Master’s Thesis

Authentic Leadership in Relation to Tall- and Flat Organizations

A comparative study of authentic leadership in the differing organizational structures of Sweden and Germany.
Abstract

In our research, we have investigated the influence of tall- and flat organizational structures on authentic leadership in the Swedish- and German context. The research was approached by the systems view and the data were analysed through Grounded Theory. Our aim was to research in which dimension authentic leadership is enabled or restricted to a larger extent – tall- or flat organizations. We discovered that authentic leadership can be performed in both, however it might be more or less encouraged. Hierarchical structures could be seen as a tool for performing authentic leadership – which we were able to confirm in the German context. While flat organizational structures could enable leaders and followers to act according to their true inner selves as well – which we were able to observe in the Swedish context. Interesting differences between tall- and flat organizational structures in Sweden and Germany were observed in terms of authentic leadership performance.

Keywords

Authentic Leadership, Tall Organizations, Flat Organizations, Sweden, Germany
Thanks

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e.g.  exampli gratia (for example)

etc.  et cetera
1. Introduction

In the following Master’s thesis, we have decided to make use of she instead of he when talking about non-specified individuals. The reason for this is that both writers of this thesis are female and to put a distance to the overused he when talking about a person as well. She is used here for both genders and does not exclude anyone.

1.1 Background

In today’s society leadership has almost become fashionable, trendy, desirable or sought-after. Nowadays, many people would like to call themselves leaders to perform the power of such positions. While a manager focuses on goals and is passive in what she does, the leader instead searches actively for alternatives. A leader acts flexible and has great imagination whereas a manager rather stays static and scratches the surface instead of analysing issues deeply (Bennis, 2009). Why is it so desirable to become a leader? Historically, the leadership role has been seen as a position requiring substantial responsibility and a leader was born rather than made (Steinhoff, 2015).

Recently, it has been quite easy to access education in leadership. Consequently, more people have become interested in the topic and such job positions related to the same. Nonetheless, being a leader is not always an easy task and not every leader is successful in her way of leading. Müceldili, Turan and Erdil (2013) state that authenticity is one of the characteristics that is considered as a successful trait in organizational leadership. Authentic leadership refers to a leader with great self-awareness, showing her true inner self and who succeeds in encouraging the followers to maintain their true inner selves as well. Authentic leadership reflects an empowering relationship between a leader and a follower (Gardner et al., 2005).
For quite some time, people have tried to analyse the phenomenon of authentic leadership and have never succeeded in uncovering it entirely. In order to come closer to unravel it, we intend to research the topic of authenticity in relation to tall- and flat organizational structures. The purpose of this study is to examine tall- and flat organizational structures in terms of authentic leadership and in which ways could they restrict or enable authentic leadership. In which dimension links between authenticity and tall- or flat organizations exist will be answered. Areas like: Do organizational structures influence authentic leadership? Is it realistic to be authentic in every situation? What does authenticity mean for leaders as well as followers? Do leaders and followers have the same perception of authentic leadership? What fosters individuals to act authentic? will be addressed and investigated in this Master’s thesis.

Moreover, aspects connected to culture could have an influence on authenticity. To focus further in detail on this topic, we have decided to compare authentic leadership in tall- and flat organizational structures in two countries: Sweden and Germany. It is assumed that taller hierarchical structures in Germany are more present than in Sweden (House et al., 2004). Decentralization plays a key role in flat organizations which means that less hierarchy as well as less supervision is perceivable. In addition, the decision-making processes are done by the leader and her followers together. In contrast, tall hierarchical organizations are characterized by centralization and higher supervision. In this type of organizations decision-making is done by the leader. Sweden’s companies are mainly flat organizations and in Germany companies are still rather tall hierarchically organized. Investigating flat organizations in Sweden and tall organizations in Germany will help us to study the influences on authentic leadership.
1.2 Problem Discussion

In this Master’s thesis, we discuss the phenomenon of authentic leadership in relation to tall- and flat organizational structures. The need of leadership is based on different interests from different parties which in turn create challenges to deal with. Without the existence of conflicts leadership would not be needed necessarily. Leadership implies diverse levels of influence. We look at authenticity in terms of: In which dimension do tall- or flat organizational structures influence authentic leadership?

In most literature related to authenticity, the focus is on the positive impacts of authentic leaders. For instance, an authentic leader is described as someone possessing a substantial portion of self-awareness. It is a person that is genuine and will give her true self away to the audience – the followers. Additionally, it is stated that an authentic leader brings out the positive aspects and strengths of the followers (Gardner et al., 2005). In the article, The influence of authentic leadership on creativity and innovativeness by Müceldili, Turan and Erdil (2013), it is discussed that authenticity increases creativity and innovativeness in organizations. Therefore, authenticity has an important positive impact on business and organizations (Müceldili, Turan & Erdil, 2013). According to the article, Review of practical implications in authentic leadership studies by Arda, Aslan and Alpkan (2016), authentic leaders are an asset to the business and the organization, since they are seen as a competitive advantage against other organizations. It is argued that authentic, self-aware, genuine leaders are needed in terms of building strong, long-lasting, empowering organizations. Authenticity is seen as a long-term factor for an organization to flourish and grow. Likewise, authentic leaders are desirable, in terms of building long-lasting relationships with business partners (Arda, Aslan & Alpkan, 2016).

On the other hand, some authors argue that it is not possible to maintain authenticity constantly. To exemplify this, it is helpful to draw attention to the article, The impossible of the ’true self’ of authentic leadership written by Ford and Harding (2011). The authors state that authentic leadership has to include the relationship between the leader and the follower, which is a highly complex
matter. Gardner et al. (2005) argue that the leader is only considered to be authentic if she shows the true moral, core values and sincere inner-self to her followers. Gardner et al. (2005) try to convince us of this idea, but in practice it might be difficult to adhere to this requirement constantly. Ford and Harding (2011) state that the leader must be authentic always towards any audience. As an authentic leader, you cannot choose to show certain beneficial traits only in certain situations. The leader is considered to be authentic as long as she does not try to benefit from a situation by manipulating the true self. Ford and Harding (2011) point out that an authentic leader can only be authentic if the followers are authentic as well. The followers have to reflect their true inner selves, following the example of the authentic leader. The authors claim that the follower needs to be authentic in terms of showing her own true self. Hence, not absorbing the leader’s true self for herself. If the follower absorbed the leader’s true self for herself, she would be considered inauthentic, since the inner self being presented is not her own inner self anymore. Aiming for authentic leadership the relationship between the authentic leader and the authentic follower needs to be based upon trust and accuracy (Ford & Harding, 2011).

The article Our society, our selves: Becoming authentic in an inauthentic world by Erickson (1994), reveals the complexity of authentic leadership even more. Erickson (1994) argues that the ability to be authentic or not, relies much on the culture the leader lives in. The culture or environment is a key factor in which authentic leadership is encouraged or discouraged. If an environment is discouraging and toxic, it is not likely that authentic leadership occurs. According to Erickson (1994), authenticity has to be seen in a wider, societal context, to be understood correctly. The culture or society shapes our true selves and how we should perceive authenticity. The cultural context in which we live is therefore important to the concept of authenticity. As society and history changes, so does the perception of self-awareness and authenticity. However, authenticity can have a differing perception in diverse cultures. In one, it might be considered as an important cultural aspect to always stay true to yourself. In others, leaders are proud to play a certain role which does not necessarily include to follow one’s own ideas (Schneider, Barsoux & Stahl, 2014). Thus, some might argue that this kind of authenticity could be understood as being authentic means not to be authentic. In some cultures, authenticity is not
expected or valued in the same way as in others. Furthermore, authenticity has become even more complex in today’s world, as the line between public- or private life has almost been blurred completely. In some cultures, it is important for the followers to know how a leader acts in public- as well as in private life. The outcome is for them to determine if the leader is authentic or not. The authentic leader has to embody the stories and core values of herself in order to be considered as authentic (Erickson, 1994).

In the article, *Paradoxes of authentic leadership: Leader identity struggles* by Nyberg and Sveningsson (2014), it is discussed whether to be an authentic leader is solely a positive matter or not. The authors claim that leaders might find it difficult to be authentic at all times, since it could conflict their goals and visions of the business and the organization on the whole (Nyberg & Sveningsson, 2014).

1.3 Research Questions

In this Master’s thesis, our precise purpose is to elaborate authentic leadership behaviour in relation to tall- and flat organizational structures. This is done through a comparison of the flat organizational structures in Sweden and the tall organizational structures in Germany. Thus, we examine the connection between authentic leadership in flat- or tall organizations. The research questions are defined as followed:

1. What is the relation between authentic leadership and tall- and flat organizational structures?

   *Aim: Examine tall- and flat organizational structures in terms of authentic leadership in Sweden and Germany.*
2. In which ways do tall/flat organizational structures restrict/enable authentic leadership in Sweden and Germany?

Aim: Investigate if there is any influence from flat/hierarchical organizations on authentic leadership.

1.4 Research Aim

The goal of this study is to reveal whether being authentic is influenced by tall- or flat organizational structures. The aspects go further to reflect on: How are characteristics like trust, creativity, innovation and empowerment connected to authentic leaders and their followers? In addition, what are the connections between tall- and flat organizations to authentic leadership behaviour. We consider that authenticity is one of the most interesting leadership characteristics to investigate further for this research question.

To summarize the key aspects of this Master’s thesis: First, we look at what authenticity means in the frame of leader’s- and follower’s behaviour, which is discussed within the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework states the present level of research with regards to authenticity within leadership. By doing so, we concentrate on the prevailing positive literature of authenticity. Nevertheless, we do think it is important to focus not only on positive associations but also on critical literature facing this topic. We then elaborate the concept of tall- and flat organizations in relation to authenticity. Ghiselli and Siegel (1972) for example discuss the idea of more satisfied leaders in flat organizations rather than in tall organizations due to their independence in their working style. Since authenticity is such a large field to study, we decided to narrow it down through the reflection of tall- and flat organizations linked with authenticity. We investigate if and how these two can be related to each other with special regards to flat organizations in Sweden and tall organizations in Germany.
2. Theoretical Framework

To make accurate and relevant connections in our research analysis, we have constructed a theoretical framework. The literature we have chosen to rely our research on, is based upon a few criteria that we found important regarding our topic. To accomplish a correct overview of our topic we wanted to review previously made research in the fields of authentication, authentic leadership, followership, hierarchical structures, philosophy and cultural differences. To narrow our theoretical framework even more down, we also wanted to construct a comparison between Sweden’s flat organizational structures and Germany’s tall organizational structures. Following these criteria, we expect to be able to make a clear research analysis.

2.1 Research in Authentic Leadership

Previous research in our field of study of authentic leadership has shown that today’s society demands greater work-based performance and more successful results in the organizational environment. It is more crucial than ever to perform great work outcomes and to embody the values of the organization. One may need to step away from one’s own core values to put the organizational values first. In today’s organizational environment it is highly difficult to maintain the true- or real self. This may lead to a loss of the real-, true inner self, when being forced to play different roles in diverse settings or environments. People then look to great leaders to find their true pathway. The leaders who answer this call by showing not only themselves as true and real, but also enlighten the followers, are referred to as authentic (Gardner et al., 2005).

Müceldili, Turan and Erdil (2013) argue in their research that authenticity has a positive impact on improving creativity and innovativeness in organizational environments. The authentic leader provides the followers with a certain form of freedom to assist them to be creative and innovative. Authentic leadership is referred to as a competitive advantage within the organization, since it enables
creativity and innovativeness (Müceldili, Turan & Erdil, 2013). This very same statement is also confirmed by Arda, Aslan and Alpkan (2016) – authentic leaders are an asset to the business and the organization, as they are seen as an enrichment for the organization.

Gardner et al. (2005) state that an authentic leader is an individual possessing a substantial portion of self-awareness. It is a person that is genuine and will give her true self away to the audience – the followers. The authors also express that an authentic leader brings out the positive aspects, the strengths, of the followers (Gardner et al., 2005). Arda, Aslan and Alpkan (2016) state that authentic, self-aware, genuine leaders are needed in terms of building strong, long-lasting, empowering organizations. Authenticity is understood as a long-term factor for an organization to flourish and grow. Likewise, in terms of creating long-lasting relationships with business partners, authentic leaders are desirable (Arda, Aslan & Alpkan, 2016). Consequently, it could be said that organizations value authentic leaders in order for them to be a powerful competitor on the market.

2.2 Critique towards Authentic Leadership

In preceding research, it is suggested that it is not possible to maintain authentic leadership at all times. To exemplify this, one could mention the discussion in the article, *The impossible of the ‘true self’ of authentic leadership* written by Ford and Harding (2011). The authors state that authentic leadership must include the relationship between the leader and the follower. It cannot solely be built upon the actions of the leader; it has to include interaction and exchange between the leader and follower as well (Ford & Harding, 2011).

One other aspect being discussed in the previous research of authentic leadership in terms of critique, is today’s high performing society in which it is easy to lose the own true inner self, for the sake of the core values of the organization (Gardner et al., 2005). It could be argued that it is sometimes more desirable to embody the organizational core values than to present the own
inner self at certain occasions. In the fast-paced working environment as of today, the leader or the follower might lose their inner self to the core values of the organization they represent. The leader is only considered to be authentic if she shows the true moral, core values and sincere inner self to her followers (Gardner et al., 2005). Ford and Harding (2011) present the critique on authentic leadership, that the leader must be authentic consistently towards any audience, not only choose to show certain beneficial traits in certain situations. The leader is considered to be authentic as long as she is not trying to benefit from a situation by manipulating the true self (Ford & Harding, 2011).

In the article, *Our society, our selves: Becoming authentic in an inauthentic world* written by Erickson (1994), even more of the complexity of authentic leadership is revealed. Erickson (1994) claims that the ability for a leader to be authentic or not relies on the culture she is in. The culture or environment is a key factor in which authentic leadership is encouraged or discouraged. If an environment is discouraging and toxic then authentic leadership is not likely to occur. According to Erickson (1994), authenticity has to be seen in a wider societal context to be understood correctly. The culture or society shapes our true selves, and how we perceive authenticity and authentic leadership. For this reason, the cultural context that we live in is important to the concept of authenticity and authentic leadership. As society and history change so does the perception of self-awareness, authenticity and authentic leadership. Furthermore, authenticity and authentic leadership has become even more complex in today's world, since the line between what is public- or private life has almost been removed completely. Today, it is crucial for the leader to be able to show that she is trustworthy and credible and that she is holding on to what she believes in. In addition, it is important for followers to know how a leader acts in public- as well as in private life to determine whether the leader behaves authentic or not. The authentic leader has to embody the stories and core values of herself in order to be considered as authentic (Erickson, 1994).
In the article, *Paradoxes of authentic leadership: Leader identity struggles* by Nyberg and Sveningsson (2014), it is examined whether being an authentic leader could include not only positive aspects, but also negative ones. The authors claim that leaders might find it difficult to be authentic constantly, since it could conflict their goals and visions of the business and the organization on the whole (Nyberg & Sveningsson, 2014).

### 2.3 Philosophical and political Perspective of Authenticity

*The Republic (Politeia)* by Plato discusses some of the philosophical thoughts that could be interesting to reflect within our research study of authenticity. The reason for doing so is the fact that the philosophical thoughts of Plato go deeper than the hierarchical structures and point out the fundamental core of leadership – integrity. Integrity is one of the core traits that Plato indicates, which would be considered as a fundamental personal characteristic for an ideal leader to have. According to the discussion of Plato, an ideal leader should possess great integrity and awareness of justice (Stolpe, 2003).

In political philosophy Hobbes, for instance, has the idea that there is always a competition of power between human beings. Every human being desires to have more power and to increase her own influence (Wolff, 1996). Likewise, Locke suggests that political leadership only exists if there is a leader and a follower, in the sense that a leader can only have political power if the followers allow her to have it. In politics, it has much to do with the same leadership type as in organizations, in the way that power can only be performed over a person if that person has agreed to it. Power is then performed only by authority or the state. Wolff (1996) refers this to the phenomena of the social contract.
2.4 Authentic Leadership and Followers

Gardner (1995) formulates that authentic leadership has to include not only the leader, but also followers who interact with the leader. The followers play an important role in the art of leadership and they give the permission to be led. Authentic leadership and followership can be seen as a cultural, cognitive and communicative matter. The leader creates stories that the followers relate to and the leader frames the reality of the followers to enable them to follow (Gardner, 1995).

Previous research has shown that human beings have a fundamental need to belong to a group – the need to find a group identity. Gardner (1995) states that trust is a fundamental element in the relationship of the leader and the follower. Trust or mistrust are important key terms regarding leadership and followership, since it creates a relationship which empowers or diminishes (Gardner, 1995).

Authentic leadership has to include a rewarding relationship between the leader and the follower. They have to empower each other (Ford & Harding, 2011). In the article, The Impossibility of the ‘True Self’ of Authentic Leadership by Ford and Harding from 2011, it is demonstrated that an authentic leader can only be authentic if the followers are authentic as well. The followers have to reflect their own true inner selves, following the example of the authentic leader. Ford and Harding (2011) also point out that the follower needs to be authentic in terms of showing her true self, not relate to the leader and adopt the true self of the leader. The follower is then considered to be inauthentic, as the presented inner self is not her own inner self. The relationship between the authentic leader and the authentic follower needs to be based upon trust and accuracy, in order to support the occurrence of authentic leadership (Ford & Harding, 2011). The follower needs to acknowledge the leader to be trustworthy, acting out of her true inner self for the follower to perceive the leader as authentic.
Many leaders take over the leadership style or techniques from leaders they themselves had followed or looked up to prior to becoming leaders themselves. Followers are attracted to leaders which have features that the followers appeal to, such as intellect, power, strength etc. However, these preferred features may vary much from follower to follower (Gardner, 1995).

2.5 Hierarchical Structures and Leadership in diverse Cultures

What may bind “born” leaders and “born” followers together is their common need for a structure, a hierarchy, and a mission.’ (Gardner, 1995, p. 33)

Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010) state that a nation includes common institutions, such as a national army, -language, -political system, as well as -business market etc. This is what makes a nation a nation and a country a country. There are obviously differences between how different nations function and how they are built up. Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010) also refer to typical national identities or behaviours, such as typical German behaviour or typical Swedish behaviour. This is a why cultures may clash and how we perceive one another from our different cultural backgrounds (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010).

Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010) claim that a nation is built on its own history. Fundamentally, the nation is grounded in its very own history. Moreover, a nation has its own identity, values and institutions on top of that. It is important for human beings to have a group- or national identity. People think and behave differently in different countries (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010).
Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010) declare that all that a country is based on, such as national history, identity, language, behaviour, values – summarizes what a country is and what differentiates it from other countries. This also affects the leadership and leadership styles in a nation or country (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010).

‘Managers and leaders, as well as the people they work with, are part of national societies. If we want to understand their behavior, we have to understand their societies.’ (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010, p. 25)

Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010) point out that in countries where employees have a good relationship with their supervisor or leader in organizations, they prefer to participate as well as being involved in decision-making processes. In contrast to countries where employees feel a power distance to their supervisor or leader in organizations – they prefer the leader to take the decisions for them and not include them in the decision-making. In countries where normally the power distance is high between the employees and the leader, there is a tendency that employees look up to their leaders as authoritarian, rather than see them as someone on the same level as themselves. It is more accepted in organizational power distance countries that decisions are made by the leader without or with little consent of the employees (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010).

As stated by Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010), flat organizations are characterized by decentralization, less tall hierarchical structures and less supervision. Regarding salary, this is less unequal between leader and employees than in tall hierarchical structured organizations. The employees are encouraged to participate in decision-making and the leader is regarded to be on an equal level as the employees. In contrast, for tall hierarchical structured organizations, centralization and supervision are more common activities. Formality and rules are to be considered to a higher extent, as well as a greater gap in salary between employees and leader. Employees are not asked to participate in decision-making processes as regularly and the leader is understood as someone possessing a higher level of expertise in relation to her employees (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010).
In the article, *Leadership and managerial success in tall and flat organization structures* by Ghiselli and Siegel from 1972, the idea is being discussed of more fulfilled leaders in flat organizations rather than in tall organizations due to their freedom of independence in their working style (Ghiselli & Siegel, 1972). In addition, Nardon and Steers (2009) for example, bring up Scandinavian organizational culture as democratic and non-hierarchical structured:

‘Other cultures, particularly those in Scandinavia, stress a “low power distance”, believing in a more egalitarian or participative approach to social or organizational structure.’ (Nardon & Steers, 2009, p. 10)

2.6 Comparative Investigation of national Differences

2.6.1 The Concept of Culture

Disregarding which culture somebody belongs to group identity and common values are constantly important to human beings. Different countries have different cultures and different cultures embody different values. Every country is unlike in its ways of framing experience and values. What is seen as desirable leadership traits or behaviour in one country, may not be desirable in another. The referencing to so called heroes, past leaders, may vary much between countries. Gardner phrases this as ‘cultural stories’ (Gardner, 1995, p. 55).

Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010) clarify that cultures can vary looking at different countries depending on values, heroes, symbols etc. The cultural set of values are all used to gather the own group around a certain type of culture and understanding. It is important for a group or culture to distinguish what they are and what they are not as a collective (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). Usually the national culture differs from societal culture, in the way that this mainly refers to national politics (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). The authors also elaborate that there are many levels of culture within a person – for example a national-, an ethnical- or religious-, a gender-, an educational- or social class level and so on. There can be many different levels of culture within
one individual which all have a meaning. This makes the concept of culture complex (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). Evidently differences between cultures and nations exist. For this reason, several complex levels need to be considered to understand different cultures in relation to leadership style. Therefore, we would like to introduce a comparison between Sweden and Germany, since they are our study objects.

2.6.2 National Cultural Dimensions

In the following section, we compare Sweden and Germany in terms of Hofstede’s national cultural dimensions as well as distinguishing aspects belonging to the countries. At first, we added a figure which shows an overview of Hofstede’s dimensions that are explained afterwards. At the same time, we point at important cultural behaviour of Sweden and Germany.

![Figure 1 Hofstede’s National Cultural Dimensions](self-constructed figure from source: Hofstede, 1983, p. 52)
2.6.3 Sweden

Power Distance
Sweden is seen as a low power distance structured culture, as demonstrated in figure 1. This means that hierarchical structures within the organization are significantly reduced (House et al., 2004).

'In countries like Sweden, where power is supposed to be shared equally and where there is more concern for the quality of relationships and mutual gain, conflict is more likely to be resolved through collaboration.’
(Schneider, Barsoux & Stahl, 2014, p. 233)

In the consensus-oriented Scandinavian culture employees or followers tend to be included by the leader or asked to participate in meetings and decision-making processes. Even though, at some occasions they are not directly involved or affected by the decision. Schneider, Barsoux and Stahl (2014, p. 221) refer to this as creating a ‘sense of purpose’.

In Sweden, a manager is not considered to be higher in the hierarchy than the employees. The hierarchical structures, power distance and status of the leader are not considered to be of any significant importance. Furthermore, Swedes and Scandinavians have great trust in other people (Schneider, Barsoux & Stahl, 2014).

Individualism
As shown in figure 1, Sweden is considered to be an individualistic country, where employees expect to have an equal relationship with their supervisors (Itim International, 2017).

In terms of communication, there is a general cultural custom in Sweden and other Scandinavian countries that silence is important. Silence is explained as everyone gives everybody room to speak without to interrupt them. While silence is not valued, for example in the USA, it is highly appreciated in Sweden.
Giving a leader or a follower (employee) the chance to speak her mind without being interrupted is a general custom in Sweden and in the Scandinavian cultures (Schneider, Barsoux & Stahl, 2014).

**Masculinity**

Sweden is considered to be a feminine culture, according to Hofstede (see figure 1). Management is expected to be included and employees are expected to participate in decision-making processes. To be equal in the workplace and to share a purpose of solidarity is important. In the Scandinavian culture, it is seen as important to have a good balance between time at work and free time. Free time is highly appreciated as well as the quality of life (Itim International, 2017).

’In Sweden, given a choice between a bonus and time off, the latter is likely to be chosen. Monetary rewards are less motivating because the egalitarian ethos breeds a reluctance to stand out financially (as do the high tax rates). Swedes are also more concerned with quality of life, with Sweden ranking highest on Hofstede’s femininity dimension.’ (Schneider, Barsoux & Stahl, 2014, p. 162)

**Uncertainty Avoidance**

As shown in figure 1, Sweden has low level of uncertainty avoidance. This means for example that people in this type of culture interact on an informal basis. There are less formalizations and social rules to follow and trust is built up through verbal communication. Change is more easily adopted in this type of culture (House et al., 2004).

There are different ways in cultures how to resolve conflicts. In Swedish- or Scandinavian culture, conflict is commonly solved through active participation (Schneider, Barsoux & Stahl, 2014).

In Scandinavian culture, consensus is highly appreciated. At some occasions, it is even more important to obtain consensus than to make a wise decision (Schneider, Barsoux & Stahl, 2014). Democratic processes, participation and involvement are guiding key terms in the Scandinavian organizational culture (Schneider, Barsoux & Stahl, 2014).
2.6.4 Germany

Power Distance

Germany is seen as a middle power distance structured culture, as shown in figure 1. This means that there is not a significantly high power distance within the organization. However, the organizational structures are not significantly flat either (House et al., 2004). As to be seen in figure 1, after Hofstede (1983) the distinction of power distance between Sweden and Germany do not differ much from each other. Nevertheless, hierarchical structures seem to be more present in Germany than in Sweden (House et al., 2004). In this research, it is to find out whether the power distance of Sweden and Germany between leaders and followers is close to each other or if they differ more than it can be seen in figure 1.

'Some of the cultural differences can be spotted in artefacts, such as the use of titles and first or last names, the presence and form of meeting agendas [...].'

(Schneider, Barsoux & Stahl, 2014, p. 220)

The quotation above indicates the cultural differences regarding hierarchical structures and formalization. Some national cultures prefer to set up formal rules, while other cultures prefer informal settings (Schneider, Barsoux & Stahl, 2014). In Germany, it is also important to have appropriate technical skills in order to move up in the organizational structures (Schneider, Barsoux & Stahl, 2014). Decision-making in the German context is made by the managers or leaders at the top of the hierarchical structures, alternatively by the managers working below them (Schneider, Barsoux & Stahl, 2014). Direct communication is preferred in the German organizational context (Itim International, 2017).

'In Germany, managers use the title, last name and formal "you" (Sie) in social as well as in the workplace.' (Schneider, Barsoux & Stahl, 2014, p. 34)

Individualism

Germany is considered to be highly individualistic, according to Hofstede (see the figure 1). In terms of general organizational life, Germans have a strong ‘sense of duty and responsibility’ (Itim International, 2017, para. 5). In the
German context, there is an indication that privacy is important. Mistrust is sometimes an issue in German culture (Schneider, Barsoux & Stahl, 2014). The empirical findings of Schneider, Barsoux and Stahl (2014) also indicate that Germans in general organizational life are quite individualistic, task-oriented and do not trust other people very easily.

**Masculinity**

Germany is considered to be a masculine culture, as shown in figure 1. Work-based performance is highly desirable and status is appreciated to show. Honesty is important in the German culture, even though it might have a negative effect at some occasions (Itim International, 2017).

Schneider, Barsoux and Stahl (2014) explain that in Germany it is highly important to set agendas and outline meetings. German leaders are generally highly skilled regarding setting agendas and arranging meetings, as well as paying attention to details (Schneider, Barsoux & Stahl, 2014).

**Uncertainty Avoidance**

As figure 1 shows, Germany is ranked high in the area of uncertainty avoidance. This means for example that the culture relies to a large extend on social rules or formalizations. The culture tends not to change very easily. The social rules and formal way of socializing is highly important (Itim International, 2017). In the German context, expertise is highly valued. Uncertainty is high and therefore the need for expertise is also high. Furthermore, work and performance is generally considered to be more important than private free time (Itim International, 2017).

In countries with generally higher power distance within organizations, conflicts are more commonly resolved through non-communication (avoidance) in the hierarchy. This might sometimes lead to even greater conflicts (Schneider, Barsoux & Stahl, 2014).
2.7 Our Interpretation of the theoretical Framework

After having investigated aspects of authentic leadership, the relationship between leaders and followers, tall- and flat organizations as well as cultural issues, we would like to sum up our interpretation of these points to frame the outcomes we use for the practical part afterwards. In our thesis, we investigate in which way organizational structures, such as tall and flat, influence authentic leadership.

First, authenticity and authentic leadership behaviour influence the interaction between leaders and their followers in several ways. As Múceldili, Turan and Erdil (2013) state, an authentic leader inspires followers to be creative and innovative. Similarly, Gardner et al. (2005) argue that authentic leaders have a substantial portion of self-awareness. The aim is to find out whether authentic leadership, including the aforementioned aspects are restricted or enabled through tall- and or flat organizations. Based on the idea of Gardner et al. (2005) that an authentic leader gives her true self away, we investigate whether tall- or flat organizations restrict or enable authentic leadership. Depending in which culture a leader lives she can be authentic or not as claimed by Erickson (1994).

At this point it is to see whether flat organizational structures in Sweden and tall organizational structures in Germany empower or diminish leaders to act authentic.

Furthermore, as addressed by Erickson (1994) conditions like to know anything of the private life of a leader helps the follower to decide whether a leader’s behaviour is authentic or not. It could be argued that in hierarchical organizational structures a leader does not prefer to reveal anything of her private life which would in turn mean a follower might have difficulties to see her leader as authentic. Likewise, Schneider, Barsoux and Stahl (2014) support this in stating that privacy is important in the German context.
Another issue for leaders in hierarchical organizations, as those we intend to interview in Germany, could be a conflict between the interests of a leader and those of the organization (Nyberg & Sveningsson, 2014). It might be that leaders in Germany struggle in being their true self due to the aforementioned issue, which we intend to find out.

The second aspect to discuss is the relationship between the leader and the follower. Trust is one main aspect as examined by Gardner (1995) and it could be questioned whether tall- or flat organizations influence leader and follower to trust each other. As stated by Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010) people think and behave differently in different countries. Power distance and decision-making processes are further topics to consider when talking about authentic leadership in relation to tall- and flat organizations. Sweden with a scale of low power distance and a high involvement of everyone in the decision-making process (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010) might support leaders to be authentic due to their freedom of acting the way they prefer it for themselves. Since most of the companies in Germany are still quite hierarchical, decisions are to be taken by the leader and do not involve the follower (Schneider, Barsoux & Stahl, 2014). Thus, hierarchy could restrict both leader and follower to be their true selves as either the leader follows the guidelines of the company without her own involvement, or the follower is not able to join the decision-making process.

Additionally, in terms of masculinity and femininity differing directions of Sweden and Germany are depicted, as to be seen in figure 1. Germany is portrayed as masculine and Sweden as feminine which shows the difference in hierarchy and within that the strength of leaders over followers to take decisions (Itim International, 2017).

In contrast to that, flat organizations, like most of the companies in Sweden, tend to follow the idea to include everyone. This goes back to cultural topics which play an important role in authentic leadership (Erickson, 1994). Nardon and Steers (2009) state that the Scandinavian culture encourages to have equality among employees of a company which could mean that to be authentic might be faciled for leaders as well as followers in a country like Sweden.
Additionally, following figure 1, Sweden is a highly individualistic country which supports the aforementioned. Furthermore, we reflect upon the question whether it is accurate that in flat organizations, observable in Sweden, leaders feel more fulfilled to be authentic owing to their freedom of independence or whether there is no difference between tall- and flat organizations (Ghiselli & Siegel, 1972).

Communication differs within Sweden and Germany, Swedes tend to prefer silence over the prevailing direct communication in Germany. On the one hand, a link between the Swedish way to communicate and still behaving authentic could be questioned due to a possible underlying issue of Sweden’s silent communication as this aspect could result in difficulties of being true to yourself and speaking up your mind (Itim International, 2017; Schneider, Barsoux & Stahl, 2014). On the other hand, the German directness might make it easier for leaders and followers to raise their voices. Nevertheless, hierarchy could then restrict the followers to speak up their minds even though direct communication is desired.

When investigating the category of uncertainty avoidance, we can identify that Germany is influenced by this dimension to a greater extent. Sweden has a lower degree of uncertainty avoidance. Related to organizational hierarchical structures, it might be indicated that in German organizational life there is a structured formal way to socialize and perform at work.

For Sweden, this signifies informal ways of communicating and fewer social rules to follow (Itim International, 2017). It is interesting to examine how this could influence the occurrence of authentic leadership.

To finalize what we draw from the theoretical framework to our analysis - Germany and Sweden have diverse ways to interact in organizational life, which implies that there is a difference in the way leaders and followers are related to one another in these two cultures. With the help of the next chapter methodology, we will be able to connect our theoretical framework with the practical one afterwards.
3. Methodology

The following chapter is about methodologies in business studies and the methodological choices we have made for this study. While conducting research, it is significant to comprehend the philosophical commitment which is made through the decision of the research strategy. Consequently, the importance lays in the understanding of our investigations (Johnson & Clark, 2006). Choices for the research approach are dependent on the research questions that are answered (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Thus, we decided to give an overview of methodology and various methodological approaches leading to the methodological view used in this thesis.

3.1 Choice of the Research Issue

When we first thought about our topic we fully concentrated on going as deeply as possible into the aspects of authentic leadership. We commenced by agreeing on a topic which we regarded as something highly important and also gave us meaning to reflect upon. We both were intrigued by the topic of authentic leadership and we had the vision to contribute to the literature already existing. Besides, considering our own cultural background we thought that linking hierarchical and non-hierarchical issues to authentic leadership would be reasonable. This approach was to bring some new aspects to the mystery of authentic leadership. Every methodological approach has its own value and fits for different studies. While investigating our topic further we had the impression that various aspects come together and form a system. Linkages between the diverse aspects we discussed in our theoretical framework can be found. For instance, a relationship between the leader and the follower, the authentic behaviour of each of them as well as the hierarchical and cultural influence. Therefore, we have decided to work with the systems view as our methodological approach to study our topic. Further explanations about this choice are discussed in the section 3.3.1 Systems View. Additionally, for our analysis of the data we have decided to use Grounded Theory which will also be explained
later on. We have used the two methodological approaches in different stages of the thesis. At first, proceeding towards our topic through the systems view and second, to analyse our data with the coding procedure of Grounded Theory.

3.2 Methodological Overview

Methodology examines the approach of considering as well as creating (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009). A creator of knowledge is someone who ‘in a critical, conscious and insightful fashion creates the prerequisites for generating knowledge’ (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009, p. 19). In this case, it is us, the authors of this thesis. It is impossible to use every kind of data in every approach, different approaches require different kinds of data (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009). Moreover, there is not solely one correct approach, it is dependent on the situation that is investigated and on one’s own view on life as well (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009). A method should be chosen to fit the problem (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009). Consequently, the creator of knowledge has an impact on the collection and interpretation of data (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009).

To approach our research about authentic leadership in Sweden and Germany, we decided to choose the systems view. In this approach, the collection of data is done through interviews for instance where we, as the interviewer, have an impact on the collection and interpretation of the data. Additionally, it is the personal understanding and awareness of the creator of knowledge who contributes to the creation of knowledge (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009). The creator of knowledge should look behind patterns and given understandings, it is her responsibility to actively create knowledge when conducting research (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009). Our goal was to use interviews to look behind the patterns of authentic leadership and its connection to tall- and flat organizations. In order to analyse our raw data of the interviews we used the coding procedure of Grounded Theory.
Methodology helps to bring order in the chaos. The creator of knowledge should become aware of having different angles and views on her research. This helps herself to fully understand her research (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009). The fact that we wrote this thesis in a team of two helped us to bring different angles on the research. Furthermore, the idea to interview both sides, leaders and followers as well as the decision to compare two countries with each other added value to the whole picture.

Arbnor and Bjerke (2009, p. 31) highlight the following statement ‘methodics [need] to be in harmony with the chosen view, the methods and the study area’ to achieve scientifically valuable outcomes. Everyone undertaking a study needs to be conscious about the chosen view and the knowledge produced (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009). Professor Daudi once said ‘Methodology it’s me’ (2016, November). Thus, methodology is of great importance and does not refer to simply follow a strict guideline, it was more about us and our personal contribution when we conducted our research. To conclude, Arbnor and Bjerke (2009, p. 33) formulate methodology as ‘to be aware of, and be able to handle, different relations which exist between participating moments and processes when conducting studies aiming at generating new knowledge’. 
3.3 Different methodological Approaches

There are various methodological approaches for the creator of knowledge to make use of. According to Arbnor and Bjerke (2009), it may be differentiated between three approaches: Analytical View, Actors View and Systems View. Figure 2. shows an overview of the three approaches which are briefly explained afterwards.

![Figure 2 The Boundary between Explanatory- and Understanding Knowledge](image)

The analytical view generally focuses on facts. Within this view an objective reality exists which has a summative character. The key aspect of this approach is to base research on numerous facts and not on one’s single perception (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009). As indicated in Figure 2 it is explanatory knowledge which is gathered when using the analytical view. In the actors view reality is understood as a social construction wherein the creator of knowledge is one of the main characters. The creator of knowledge is actively involved in the construction of reality together with other actors of the topic (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009). The actors view goes away from the analytical view and understands quantitatively collecting of data as determined and as denying the understanding of the true reality (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009, p. 131, see Figure 2). The third view, systems view, is explained in the next chapter.
3.3.1 Choice of Systems View as Methodological View

The systems view has the fact-filled reality in common with the analytical approach but differs by assuming that reality is not summative (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009). The emphasis in the systems view lies on a factive reality consisting of fact-filled systems in the objective reality and subjective opinions of these structures, which are also treated as facts (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009). In order to understand, it is necessary to place phenomena in a larger context and to look at the pattern of the phenomena helps explain them better. The aim is to find consistent patterns, interactions and relations and it starts with already existing systems theory (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009). From the starting point of existing systems theory new systems theories should be developed which are better than the already existing ones. The existing systems can be split into smaller subsystems which might show connections with each other (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009).

For the creator of knowledge in the field of authentic leadership this means that she should start doing research by investigating already existing literature and extracting systems theory concerning authentic leadership. Based on these findings the creator of knowledge could, for instance, draw analogies which are then adopted to the specific case she wants to look at. While doing so, the creator of knowledge’s research includes a search for differences that can be explained or understood instead of searching for a high number of quantitative factors (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009). The system studied in this thesis, consisted of the relationship between leaders and followers as well as followers and leaders trying to be authentic against the background of the context. The context investigated within this thesis was different kind of values in cultures. Differently said, how did the system work in different cultures. The system is influenced by cultural understandings including tall- and flat organizations in Germany and Sweden.

By using the systems view, synergy effects can be generated out of the individual components by creating moments where ‘the whole is more than the sum of the parts’ (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009, p. 109). Three significant principles need to be taken into consideration when using this view, which imply that components
are dependent on each other, reality in a system is only shown incompletely and the creator of knowledge herself has an effect on the system. The authors state that there is a *magnifying level* where the idea is to keep a magnifying glass. Meaning if you put the magnifying glass further away you do not see any details but the frame is bigger. If you look closer to the object that you study the frame will be smaller but there will be more details (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009, p. 121).

We searched for the components influencing each other by interviewing leaders as well as followers. The overall aim was to find a whole instead of an isolated subject. Underlining the aforementioned complexity in the systems view, every component can be both producer and product. In the systems view the ‘processes are more important than structures’ in open systems (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009, p. 125).

Our decision to approach our study with the help of the systems view is based on its variation to have several aspects influencing the topic which build a system together. Leadership can be understood as mutual relationships between leader and follower (Hollander, 2012) which underlines our intention to investigate our topic with the help of the systems view. Likewise, ‘effects and relations of multiple influences should be analysed in a rich [...] way’ (Klaussner, 2012, p. 420). Arbnor and Bjerke (2009, p. 51) state ‘that a systems oriented view is the most successful way to go to bring the subject forward’. With this message in mind the systems view was the most convincing approach to reach our research questions. With the help of the systems view, we could formulate a system around authentic leadership. It supported us to focus on every factor in tall- and flat organizations influencing authentic leadership. With the systems view it is possible to analyse the role of authentic leaders and followers following them. Common success methods can be discussed which contribute to the whole system of authentic leadership.
3.4 Data Collection

Data collection refers to quantitative data- as well as qualitative data collection. A quantitative approach includes questionnaires or data analysis procedures to gain numerical data. Whereas a qualitative approach covers for instance interviews or categorizing data to gain non-numerical data (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). In contrast to quantitative data gathering, qualitative approaches are based on meanings resulting from words. Qualitative data collection requires a categorization of non-standardised data. Furthermore, instead of using statistics as it is done in the quantitative approach, the qualitative approach uses conceptualization (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Corbin and Strauss (2012) highlight that qualitative data collection includes for instance interviews, observations or videos. This does not exclude the possibility for observations in quantitative data. For this Master’s thesis, the intention was to study the topic of authentic leadership in tall- and flat organizations with the help of qualitative data collection. In our study we looked for meanings, understandings and social interactions which could be portrayed perfectly through qualitative analysing of data.

3.4.1 Collecting primary Data by Using semi-structured Interviews

The qualitative collection of primary data for our study was based on the idea of an inductive approach. The inductive approach for the creator of knowledge is the possibility to comprehend the meanings people associate with events as well as a close realization of the context. In addition, this approach leaves more space to adjustments during the process (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Consequently, it gave freedom to study our topic thoroughly and to get a better understanding of what it really means to be authentic in tall- or flat organizations. We chose to do semi-structured interviews to gain as much information as possible and to support the interviewees in being less biased. As Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) explain, the advantage of this kind of interviews is the absence of one strict interview guideline. This helped us to add or leave out questions during the interviews for a broad understanding of the interviewees’ answers. ‘[S]emi-structured may be used in order to understand
the relationship between variables’ (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p. 322). Furthermore, the scene was set to fully understand the system of authentic leadership and organizational structures. The interviews were audio-recorded to guarantee that everything could be analysed in depth. One major benefit is the possibility to establish personal contact to the interviewees. Nevertheless, conducting interviews can also have subjective issues regarding reliability, bias as well as validity and generalization (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009).

Our interview questions (see Appendix B) were chosen based on our understanding of the theoretical framework and the research questions. We decided to ask questions concerning three main aspects: firstly, authenticity in general as well as within leadership styles, secondly, interaction between leaders and followers and thirdly, tall- and flat organizational questions. The questions about authenticity dealt with the phenomenon itself and how it is acted out by leaders and followers. The second main aspect was about the way leaders made followers act and feel about their leaders as well as how leaders reach their followers. Finally, questions with regards to tall- and flat organizations gave us a clear understanding of the connection of authentic behaviour within different organizational cultures. Given the fact that semi-structured interviews were conducted, we had the chance to add questions instantly in addition to the guideline which had been prepared beforehand.

3.4.2 Challenges of Conducting Interviews

Several challenges exist when collecting data through interviews which we would like to address here briefly. The first to give attention to is of an ethical nature. As the interviewer, ethical integrity is expected to not make any harm concerning the knowledge gained through the answers of the interview partners (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Generally, the interviewee should be informed about her rights. This requirement was fulfilled using an information sheet (see Appendix A: Information sheet) that was given out prior to the interviews. Our topic is really sensible because the questions were to some extend very private and on an emotional level. Trust was the key term in this matter. We built up trust by assuring confidentiality to the explanations given
and through letting the interviewees having control over answering or declining questions. We used personal connections to find interview partners in order to diminish a feeling of unease. Furthermore, this gave us the advantage to go even deeper into the questions and to be able to rely on the given answers.

### 3.4.3 Criteria for Choosing Interview Partners

Previous to the search for interview partners we had written down criteria that the interview partners should have. These criteria were based on our research topic to gain valuable outcomes. The leaders interviewed were asked to have a leading position for at least five years. The size of the team they were leading should have been at least ten people and they should have worked for big sized companies. The answers they gave to us could have been referred to not only one specific situation but to various working experiences. We wanted to interview both male and female and they were supposed to have spent most of their working time in either Sweden or Germany. We interviewed two leaders in Sweden and two in Germany to have an equal number with regard to creating comparability.

Concerning the followers, they were asked to have working experiences for at least five years and we decided to interview followers in different industries. The latter decision was made to have a variety of industries in our study. The followers were asked to have spent most of their working time in either Sweden or Germany. Nevertheless, we chose to interview followers that have experience in another culture. This decision is based on the idea that they were able to have a different view on leadership and followers in general.
### 3.4.4 Overview of Interview Partners

**Table 1** Criteria and Overview of Interview Partners *(names are made anonymous)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Sweden</strong></th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Leadership position in years</th>
<th>Size of Team</th>
<th>Big-sized company</th>
<th>Spent most of working time in Sweden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leaders</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>10 people</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tommy</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>30 years</td>
<td>850 people</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Followers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gustav</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lars</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>40 years</td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Germany</strong></th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Leadership position in years</th>
<th>Size of Team</th>
<th>Big-sized company</th>
<th>Spent most of working time in Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leaders</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>15-35 depending on season</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felix</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>more than 100 people all over the world</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Followers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janine</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>Energy Business</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Singapore & France, 5 years)
3.5 Interpreting Data

Taylor and Bogdan (1984, p. 128) formulate that ‘[d]ata collection and analysis go hand-in-hand’ because it is a constant process. It starts already whilst conducting an interview. Nevertheless, some points still have to be said about the way to gain the most reliable information out of our collected data.

3.5.1 Grounded Theory

In order to do a qualitative study, we were inspired by Grounded Theory and used it as a practical method to do qualitative research. Our inspiration came through the way Grounded Theory is structured when it comes to analyse data. Corbin and Strauss (2012) state that Grounded Theory represents theoretical concepts resulting from qualitatively analysed data. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) ascertain that the collection of data can be done through observations rather than preceded by a theory. Hence, a theory emerges from the collected data which are to be tested afterwards. There are four aspects of Grounded Theory: theoretical sampling followed by theoretical saturation, coding and constant comparison (Corbin & Strauss, 2012). Theoretical sampling means the collection of data with the help of concepts like conditions which show the scope of a concept. Theoretical saturation occurs when the end of category evolving is reached. Coding (see also further down) indicates the development of concepts from data and lastly, everything is constantly compared with each other (Corbin & Strauss, 2012).

3.5.2 Developing Data for Interpretation

Before being able to make any statements about the interview findings, the data was assembled in the right way. When conducting interviews, it is interesting to focus on how certain things were said and in which tone of voice. One reason to conduct face-to-face interviews was the possibility to make notes about the body language of the interviewees while they were speaking.
Interviews can be transcribed in two different ways. Either, each spoken word exactly how it is said, or only parts of the audio-record which are relevant to the research (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, 2009). We decided to transcribe relevant parts, so that we could fully focus on what was important for our study. Furthermore, some of the interviews were held in German and Swedish and afterwards translated into English, there was a greater chance to analyse it more deeply using only the relevant parts.

3.5.3 Coding of qualitative Data

With the objective to achieve the best outcome of this research, we decided to follow the steps of Grounded Theory. Those are as followed: first we did open coding which means the disaggregation of data into units, after that we made use of axial coding in which relationships between categories are to be recognized and in the last step the categories were integrated to produce a theory which is called selective coding (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). With the help of categorization, we were able to see several factors influencing the success of authentic leadership and build a system around it. It helped us to see relations between authentic leadership, followers as well as tall- and flat organizational patterns. Taylor and Bogdan (1984, p. 136) explain coding as ‘a systematic way of developing and refining interpretations of the data’. While doing this process, we focused on our research questions with the aim of understanding the relation between authentic leadership and tall- and flat organizational structures.

We followed the guidelines suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2012) for naming units: either applied expressions that were used often by the interviewees or related to our theoretical framework. During this process, we created main categories which we named authenticity, hierarchy, flat organizations. A further categorisation in lower-ranked categories was carried out like power distance, private life, communication, creativity, self-awareness, conflict of interests, caring about employees, addressing employees and trust as well as further categories. These categories were written down in an excel table and each relevant part out of the interview was assigned underneath each category (see table below).
We constantly watched out for any similarities and dissimilarities as well as compared our different interviews with each other and our theoretical framework. A large excel table resulted out of this unitizing. With the help of this new subcategories emerged and we created a new even larger table (see below).

Table 2 Brief Excerpt of Open Coding Process of our Data

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Table 3 Brief Excerpt of Categorization Process of our Data
During the process of data categorization relationships between categories became obvious and made us rethink categories and subcategories as well as critically analyse our data. After we finished the categorization which helped us to see the relationships between the various categories, we brought meaning into the whole study. The last step of analysing data through Grounded Theory is called *selective coding* which supported us in gaining valuable outcomes (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). We could have continued working on new tables constantly because there seem to be always new relationships and new ideas on what to analyse. At one point, we decided that we were really satisfied with the connection of the findings of our interviews and stopped the process of categorization. The last table became a huge one which you can see as an excerpt below.

**Table 4 Brief Excerpt of Axial Coding Process of our Data**

![Table 4](image-url)
In order to analyse our findings, we created mind maps for each big category. This made it more perceptible and less difficult to analyse when writing about the findings (see excerpt below).

**Figure 3** Excerpt from Mapping Process of Categorized Data

The aforementioned steps to analyse our findings made it possible to gain the valuable outcome which will be discussed in detail in chapter 4. *Results and Analysis of our research.*
4. Results and Analysis of our Research

As we have already discussed in the chapter before, for our analysis of our data we were inspired by Grounded Theory. Through the coding procedure which we have explained above, we were able to analyse our interviews deeply. Alvesson (2003) argues that an interview situation must be regarded with caution since an interview situation is to some point restricted by being artificial and not depicting the real situation. One way, which we practiced while conducting our interviews, to improve the outcome of the words being said by the interview partner was to ask open questions. Following this idea led us to getting a better understanding of their explanations. In addition, we paid attention to situations in which we got the impression the interview partner only tries to show a better self-identity, as it is also discussed by Alvesson (2003). In the following chapter, we have analysed our results carefully to not get misled by any statements of the interview partners. As explained above, to proceed towards our research topic we have used the systems view. By applying it, we formulated a system around authentic leadership in which we focused on every factor in tall- and flat organizational structures. The relationships between leaders and followers were deeply analysed. In addition, cultures as well as tall- and flat organizational structures formulated the system around our topic.

At first, we portray the interview partners of this thesis in the following chapter. After that, we depict the findings out of the interviews which are followed by an analysis that refers to our research questions and the theoretical framework beforehand. We have chosen to structure the analysis in the following way: countries and authentic leadership in relation to tall- and flat organizations including the aspects according to the theoretical outcome and our findings in the interviews. Each aspect is dealt with precision in line with the findings and the analysis. To structure the text most efficiently the findings are followed by the analysis promptly.
4.1 Contemplation of Authenticity in Relation to tall- and flat Organizations – Sweden

4.1.1 Who were our Interview Partners in Sweden?

For Sweden, the first leader interviewed we have chosen to call Tommy (names are made anonymous). Tommy is a male leader at the age of 59 and he works in a big-sized company as an engineer. He has been in a leadership position for approximately 30 years in which he is mainly responsible for a team of 850 people. Tommy has spent most of his working life in Sweden. The second leader interviewed we have chosen to call Anna. Anna is a female leader at the age of 31. She has worked in a big-sized company as a consultant in finance and accounting. Anna has been in a leadership position for approximately 7 years and she is in general responsible for 10 people (depending on the consultancy projects). Anna has spent most of her working life in Sweden.

The first follower interviewed we have chosen to call Gustav (names are made anonymous). Gustav is a male follower at the age of 30. He has worked for an environment focused company for about 5 years. Gustav has spent most of his working life in Sweden. The second follower interviewed we have chosen to call Lars. Lars is a male follower at the age of 64. He has worked for a technology focused company for approximately 40 years. The company that he works for is based in Sweden. Lars has frequently been delegated to work worldwide and spent approximately 30 years outside of Sweden.

The following analysis is based on the content resulting from the in-depth interviews that were conducted with the Swedish interviewees.
4.2 Authentic Leadership – Sweden

The content of the Swedish interviews has shown that authentic leadership behaviour appears to play an important role in this particular Scandinavian culture. All of the interview partners said that they appreciate authentic leadership, seen from both sides - the leaders and the followers’ side. Even in the relationship amongst the leader and follower the interview partners appreciate authentic behaviour. Anna expressed that authentic leadership only occurs if the follower allows it. Anna (2017, 2 April) said, ‘there has to be interaction between the leader and the follower in order for authentic leadership to occur’. This is also confirmed by the literature of Ford and Harding (2011).

Anna also declared that it is highly important to have a good relationship with the followers, regarding both private- and professional work life.

In order to analyse what Anna said, we can say that according to her own words she has an ambition to appear as an authentic leader. She claimed that she cares about her employees and their private- as well as professional work life. Anna (2017, 2 April) laughed and said that she ‘care[s] more about the follower as a person than how the follower perform[s]’. Yet, this statement also means that Anna believes that she cares about how the follower performs and feels even in the workplace. Based on Anna’s experience knowing about the follower’s private life is a way of knowing how to empower the follower in professional life as well. Anna works within a flat organization and this could also proof the correctness of the assumption given in our theoretical framework about authentic leadership and flat organizations. Anna appears to be authentic according to her own words and her statement could show authentic behaviour in practise within the flat organization. In a flat organization, the employee and her feelings should always be put first. This appears to be true in Anna’s case. The way Anna laughed and said that she is almost embarrassed how much she cares about her followers shows something about her working environment - the Swedish working environment.
Though, Anna’s words might also reflect and reveal another matter – words and actions might not go hand in hand. We assume that she does care about the performance of her followers in the organizational life, otherwise she would appear to be an unproductive manager.

Private Life

Both Swedish leaders argued that they act authentic by revealing their true inner selves to the followers. It is also confirmed in Gardner et al. (2005) that revealing the true inner self is important in leadership situations. Even the followers Gustav and Lars said that they are authentic revealing their true inner selves. All Swedish male interview partners said that they do not particularly want to know anything about the private life of their leader or follower. Though, all four interviewees explained that they spend time with their leader or follower during their free time. The two older (and male) interview partners said it is still preferable to keep private and professional work life separated and not to reveal too much of their private life to their leader or follower. On the one hand, Tommy stated that it is highly important to keep a good and healthy connection to the followers, but still keep the connection professional and not too private (Tommy, 2017, 3 April). Anna on the other hand, wants to share her private life with her followers and she prefers that the followers do the same. Anna (2017, 2 April) uttered that ‘it is important to know the private backgrounds and true inner selves of the followers’ to build a good relationship with them. The followers Gustav and Lars do not want to reveal too much of their private life to their leaders.

This confirms that the Swedish interview partners all prefer a personal connection with their leader or follower, but still draw some form of line between private- and professional work life. To analyse what the interviewees said, we can see from their statements that there is a distinction between the older and the younger interviewees. Likewise, a difference between male and female can be detected. Possibly, the older interviewees have previous experiences of more hierarchical structured working environments from the past and they can relate to those. In contrast, the younger interviewees pay more attention to authentic behaviour, thus revealing more about their private life. Anna, as the female interviewee is most keen on revealing about private life. This might explain that
females are more personal and private with their followers compared to male leaders. In addition, it could be confirmed that being authentic in a flat organization might include being more personal and private in terms of communicating and acting.

**Role-Model**

All four interview partners have looked up to leaders as role-models who had the personal characteristics of drive, competence, firmness as well as making fast and accurate decisions. It is also stated in Gardner (1995) that role-models play an important role for leaders themselves and in leadership situations. Leaders tend to look up to other leaders as role-models (Gardner, 1995). Not only the interviewed leaders, but also the followers Gustav and Lars have had role-models, but in the sense that they also have looked up to leaders, not other followers.

This affirms that the Swedish interviewed leaders all have looked up to other leaders as role-models and have been inspired by those in their own way of leading. To look up to other leaders as role-models indicates something about the way people act in their leadership style. Gustav (2017, 2 April), for example, admires ‘leaders who do not mind to “dig in” and work hard’. He is also impressed by leaders ‘who show competence and drive’ (2017, 2 April). He looks up to and follows these leaders because he finds them to be authentic when they are showing these types of personal characteristics. All Swedish interviewees declared that they look up to leaders who are using principles of the flat organization. Therefore, these leaders and followers turn more in the direction of flat organizational values.

**Self-Awareness**

Anna described herself as a person having great self-awareness. Tommy also told that he has a great portion of self-awareness and that he is humble in decision-making as well as in leadership. Gardner et al. (2005) write about self-awareness as a crucial trait a leader should have to be authentic. Both leaders and both followers confirmed that they reveal the same true inner selves towards any audience. For this reason, in our analysis we take caution for these sorts of statements. The interviewees might reveal to us that they have great self-
awareness, though they might have not. We cannot take it as a fact that the interviewees are correct in their assumptions of how others perceive them, we can only analyse their specific words. The discussion about great self-awareness can also be found in Ford and Harding (2011) who explain that it is necessary to reveal the same true inner self towards any audience.

Thus, it appears that a large portion of self-awareness is present in flat organizations. Self-awareness could be facilitated through the openness of the organizational structures. When having a great portion of self-awareness, the leader or follower knows who they really are and what to reveal as their true inner selves. Showing a great amount of self-awareness makes the leader or follower more approachable and authentic, which is preferred in a flat organization.

Conflict of Interests
The interview partners Tommy and Anna said that their own values are always more important than the organizational values. Tommy (2017, 3 April) pronounced he hopes that ‘they go much hand in hand’. Nyberg and Sveningsson (2014) state that there could be a conflict of interests in terms of the leaders’ own core values and the organizational values. When coming across these sorts of statements we are careful to draw conclusions. The interviewed leaders might claim that their own values are more important than the organizational values, though in real life the leader acts upon both. The leader might want to appear authentic and genuine in this sense. Nevertheless, we assume that the organizational values most likely play an important part as well.

This discussion leads to the hypothesis that there could be a conflict of interests between the core values of the leader and the organizational values, while these also might be possible to combine. In a flat organization, leaders and followers often strive for consensus and they are open for new influences. It appears to be power struggles in the flat organization as well, although consensus is of greater importance than individual profit. This could mean that in a flat organization employees might be more willing to adopt the leader’s own core values as their own.
They might be willing to be led in that direction. In flat organizations, individuals tend to see various aspects and include more opinions. There is a great complexity to this matter and discussion, which we do not intend to ignore.

4.2.1 Authentic Leadership in Relation to tall Organizations – Sweden

Our research also contained authentic leadership in relation to hierarchy in Sweden. One of our main empirical findings for this section is that all our interview partners in Sweden said they dislike hierarchy. They claimed that hierarchy would restrict them in their role as a leader or follower. Both interviewed leaders supposed that they would act differently as leaders if they worked in another culture (other than Sweden) with more hierarchical structures.

Power Distance and Decision-Making Process
Erickson (1994) also refers to the aforementioned – arguing that depending on the culture the leader is working in her leadership style will be affected. Both Swedish leaders stated that too much involvement by followers in the decision-making process would deteriorate the outcome and result in a negative way. It would also affect the performance of the organization. Both leaders confirmed that at the end of the day as leaders they still have the main responsibility. To some extent these leaders act on their own. Tommy uttered that his leadership style is democratic but firm. He confirmed that he always strives for consensus, though he is still responsible and in charge of the final decision in the end (Tommy, 2017, 3 April). The followers Gustav and Lars want to be included in the decision-making process.

This refers to the point that the interviewed Swedish leaders and followers all believed that they would act differently in a different culture compared to Sweden. They dislike the thought of hierarchical structures, which in this case is highly interesting. The leaders acknowledged that they strive for consensus at all times, albeit they want to have the last say and control over a decision. This confirms that even if consensus is highly appreciated in the Swedish context, there has to be someone responsible for the final decision and the
consequences. The followers accentuated that they want to be included in the decision-making process. We can assume that they are included and therefore, are able to act authentic within a flat organization.

All four interviewees stated that they assume that organizations outside of Sweden are generally more hierarchically structured, meaning that the power distance is higher. Both followers declared that they would act differently if they were followers in an organization with more hierarchical structures. The two older interview partners said that they keep a higher power distance in the flat organization to their leader or follower than what the younger interview partners expressed.

This can be explained by the fact that the interviewed Swedish leaders and followers all believe that lower power distance enable them to act authentic. This also means that they all suppose that they would feel restricted within hierarchical structures. We can interpret that flat organizations enable leaders and followers to be authentic because our interviewees spoke of empowerment in relation to this. We are aware of the fact that our interviewees only give us some of the pieces in the puzzle of this discussion. Certainly, there is more to reveal with regards to this discussion and the complexity is clearly observable. The older interview partners might have experienced a higher power distance in the past and still act upon old values, while the younger ones kept a lower power distance for convenience.

4.2.2 Authentic Leadership in Relation to flat Organizations – Sweden

For the analysis of authentic leadership in relation to flat organizations, interesting aspects were given by the Swedish interview partners. Both interviewed leaders like to include their followers in the decision-making process, but only to a certain extent. Too much involvement by the followers they said would restrict the outcome of the decision. Both Swedish leaders claimed that they use a democratic leadership style, where they strive for consensus within the organization. All four interviewees said that they believe that it is easier to be authentic in Sweden compared to other countries. They
explained that this refers to the flat organizational structures that Swedish companies in general have. Both interviewed followers (Gustav and Lars) want to be included by their leader in the decision-making process. Both Swedish leaders explained that they see their followers not as followers, but as equal colleagues. In their opinion creating a team composed of both, leader and followers, is the most important aspect of authentic leadership. Both Swedish leaders confirmed that the Swedish culture fosters them to lead in the flat way that they do in their organization.

We would like to draw the conclusion that our interviewees feel empowered in flat organizations and that the Swedish culture fosters them to become who they are. They consider themselves to be authentic and they also relate this to flat organizational structures. However, we are aware of the fact that the statements given by our interview partners in the specific interview environment, might not reveal the correct and complete truth of reality. Therefore, we can only assume that flat organizations enable and empower leaders and followers to show their personal true inner selves.

**Creativity and Initiative**

All four interview partners acknowledged that personal connection and good relationship between a leader and a follower is appreciated and necessary. Both interviewed leaders want their followers to take own initiative without the necessity to monitor them. Likewise, the followers want to be able to take own initiative in their position as followers without being monitored. All interviewed Swedish persons expressed that they want freedom in their position as leader/follower. They all want freedom to be creative and perform job tasks without being monitored. This can be referred to Muceldili, Turan and Erdil (2013) who state that authenticity empowers creativity and innovativeness in the organization.

The Swedish interviewed partners all agree on the thought of feeling free in their positions (not monitored) as leaders or followers in order to be creative. Thus, the interviews show that flat organizations encourage creativity and innovativeness – hence, as we interpret it – authentic behaviour. Leaders and followers appear to feel freer to create innovative ways of thinking and acting.
Leadership Style and Addressing Employees

Anna described herself as a kind leader, even though she can be direct if needed. Tommy pronounced that he is keen to have the opinion from everyone in the company, but he is still direct and tough when it comes to making decisions. Nevertheless, he always wants to keep a good relationship to the followers.

This could be related to the fact that the Swedish leaders address their followers as equals in terms of wanting to include their opinions. In the final step of decision-making the leaders want to be in control and decide themselves. For the analysis, we can acknowledge that this is a highly complex matter. On the one hand, the leader in a flat organization wants to include the opinion of everyone in the organization. On the other hand, the leader has to be in charge of the last say – the final decision. Control is needed in some form to move forward with organizational matters. The leader can be authentic and include the followers to a certain extent, before she makes the final decision on her own.

Trust and Relationship

Anna said that she trusts her team and she knows that they trust her as well. The followers have told her that they trust her. Tommy also said that he trusts his team and they trust him, although he said, ‘they do not have any other option’ (2017, 3 April). Trust is highly important in authentic leadership, according to Ford and Harding (2011). The followers Gustav and Lars also said that they trust their leaders, but sometimes not completely, based on previous experiences when their leaders had made negative decisions.

The Swedish interviewed leaders (and even followers) declare that trust is an important part of mutual relationships and authentic leadership. Tommy, who said that the followers have no other option but to trust him, can appear to be authentic because he stays true to himself with this statement. He claims that he adapts to the values of the flat organization, specifically including and informing everyone, despite the fact that he still sees himself as the manager in charge. Behind it all, it could be interpreted that Tommy sees himself as the boss who tells the followers what to do. In a way, this could also be seen as an excluding behaviour. Nevertheless, trust is highly important in the flat organization, because it enables authentic behaviour.
4.2.3 Our Interpretation of Interviewees Connection to Authentic Leadership – Sweden

To sum up the Swedish context, we can see that authentic leadership is highly important in Sweden. Revealing the true inner self appears to be highly appreciated in the Swedish culture. Followers are encouraged to participate in decision-making processes as well as to state their opinion. The Swedish leaders expressed an ambition to strive for consensus, although they want to make the final decision themselves at one point. Swedish followers appreciate leaders who show drive and competence. Self-awareness appears to be important for the Swedish leaders and followers since it can be related to flat organizational structures and authentic behaviour. The followers want to be creative, innovative and expect freedom in their role as a follower.

Our Swedish interview partners confirmed that the Swedish culture, consisting of flat organizational structures, is the reason for them being enabled to act authentic. They also assure that having a good and healthy leader- and follower relationship is necessary for authentic leadership to occur. As confirmed during the interviews the flat organizational structures visible in Sweden include more open and intimate communication. In the Swedish context, it is likely that more opinions and various aspects are included in organizational decision-making processes. Our Swedish interview partners expressed that they would feel restricted in hierarchical structures and that it would limit their ability to be authentic in their positions. Solidarity and active participation appear to be crucial matters in the Swedish culture, affiliated to the classification of Sweden as a feminine country (according to Hofstede’s cultural dimensions). Informal communication and trust are indicators of the low level of uncertainty avoidance in the Swedish context. In general, Sweden can be seen as a flat organizational structured culture. As the interviewees like to be seen as equals, the Swedish context could be seen as individualistic.
4.3 Contemplation of Authenticity in Relation to tall- and flat Organizations – Germany

4.3.1 Who were our Interview Partners in Germany?

As already described in chapter 3.4.3 Criteria for Choosing Interview Partners, once again we briefly point out the main characteristics of the interview partners. This is done to effortlessly follow the analysis of each country.

The two leaders interviewed in Germany are called Laura and Felix (names are made anonymous) and their age is 46 and 37 years. Laura is in a leadership position for 14 years and the size of her team depends on the season of the year and varies between 15 to 35 employees. Laura works in the retail industry. Felix leads an internationally team of more than 100 employees and has been in a leading position for 6 years till date. He is a project manager in a big manufacturing and electronic company. Both leaders work for a big sized company and have spent most of their working time in Germany.

The two followers interviewed in Germany are called Paul and Janine (names are made anonymous) and are 31 and 25 years old. Both of their working experience is at least five years. Currently Paul works for a company in the energy business industry and Janine in the retail industry. Paul had worked outside of Germany which met one of our requirements and helps him to have a different view on the German working environment.
4.4 Authentic Leadership – Germany

What characterizes authentic leadership in Germany? In the following paragraph, we discuss this topic in depth and give an answer to how leaders and followers in hierarchical organizations in Germany act and perceive authentic leadership behaviour. Furthermore, it is explained how the interviewed followers wish their leader to be in terms of personality and character. Attention should be drawn to the fact that one leader and one follower work for the same company currently. Laura and Janine work together in the same company and Laura is the direct leader of Janine. This circumstance makes it possible to even compare some of the statements of Laura and Janine on related topics. Felix and Paul work for the same company as well but not in a direct working relation to each other.

Concerning authentic leadership, the two leaders (Laura and Felix) interviewed both claim to be authentic at all times. Nevertheless, when asked more deeply and in different ways it became obvious that in specific situations both struggle to be authentic and that authentic behaviour does not seem to be possible consistently. This aspect has also been discussed in the theoretical framework where Nyberg and Sveningsson (2014) state that leaders might find it difficult to be authentic constantly. It manifests itself e.g. when Laura at first said she ‘stay[s] true to herself’ but then argued ‘I stay 90% true to myself’ (Laura, 2017, 5 April). Nonetheless, throughout the whole interview she stated repeatedly that she is authentic in her way of leading and behaving privately as well as in work life. When asked Janine she proves Laura’s authenticity. However, Janine believes that everyone has to deviate from one’s own path sometimes, but stated that Laura ‘always tries to make it the way she thinks it is right’ (Janine, 2017, 10 April). Considering Felix, he believes that the team he works with would recognize if he were not acting authentic which in turn means for him that followers would not see him as authentic at all. Felix thinks the task of an authentic leader is to give the team the possibility to talk to him no matter in which situation. He underlines his authenticity when expressing the following ‘I think I can always be myself’ (Felix, 2017, 5 April).
Coming to Janine, she expressed that authenticity has to do with one’s own convictions as well. If it affects her directly then she will react to it but when she does not care about the happening she just follows the way it is expected. In case she is not able to stay authentic, she said she would try to search another way to find acceptance with her own self. Janine values an authentic leader whom she described as direct, honest and accepting criticism. Most important for her is to know that her leader acts authentic regarding speaking her own mind even though this might hurt. She prefers direct and genuine feedback instead of giving falsehood just because of politeness. She signifies that it is easier to work in an environment as described due to the ability to speak out her opinion as well.

Paul (2017, 5 April) finds it difficult to ‘deeply show [his] true self at work’ and said it is ‘not always easy to be your authentic self’. This is due to his believe that he acts differently comparing private- and work life. Regarding the authentic leadership of his former leaders he replied that he felt empowered and not lost. He values openness, approachability and a great relationship between leader and follower. He described one of his former leaders as his mentor who fulfilled a nurturing role in his development. During the interview, he added the sentence ‘He taught me great life lessons’ (Paul, 2017, 5 April). Furthermore, Paul (2017, 5 April) voiced that an authentic leader is ‘someone who would back you up in difficult situations’ and ‘someone that has a long-term view on things’. His overall perception about authentic leaders is that ‘it takes a certain amount of grey hair/seniority to have that sort of view’ (Paul, 2017, 5 April). Nevertheless, in accordance with what was said by Janine, he also questioned if a leader can always be authentic due to the ‘high pressure coming from management’ (Paul, 2017, 5 April). This point can also be found in our theoretical framework. There it is communicated that a leader or follower might lose her inner self to the core values of the organization she represents (Gardner et al., 2005). Additionally, Nyberg and Sveningsson (2014) claim that leaders might find it difficult to be authentic at all times since it might conflict the goals and visions of the organization. This issue will be discussed again in the section authentic leadership in relation to tall organizations.
As a result of the aforementioned answers concerning authentic leadership behaviour there is an overall tendency to state that being authentic in every situation seems to be unfeasible. Yet, every interviewee had a strong will to be authentic and deviate from being authentic only in extreme situations or in those in which it does not affect the interviewee considerably. However, it is interesting to see that both leaders claimed to be more authentic than the followers would say a person can be. We assume this phenomenon is connected to the job position of the leaders and their greater self-awareness. Based on these statements we interpret that in Germany followers find it difficult to be authentic due to the hierarchical structures they work in. On the other hand, this aspect can also be connected to the prevention of losing one’s face by showing weakness. Naturally, people give a rosier picture of themselves which could also be the case here. Nevertheless, e.g. Laura’s strong commitment to telling the truth in every situation disregarding any outcome and her willingness to even quit a job when she feels not being accepted the way she is, adds evidence to her authentic leadership behaviour. Likewise, Felix’s open communication policy and his idea of changing the company instead of changing himself indicates his authentic personality. For Germany, an authentic leader is someone who is direct, open, honest and approachable for a follower.

4.4.1 Authentic Leadership in Relation to tall Organizations – Germany

So far, we have given an account on the leader’s and follower’s perception of authentic behaviour in Germany. In the following paragraph, we look at authentic leadership in direct relation to hierarchical organizations in Germany. As discussed in our theoretical framework there are several aspects on how authentic leaders interact with their followers. It is identified that aspects like creativity, innovativeness, self-awareness, private life, trust, power distance, as well as cultural conditions contribute to authentic leadership behaviour. Subsequently, those points are related to the statements of the interviewees of hierarchical organizations in Germany.
Our overall goal of this thesis is to find out if tall- and/or flat organizational structures influence the way people act authentically. While elaborating what was communicated by the interviewees we intend to answer this question.

Every interviewee has worked already and still works for a company which has tall hierarchical structures. Laura and Janine work for a big company within retail which sells mostly decoration and furniture in a business to consumer relationship. Both have direct consumer contact and fulfil a sales function amongst other things. Laura, as the leader, has typical leadership positions tasks as well. Felix and Paul work for a big manufacturing and electronic company in which Felix is in a position of a project manager and Paul works as an internal adviser to sales people on financing topics.

While discussing authentic leadership in tall- and flat organizational structures in Germany, it became obvious that all interviewees work in very tall organizations. Laura (2017, 5 April) for instance explained ‘there’s a hierarchical thinking’ or Felix (2017, 5 April) ‘there are a lot of hierarchies’. This gave us the perfect basis to dig deep into the topic of tall hierarchies and authentic leadership. We asked the interviewees if they feel restricted in their behaviour when working for a tall organization. In order to answer this, we approach different aspects which contribute to authentic leadership.

**Creativity and Initiative**
Looking at ways to enhance creativity within the team, Laura chooses daily business over creativity. Only every now and then there are days in which she allows her team to be creative in order to see if anything useful comes out. Felix tries to give them room for being creative and to refrain from pushing his own ideas because he knows that sometimes the team comes up with even better ideas. He has realized already that he works in a special team as they come up with non-company-standardized solutions to enhance any process. He entitles that as ‘thinking out of the box’ (Felix, 2017, 5 April).

At this point it can be interpreted that Felix follows an authentic leadership behaviour. It seems that the hierarchical environment does not restrict him in this aspect. Laura rather follows the hierarchical way of dealing with that.
Role-Model
The interviewed leader all looked up to a former leader who serves as a role model which is also stated by Gardner (1995).

Out of this, we claim great likelihood that individuals in hierarchical companies become hierarchically driven if they look up to hierarchical leaders. Due to Laura’s hierarchical environment and her authoritarian style of leading we claim that she gives less freedom to her followers. This might result in a less authentic leadership style of a follower in future leading positions. Additionally, she stated that achieving the business goals is more important than the well-being of the employee. Here we see a connection between Hofstede’s *Uncertainty Avoidance* and the high level of Germany in this category (Itim International, 2017). As we hold the view that Felix’s leadership style encourages more participative actions, for him creativity and innovativeness are important aspects him. This results in more freedom for his followers and simultaneously in giving them the change to act authentically.

Self-Awareness and Trust
Both leaders expressed that they have a very large portion of self-awareness, Laura (2017, 5 April): ‘I’m really convinced that what I’m doing is the right thing’ and Felix (2017, 5 April) ‘I wish to be more silent sometimes, it would maybe be beneficial but I’m very much dominant’. In addition to self-awareness, trust is very important in authentic leadership (Ford & Harding, 2011). When talking about trust all interviewees stated that they have trusted all of their employees as well as leaders so far. Laura said that even when you do not have a good relationship to someone in certain situations trust is still given. So far, both leaders have shown characteristics which are demanded for being an authentic leader in Germany.

Summarizing the findings so far, leads to the assumption that authentic leadership is prominent in tall organizations when talking about self-awareness and trust. Self-awareness seems to be of importance because the leaders showed a high level of it and the interviewed followers did not appear to have a great portion of self-awareness. Once again, we do see a connection between followers in tall hierarchical organizational structures and being authentic.
Private Life

In our theoretical framework, we mentioned that the openness to talk about private life could be influenced by tall hierarchical structures. Both leaders pointed out that they share private details. Furthermore, they think it makes them even more approachable and helps the team to grow together. Nevertheless, they do not spend their free time together with their followers. Paul (2017, 5 April) said for instance he simply ‘[doesn’t] need to know whether [his] leader behaves at home the same way he behaves in the office. For [him] that’s not important.’ For the followers, revealing details of their private life is less important. Janine (2017, 10 April) reported that she ‘think[s] there should be boundaries between private- & work life.’

This shows that hierarchical organizational structures do not restrict leaders to talk about their private life but it seems as employees at a lower organizational level prefer not to share private details with their leaders. Followers in hierarchies feel that they are at least one level further down in the organization than their leaders which restrains them from being their true authentic self. If hierarchies exist followers feel on a different level than the leaders, less empowered and less involved which might also lead to the avoidance of revealing much of their private life. In Germany, followers can be depicted as less open due to the overall hierarchical thinking.

Power Distance and Decision-Making Process

To continue with our findings and analysis, we reflect upon power distance in both companies and how it is perceived by the interviewees. All of the interviewees explained that within the organization there is a high power distance. Moreover, it is scored higher the more you go up the hierarchy levels. Usually very strict rules exist regulating company’s expectations addressing the employees. According to this, Laura (2017, 5 April) responded that ‘it is not allowed where I work to push through one’s own ideas’. However, the power distance between the follower and her direct leader is lower. Both the followers stated that they see the leader higher on the career ladder who is involved in the decision-making process. They do not even want to be held responsible for the decisions made. Paul (2017, 5 April) answered ‘that’s why they are paid those big bugs’.
Furthermore, when we asked Paul whether he would feel restricted in stating his mind if there existed a higher power distance to his leader, he replied as follows ‘I would definitely be more reserved in my opinions and interactions’ (Paul, 2017, 5 April).

The given answers show that followers do feel restricted to a certain point to be authentic within hierarchical organizations. In some points, they wish to be more included but in others they accept their position and hierarchy is the reason for them to agree with being left out in the decision-making processes. They seem to feel comfortable to work in a hierarchy. A similar aspect is true when examining the leaders. They also feel restraint as soon as a person from a higher hierarchy level is involved in the decision-making. Thus, the higher the hierarchy level the harder it gets to be fully authentic.

**Flat Organizations and Followers**

When we asked the followers how they would feel and act in flat organizations they reacted with refusal to work in a flat organization. Paul (2017, 5 April) argued that he ‘might even feel out of place’ and Janine (2017, 10 April) ‘it has to be the way it is and I think it is good the way it is’. In addition to the preceding, she put up an interesting point. If in flat organizations everyone was involved in every single decision she would expect a power struggle as it might occur that everyone would work against each other.

In our theoretical framework, it was questioned if possible underlying issues of Sweden’s silent communication could mean not being true to yourself and not being able to speak up your mind. Silence was referred to the category of Individualism (Itim International, 2017; Schneider, Barsoux & Stahl, 2014). Janine indicates this aspect in what she was saying and this leads us to the topic of communication. The rejection of flat organizations by the German followers can be referred to that they have the feeling to lose the structure in work life and do not know whom to address when they have any problems. Through our interviews, we make the statement that in Germany hierarchical structures are needed to some extent to give the followers the feeling of being at the right place.
Communication

The differing communication styles in Sweden and Germany were discussed during the interviews in both countries. It is stated that Germans prefer direct communication (Itim International, 2017) which was confirmed by all interviewees. In terms of communication and hierarchy we wanted to seek the communication styles of German leaders in relation to authentic leadership. It can be verified that the direct communication style of the interviewed leaders makes it easier for them to be authentic in hierarchies. Felix drew a connection between his open communication and the creativity in the team. Simultaneously, he wants to have a mutual understanding within the team and leads his team in a way to have a common consensus. Felix’s explanations and representation of his leadership style reminds to a high degree of how it would be expected in a flat organization. Remarkably with his approach in leading is that he sees tall organizations as not beneficial. He underlines his statement by referring to the long duration of decision-making processes and not giving the empowerment to the team when needed. He believes that in a flat organization he could work more efficiently but also rises the issue of having more pressure due to more responsibility. In addition, he stated his way of including everyone in the decision-making process as ‘the key to success’ (Felix, 2017, 5 April).

When considering Laura’s way of addressing and communicating we understand that she is extremely direct with her team as well as with superiors. She prefers to stay true to herself than to pretend to be someone else even if that might hurt others. She declared that she has difficulties sometimes, but in the end people understand her and most of them follow her. Referring to power distance, she supports the idea of hierarchies by saying ‘if it is required I stand above them to tell them the direction’ (Laura, 2017, 5 April). Despite this believe, she acts as a part of the team when needed.

For us to see in terms of both leader’s way of leading is that they try to push their own authentic leadership style through hierarchical structures and they are not always satisfied with the way the company deals with several topics. We mentioned earlier their elevated level of self-awareness which can be seen as the reason for them being able to push through their ideas in a hierarchical company.
This thought is supported by Felix’s believe when he said, ‘I can always be myself’ (Felix, 2017, 5 April) and then rises the issue that in tall organizations it could be more difficult for shy people to speak up their minds because they are to some extent pushed down by the hierarchy.

Conflict of Interests
Another key aspect of authentic leadership are conflicts of interests between those of the leader and those of the organization in a way that leaders cannot be their authentic self anymore (Nyberg & Sveningsson, 2014). Concerning this topic both leaders signified that due to the hierarchical levels in the organizations they work for, they have to work hard against the hierarchy in order to stay authentic. Felix (2017, 5 April) affirmed it in saying ‘I’m really in the conflict with myself’ and ‘You have to digest first what is the requirement of the company’. Nevertheless, both said they have success in being their true selves. Laura (2017, 5 April) articulates that as ‘I break through this hierarchy’ as well as Felix (2017, 5 April) ‘If the company has a different expectation I try to change the company’.

We conclude that hierarchies restrict them in being their authentic self. Thus, in tall hierarchical organizational structures a high degree of resistance of oneself is demanded in order to be authentic constantly. Likewise, the aspect of strong self-awareness is needed to push through one’s own ideas. In addition, we analyse here that the authentic leader with his ideas cannot be perfectly combined with hierarchies. Aspects like giving the leader and follower more space to couple their ideas with those of the company can be better lived after in flat organizations.

4.4.2 Authentic Leadership in Relation to flat Organizations – Germany

When talking about the way of working in flat organizations in terms of authentic leadership the opinions of the interviewees diverged. Laura and Janine who work for the same company have the same understanding about hierarchy. Immediately, it became clear that Laura herself is very hierarchically driven and supports the idea of tall organizations intensively: ‘I think it’s good
to have hierarchies. I support that. I want it to be done the way I said it’ (Laura, 2017, 5 April). She does not like the idea of involving too many employees and prefers an authoritarian way of leading. Nevertheless, she does not feel restricted in being authentic in a hierarchical organization since she holds the view that she can stand against it. In contrast, she supports the same idea as Felix in saying if hierarchies would be flattened than it would be beneficial in time shortening aspects. Furthermore, she sees a connection to cultural aspects. She believes that historically organizations are taller in Germany and this is what Germans are used to and where they work even more efficient. In her opinion, Germany’s hierarchical organizations could only be flattened if the mindset of leaders was changed. Janine has a similar opinion when arguing that in a hierarchy only one contact person is in charge leading to a better structure. In addition, the aforementioned power struggle is quite high to her mind.

As reported by Felix, he wants some parts of the organization itself flattened and defends the idea of flat organizations but still sees the final decisions are to be made by the leader. According to Paul’s view, both ways are good: tall and flat. Concerning criticism of tall organizations, he identified ‘One thing hierarchy does it creates an aura of greatness/importance of people. So, your boss, your bosses boss and his bosses boss. In the end, if you want to move up the ladder sometimes you need to conform towards expected things and then you’re not yourself anymore.’ (Paul, 2017, 5 April) and he would sometimes prefer to work in a flat organization. On the contrary, he stated that he might feel lost in a flat organization.

It seems obvious that both, Laura and Janine support the idea of tall hierarchical organizations. One approach in analysing this, it could be argued that this is due to the industry they work in (both in retail). Concerning Paul, his way of reacting to flat organizations could be attributed to less self-awareness than others because he would like to work in a flat organization on the one hand, but on the other hand, he would feel out of place. In the same sense, authentic behaviour comes to play. Paul does not support the idea of being able to be authentic constantly. Contrary, he would feel restricted in his ability to speak out if the power distance was really high. This leads us to the
assumption the higher the power distance the more difficult it gets to remain authentic. Thus, the ability to act authentically becomes more challenging the higher you are positioned in the hierarchy. We do believe that it needs a strong will in a tall organization to be able to describe yourself as authentic. There is a tendency of the interviewees to work in tall organizations which can be attributed to their cultural background as well as to the companies they are used to work in. In addition, we explained that all the leaders looked up to another leader in a hierarchical environment which can be understood as if our interviewed leaders prefer to stay in their hierarchical environment because it is what they have learned from the beginning. A strong commitment to hierarchical organizations could also be explained by gender because both female interviewees stood behind hierarchical thinking. The male interviewees were more open to flat organizations.

4.4.3 Our Interpretation of Interviewees Connection to Authentic Leadership – Germany

All of the interviewees reinforced the argument that the taller the hierarchy level the higher the power distance, the more time it takes to come to a decision, the less they are involved in the decision-making processes and the less private issues are discussed, the more difficult it gets to reach out to people, the less open the communication. All these assumptions lead to a declining ability to act authentically in tall organizations. Limitations in acting authentically based on higher power distance are perceivable to a similar extent. In addition, a great portion of self-awareness as well as the willingness to take risks in tall organizations is the key to stay authentic. When it comes to followers and authenticity it seems harder for them to be authentic in tall organizations due to less self-awareness and lower job position level in the hierarchy.

Concerning private life and authentic behaviour in tall companies, it is less important for followers to be open but significant for leaders. In terms of communication, it helps German leaders and followers to have an open communication to stay true to themselves. Contributory to communication is
the point described above in which we claim that the higher the hierarchy level the harder it gets to have an open communication leading to less authentic behaviour in the end.

When talking to our German interviewees, we found out that they believe that leaders and followers in flat organizations have more autonomy to couple their ideas with those of the company.

➔ Considering these points of view, then hierarchy has an influencing character on the authentic leadership in Germany which leads to the statement that hierarchies restrict authentic behaviour.

However, the interviewed leaders showed great authentic leadership behaviour which leads to the hypothesis that they are not restricted by hierarchy. Their authentic leadership behaviour is supported by their great self-awareness, open communication and honesty. In this aspect, we see a connection to Hofstede’s cultural dimension Masculinity in which Germany has a high level (Itim International, 2017). Furthermore, as leaders in tall organizations use to look up to other leaders in tall organizations it shows that hierarchies do not negatively influence the leaders but enhance them to follow the same way of leading. It is discussed that authentic leadership fosters creativity and innovativeness. One of the leaders showed that he creates an atmosphere in which creativity and innovativeness is fostered which demonstrates that he is not influenced by hierarchies in this aspect. The other leader did not show great support for creative and innovative aspects which leads to the assumption that she is influenced by tall hierarchies. The follower’s unwillingness to work for a flat organization shows their commitment to tall organizations because it gives them security and structure. Hierarchy helps them to feel in the right place.

Despite the argumentation that hierarchies restrict individuals to act authentic, every interviewee felt comfortable and able to be authentic in tall organizations. We consider this is due to their strong personalities and cultural backgrounds and simply to their habit of working for tall organizations.
5. Conclusion and Prospect

In the concluding chapter of this Master’s thesis, at first, we sum up our comparative discussion about tall- and flat organizational structures in relation to authentic leadership. Next, we elaborate on our learning outcomes and what it could mean to the topic of authentic leadership. This aspect is connected to the question how value can be brought to leadership education as well as to the implications for companies striving for improvements in authentic leadership. At the end of this chapter, we provide an overview on the limitations of our research. To finalize our Master’s thesis, we give suggestions for further research in the field of authentic leadership.

5.1 Closing Summary by Comparing the two Countries and their organizational Structures

After having presented our findings and discussed them in depth we would like to give a closing summary by comparing the outcomes of both countries and their organizational structures. All interviewees in both organizational structures in each country showed authentic behaviour. An authentic leader in Sweden is someone who demonstrates drive and competence, whereas in Germany it is expected to be open, honest, direct and approachable.

Remarkably, the Swedish interview partners think their way of acting authentically would not be the same if they worked in a hierarchical organization. In comparison to that, on the one hand, the German interviewed leaders do not feel immensely restricted by tall organizational structures which we attribute to their strong personality. On the other hand, they feel restricted by tall hierarchies with regards to aspects like getting decisions done in a short time frame or being able to combine their ideas with those of the company. Additionally, followers do feel restricted by hierarchy in terms of the involvement in decision-making processes or approachability of leaders the higher the hierarchical level.
In the Swedish culture actively participating in decision-making processes is common for every employee on each job position.

Thus, followers and leaders in Sweden do not feel restricted to act authentic in their flat organizational structures. German followers do feel restricted by tall hierarchies to act authentic constantly whereas leaders holding great self-awareness feel rather unhampered. We claim that it depends on the organizational culture you are used to, meaning that someone being used to tall hierarchical organizational structures tends to follow the well-known.

A difference between the two countries can also be seen in terms of revealing aspects of their private life. In Sweden, one leader and one follower did not want to reveal much of their private life but the other two interview partners were very willing to do so. Contrary to Sweden, in Germany it was obvious that the leaders prefer to reveal lots more of their private life than the followers. Nonetheless, the sharing of private life between leader and follower has boundaries in terms of spending free time together.

In a hierarchical company followers struggle more with sharing private details than leaders do whereas in flat companies revealing anything of one’s private life is more common in the younger generation.

Work vs. Employee first?
We depicted that the Swedish employees in flat organizations and their feelings are higher prioritized than their work performance which can be seen for instance in Anna’s leadership style. In tall organizations like the ones we looked at in Germany it differs in this point by showing that work tends to be more important than the employee in many cases.

Therefore, we assume that it is easier to act authentic in a flat organization rather than in a tall organization.
Communication Style
In Germany, an open and direct communication style is preferred, whereas in Sweden open communication is expected but not as direct as in Germany. Most likely, in Sweden you would find less hierarchy levels than in Germany which leads us to the conclusion that the overall possibility to speak up one’s mind might be easier. In Germany, more strength in the personality is needed to intensively participate.

- We draw a connection between flat organizations and communication to enable authentic leadership. Despite this, we do think that the direct communication style in Germany makes it easier for people to speak up and be their true inner selves as well.

Role-Models
We found out that role-models serve as a multiplier for passing on the organizational structure so that each organizational structure stimulates its own structure which means that if the leader directs with a flat leadership style, the next leader looking up to this person is more likely to adapt a flat leadership style instead of a tall.

- Leaders in flat organizational structures create a flat organizational set of values which they pass on to the leader looking up to them. This same statement is true for leaders in tall organizational structures but the other way around.

Self-Awareness
Furthermore, a substantial portion of self-awareness is a personal characteristic that can be found in both organizational structures. For Germany, still more when looking at the leaders than the followers. All interviews let us conclude that self-awareness is needed in order to break through hierarchies and to stay authentic.

- Self-awareness supports leaders as well as followers to act authentic in tall- as well as in flat organizational structures.
Conflict of Interests
The German interviews disclosed that there exists more struggle to combine one’s own interests with those of the company in case they go in dissimilar directions. Examining Sweden, flat organizations give leaders and followers the feeling to be able to depict their ideas facile and that they are accepted more effortlessly.

➔ Thus, in cases of conflict of interests in flat organizations, leaders and followers are enabled to be themselves, whereas in tall organizational structures it is more demanding to combine differing interests.

Creativity
With the help of the interviews, we are able to recognize that creativity is more empowered in flat organizations which supports a person’s ability to act authentic. In tall organizations only one out of four strongly reinforce the idea of creativity in the team.

➔ Giving space to be creative and innovative fosters the leader’s authentic leadership style, which we consider to be distinctive in flat companies.

Trust
Trust is one of the key aspects for both organizational structures in order to enable authenticity. We did not get the impression that either tall- or flat company structures enhance authentic leadership through trust.

➔ Trust is enabled by both organizational structures equally.

Uncertainty Avoidance
Our interviews in the Swedish culture showed that consensus is highly important as well as trust and informal communication which proves the low level of uncertainty avoidance in Sweden (House et al., 2004). The high level in the category of uncertainty avoidance for Germany can be seen as true since it was verified by the conducted interviews.
Through the low level of uncertainty avoidance, we hold the regard that flat organizations and their informal way of communicating facilitate the ability to act authentic.

**Masculinity vs. Femininity**

As stated in our theoretical framework, Sweden is considered to be a feminine country while Germany is regarded as being a masculine country (Itim International, 2017). For both countries, we can conclude that this is true. Moreover, it is more likely that feminine countries have flat organizations which enable authentic leadership.

Feminine countries empower authentic leadership by means of flat organizational structures.

At the beginning of this thesis, we formulated the assumption that flat organizational structures strengthen the ability to act authentic. This was validated by our interviews in which we found out that the Swedish culture fosters individuals to lead/follow as described above. In a tall organizational structure a strong personality in terms of high portion of self-awareness and resistance is needed in order to be fully authentic. Owing to this we draw the conclusion that shy persons have more difficulties to be themselves in tall organizations. Leading us to the belief of a restriction to act authentic in hierarchical companies. Additionally, the Swedish interviewed individuals stated a great support for their authentic behaviour given by their flat organizational system and disliked hierarchical organizational structures exceedingly. In contrast, the German interviewed individuals did support authentic behaviour in flat organizations to a certain extent. Nevertheless, they think it is possible to act authentic in hierarchical organizational structures. Therefore, we conclude that flat- instead of tall organizational structures enhance and enable their employees further to act authentically. However, authentic behaviour is also achievable and likely in tall organizational structures.
5.2 Critical Acknowledgement

Our research has been designed to fit our specific topic and narrow down our aim. Along the way of designing our research we left out a few interesting aspects, which can be investigated further in depth.

We interviewed eight individuals (four in each country) and focused on in-depth interviews. This was done instead of interviewing several more individuals but with shorter questionnaires, which would have led to a quantitative data gathering. We chose to have eight interviewees because of the decision that it was enough to represent each country. The fact that the interviews were in-depth supported our decision.

After having interviewed and made the accurate methodological categorizations we had the feeling that it would have been good to go back and ask a few more questions to our interview partners. The reason for this was that we found several follow-up questions that would have been valuable for our research. If we had had more time, we would have made it possible to enhance some of our specific questions and topics even more.

We chose to interview people from different industries. This was done based on our research material because we wanted to represent the culture in each country and not only one specific industry culture. In contrast, it could be argued that using different industries in our research limits the possibilities for comparability.

Our interview partners were all in different age ranges. This might be one limitation in our research, since the comparability was restricted. Nevertheless, if we had to make this decision again we would still choose different age ranges for our interview partners because we wanted broader material for our research.
Our interview partners all had different levels of working experience given their labour years. This might have been a limitation for our research since we could not compare how they felt about authentic leadership at the same specific point in their careers. However, this helped us to make an estimation on how different interview partners at different points in their careers view authentic leadership.

We also chose to pick out interview partners of different gender. We did this because we intended to represent the average population in each country. However, the fact that we had an unequal number of female and male interviewees might have restricted the research. We had one female and one male leader in each country. The followers in Sweden were two male persons and in Germany one man and one woman. We are aware of this and have made the analysis based upon the limitation of this judgement. Nevertheless, our topic was not focused specifically on a gender discussion, which in turn made it possible for us to pick an unequal number of genders without affecting our research.

For our theoretical framework, we had difficulties to find literature connected to negative aspects of authentic leadership and behaviour. The majority of literature about authentic leadership and behaviour focuses in general on the positive outcomes and aspects, which made it hard for us to fully problematize our discussion. We were also restricted to find literature about authentic leadership connected to tall- and flat organizations. However, this gave us the niche and the possibility to narrow our research down which led us to our research questions and aims. For this reason, we focused more on the positive aspects of authentic leadership and behaviour and elaborated it more.

Some of our interviews were conducted in German and Swedish, which may have resulted in a minor loss of value in terms of meaning when translated into English. However, the interviewees had greater freedom to speak their minds in their native language, which made the interviews even more detailed and gave the possibility for profound discussions.
We could have chosen to do our research based upon other countries than Sweden and Germany. For example, China instead of Germany would have been an interesting country to investigate further, since it generally might have taller organizations and hierarchical structures. The outcomes of the research would then supposably have been different and more distinct. We did not choose to look at China as one of our research objects, since we did not have the network needed in order to conduct this kind of study. We had our networks in Sweden and Germany, which made it easier for us to access material and to find adequate interview partners. We also had previous knowledge for the Swedish and German culture due to our own nationalities, which facilitated the research work and to evaluate the outcomes.

One last aspect which we would like to demonstrate in this section is in general the challenge to interview people about authentic leadership behaviour. We have mentioned this aspect already above where Alvesson (2003) argues about artificial interview situations especially in cases like ours. It gets difficult as soon as an individual has to be really honest with oneself and not just showing a rosier picture. We tried to oppose this challenge by using open questions and continuously asking about the same aspect in a different way.

5.3 Suggestions for Further Research

For further research, it could be interesting to investigate more countries and their organizational structures than only two (as we did in our research). China is one example of a culture that would be refreshing for a deeper look, because of its supposable very tall hierarchical structures and tall organizations. It could also be rewarding to elaborate the discussion about culture and authenticity even more and make it even broader.

Further research could also be made in the field of followership in relation to hierarchy and authenticity. According to our empirical findings, followership seems to be affected differently by hierarchical structures within an
organization. For this reason, looking further into this topic could be an interesting approach.

For further research, we also suggest that an experiment could be constructed. The experiment would be to switch organizational structures around in each country or culture represented. For example, this would mean that one team of a Swedish company would experiment to lead in a tall hierarchical way. In the same sense, a team of a German company would try to lead in a flat organizational way. It could be interesting to see if authentic behaviour of the leaders and followers changes. Would German leaders and followers feel more enabled to act authentic in a flat organization? Likewise, would Swedish leaders and followers feel more restricted in a taller organization with hierarchies? Conducting this experiment would make it possible to find out whether the authentic leadership relies on the structures (tall/flat) of the organization or whether it is an intrinsic part of culture.

In addition, it would be fascinating to research authentic leadership in tall- and flat organizations in one country. For instance, it could be looked at from a Swedish perspective on both, tall- and flat organizations, in order to identify how it differentiates within the same culture. This would bring additional value to the study of authentic leadership with regards to tall- and flat organizations.
5.4 Learning Outcomes from the Author’s Perspective and Relevance to practical Application for Leadership Education

5.4.1 Reflection on our Research Topic

At this point of the thesis, we would like to reflect upon the learning outcomes from our perspective and bring up the relevance to the practical application for leadership education. We would like to begin with thinking backwards to our introduction and mirroring our research questions. As a reminder, the research questions focused on the relation between authentic leadership within tall- and flat organizational structures. In chapter 4. Results and Analysis of our Research, we deeply discussed our findings and analysis. Following this idea, our research questions were answered in the way that we do see an enabling or restricting relationship from tall- and flat organizational structures on authentic leadership. We claim that hierarchies do have an influence on authentic behaviour. Furthermore, generally speaking, it is not always possible to be one’s own authentic self. Additionally, flat organizational structures seem to enable authentic leadership. However, being authentic in a tall organizational structure is definitely possible. Still, do we prefer people to be authentic at all times or not? Is it possible to be authentic constantly? These questions can be investigated further and we would like to raise the awareness of the reader at this point to reflect upon this critically.

As we highlighted in the introduction, aspects like trust, creativity or empowerment influence the way authentic leadership is perceived and adhered. Therefore, our research questions were answered in a satisfying way.

5.4.2 Our Learning Progress and Outcomes

Our learning outcomes from the research have been rewarding to our personal development. We, as the authors, value that a flat organization functions as an open communication bubble where the followers do not need permission to
approach anyone higher up in the organization. It exists a dynamic way of working and no clear lines are defined. The decision-making process is more or less open to anyone who is willing to contribute. The flat organizational structures encourage people to reveal more of their private life and the relationships are more personally based. Private information is more easily shared between others in the flat organization. In the same way, leaders and followers working in flat organizations seem to be more satisfied (see also explanation below).

Our research helped us to understand better what it means to be authentic in both organizational structures. Our Swedish author feels more comfortable with tall hierarchical organizations after we have interviewed individuals in tall organizations. She values that authentic people are not restricted in their behaviour in tall organizations. Our German author feels inspired by the Swedish way of organizational structures and desires to experience on her own how it influences the authentic behaviour of a person. Furthermore, what we find fascinating in our research: it appears that in flat organizations, by means of the open communication bubble as mentioned above, people do not necessarily feel the urge to raise their voice as strongly as somewhere else. We suggest this is the same situation as it is with rules for children for instance. If a child is not allowed to do a certain action it is more likely that this child has the urge to do it nevertheless.

It could be a cultural issue that Swedes are more reserved and try to avoid conflicts and create an underlying power struggle. Consequently, in Germany people in tall organization feel a greater urge to speak up since they are more influenced by organizational rules leading to being their authentic selves.

In addition, we want to demonstrate that we think that a better outcome can be reached when including more people in the decision-making process in the end. In contrast, it leads to higher time consumption to cover everyone’s ideas. Nonetheless, we do think that it influences the level of satisfaction of employees (as discussed already above). Being included leads oneself to the feeling of being valued to a greater extent and being more influential as a person.
5.4.3 Our Research in Terms of Practical Value

As this is the last knowledge we want to hand over to our reader, we come to a concluding paragraph in which we would like to talk briefly about our study and how it might be valued for practical application for leadership education.

To expand our discussion, we found the example of the former CEO of Volvo, Pehr G. Gyllenhammar, in a television documentary. In the documentary (Laurén, 2017) the employees revealed that on the very same day when Gyllenhammar resigned from his position as the CEO, they were eager to bring new perspective and rejuvenation in the organization. It was mentioned that Gyllenhammar had ruled Volvo with an iron hand in a strong hierarchical way. The employees met on the day after his resignation and broke open all the doors in the office, because they wanted the atmosphere to be more tolerant. From that day onwards, the employees have secured that there would always be open doors and open communication within the Volvo organization.

We give this example since we have realized the same desire from our interviewees. Hence, the example underlines the importance to always have an open door to foster authentic leadership in organizations. Likewise, leaders in tall organizations could have a look at the way leaders in flat organizations lead and extract some of their ideas. Amongst others, openness in terms of caring even more for the employees, being open for ideas of them, including them in the decision-making process and giving the employees more freedom in their work environment adds to successful authentic leadership. In contrast, leaders in flat organizations could be inspired by leaders in tall organizations learning from their way to reach an agreement quicker and working in a more direct communication style.

Giving a deep insight into authentic leadership in relation to tall- and flat organizations, we conclude by stating:

THE JOURNEY TO AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP COMMENCES THROUGH THE AWARENESS OF THE TRUE INNER SELF.

(Gemmel & Sabel, 2017)
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Appendices

Appendix A: Information Sheet
March/April 2017

Dear Interviewee,

Thank you for your participation in the upcoming interview regarding our Master’s thesis Authentic Leadership in Relation to Tall- and Flat Organizations - A comparative study of authentic leadership in the differing organizational structures of Sweden and Germany. This information sheet will give you the required information about the nature of the research, privacy and rights of the interviewee, general information of the interview as well as theoretical basis for the interview.

1. About the Nature of the Research
   - The purpose of this research is to study in which dimension tall- and flat organizational structures influence authentic leadership behaviour.
   - The author of the Master’s thesis and the interviewers will be Eva Gemmel and Kristin Sabel. We study Leadership and Management in International Contexts at the Linnaeus University Kalmar, Sweden (https://lnu.se/program/leadership-and-management-in-international-contexts-magisterprogram/kalmar-internationell-engelska-ht/).
   - The responsible professor for this thesis is Senior Lecturer PhD Mikael Lundgren (https://lnu.se/personal/mikael.lundgren/) and the head of the Programme is Prof PhD Philippe Daudi (https://lnu.se/personal/philippe.daudi/).

2. Privacy and Rights of the Interviewee
   - The participation of this interview is voluntary and the interviewee has the right to decline to answer a question or a set of questions. The interviewee may withdraw at any time.
   - If desired company information as well as interviewee names can be made anonymous (e.g. Company 1).
3. General Interview Information

- The research is directed to leaders and followers within companies in Sweden and Germany.
- The interview will be conducted face-to-face and will take approx. 45 min. to one hour. It will be a semi-structured interview, which means it contains several questions to main topics where the interviewee has the chance to talk about his/her experiences.
- In order to gain reliable data for analysis and to control bias, it is desired to audio-record the interview. Furthermore, the interviewer will be making notes.

Thank you again for your contribution to this research.

Eva Gemmel and Kristin Sabel

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If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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Appendix B: Interview Questions

Interview-Questions Leaders

Questions regarding Personality
1. Would you be so kind and give me a brief overview of your career background and what the company you’re working for does in general? (Your position in the company / field of activity, products, number of employees in company + your team)

Leadership Style/Authenticity
2. How would you describe your leadership style? (authoritarian, democratic etc.)
3. Which specific characteristics do you think you have as a leader?
4. Do you think you are successful in the way you lead? (Have followers told you that?) Give explanation/situation when.
5. Have you had a leader yourself you looked up to? Do you think you use the same leadership style or techniques as the leaders you yourself followed or looked up to prior to becoming a leader yourself?

Personal Questions/Authenticity
6. Would you say you have a large portion of self-awareness? (More than others?)
7. What does authenticity mean to you?
8. Would you consider yourself/your leadership style as authentic? Can you explain that more detailed please?
9. Do you act differently in different situations or do you always stay true to yourself (being authentic)? Please explain that more detailed. (Is there a conflict of your goals and visions of the business and the organization on the whole when staying authentic?)
Leaders reaching out to their Followers

10. Do you have the impression that you give freedom to your followers to be creative and innovative/enlighten them in general?

11. Have you ever had the feeling to touch follower’s personality? Please tell me in which specific situation?

12. Would you say that it is an interaction between you and the follower or rather you inspiring the follower and not them you? (Synergy effect?)

13. Do you prefer including followers in the decision-making process and want them to participate? Why? Why not?

14. Do you reveal anything of your private life to your followers or do you fully separate private- and work life?

15. How would you describe the power distance between you and your team?

16. Do you trust your team? Do they trust you? (give examples)

Tall (Power Distance) vs. Flat Organizations (Participation)

17. What would you consider the company structures are of the companies you have worked for so far? (Tall or flat?)

18. Do you think there are any company structures that restrict/could restrict your leadership style? (Do you have the impression that hierarchical structures restrict you in your leadership style?)

19. Do you see any connections between hierarchy and your leadership style? In what way?

20. Would you prefer working in a tall- or flat organization? Why?

21. What do you prefer: Staying true to yourself or to embody the organizational core values? (Toxic environment, still following the organizational core values?) Would revealing your true feelings destroy your professional image? Why?

22. Have you ever had a situation in which you could not stay true to yourself? Please explain the situation.

23. What do you think: a country like Sweden is known for flat organizational structures? Is it easier in such a country to be authentic? Why/why not?

24. Do you consider yourself to be a manager or a leader? Why do you consider that?
Interview Questions Followers

Questions Regarding Personal Information
1. Would you be so kind and give me a brief overview of your career background and what your company does in general? (Your position in the company, your field of activity, industry, products).

Authenticity & Followership
2. Which previous experiences do you have so far of leaders in organizations that you have worked for?
3. Which specific characteristics have these leaders possessed?
4. How did those leaders make you feel or act?
5. Which personal characteristics or traits would you find most attractive for a leader to have?
6. Why do you find those characteristics or traits to be appealing?
7. Please give a few examples of personal characteristics or traits that you would dislike a leader to have?
8. Why would some leader characteristics not be appealing to you as a follower?
9. How would they make you feel or act?
10. Have you had any experiences of these type of leaders?
11. Would it matter to you as a follower if a leader act as genuine and humble revealing his/her true inner feeling to you?
12. How would that make you feel or act?
13. Do you consider yourself being a follower? Please explain why you are a follower or why you are not a follower in a specific situation?
14. Do you trust your leader?
15. Are there certain situations where you find it difficult to remain authentic as a follower?
16. Are there certain situations where you as a follower have found your supervisor to be inauthentic? If so, which situations, please give examples?
17. Would you as a follower say that it is important for you to know how your supervisor acts in private life as well, in order for you to determine if he/she is authentic or genuine? Why or why not?

Tall (Power Distance) vs. Flat Organizations (Participation)

18. Do you prefer being included by your leader in the decision-making process of your organization? Why or why not?

19. In situations where you have felt a power distance between you as a follower and your supervisor, would you have preferred for your supervisor to do the decision-making without your participation?

20. If there is a power distance between you and your supervisor, do you feel free to act according to your own values and beliefs (be true to yourself)?

21. Do you think it is difficult to always stay true to yourself (Is there a conflict of your goals and visions of the business and the organization on the whole when staying authentic?)

22. How would you describe the power distance in the organization environment that you are working in (low or high power distance)?

23. Would you say that you as a follower play an important role in a leadership situation in your organization? If so, how?

24. Do you have the impression that hierarchical structures restrict you in your position as a follower? If so, how? Does it restrict you from being authentic? If so, why?

25. Would you prefer working in a tall- or flat organization? Please explain why and give examples of preferences.

26. Do you consider your boss to be a manager or a leader? Why do you consider that?