



LAPIN YLIOPISTO
UNIVERSITY OF LAPLAND

ATTENTION! SEEKING FOR AN IDEAL LEADER

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF FINNISH JOB
ADVERTISEMENTS

KORHONEN KALLE
ATTENTION! SEEKING FOR AN IDEAL LEADER: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE
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Author: Kalle Korhonen

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to 1) analyze which kind of concepts of an ideal leader are produced in the context of job advertisements and 2) which discourses enable the production of the concepts of an ideal leader. Therefore, my purpose was to provide new knowledge about how an ideal leader is considered in contemporary labor markets and how it is defined in the context of Finnish job advertisements. Leader ideals are an important subject of study, since previous research indicates that they are connected to unequal procedures especially in recruitment processes, which includes job advertisements as well.

In this research I approach leader ideals in the context of job advertisements by using a critical discourse analysis. This study analyzes leader ideals within job advertisements by approaching them as social objects, which are defined and shaped from certain positions, perspectives and desires. Thus, the purpose of this study is to make visible how the concepts of an ideal leader are produced and defined from a certain perspective, excluding possibilities for different kind of concepts of an ideal leader to emerge. The theoretical framework of this study is produced around three different dimensions: ideals as a research phenomenon, job advertisements as the site of ideals and an ideal leader in the context of job advertisements. These three dimensions define the research phenomenon and context as well as how an ideal leader is understood in this research context. The research material of this study is gathered from online job advertisements from three Finnish well-known online recruitment sites: Duunitori (www.duunitori.fi), Oikotie (www.tyopaikat.oikotie.fi/tyopaikat) and Jobly (www.jobly.fi).

Analysis of the first research question provided three concepts of an ideal leader: *inspirational innovator*, *efficient high-flyer* and *collaborative influencer*. Analysis of the second research question provided three discourses which enable the production of the concepts of an ideal leader: *the individual discourse*, *discourse of constant motion* and *utility discourse*. Results of the study implies that the concepts of an ideal leader include certain desired qualities, skills and behavior which are produced in relation to certain discourses. This study suggests that the potential impact of found concepts of an ideal leader to recruitment processes should be further investigated.

Key words: Ideal leader, ideals, discourse, job advertisements, critical discourse analysis

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1 Introduction

Some time ago when I was seeking for a new job, I began to observe the online job advertisements of relevant open positions more closely than before. I discovered that in many job advertisements, an ideal candidate is described through various expected or demanded qualities and skills. Often, one needs to be a positive, social, cooperative, ambitious, enthusiastic, flexible, experienced, ready to learn new things, have tolerance for stress and so forth. In addition, I noticed that many of these qualities are frequently occurring in different open positions, repeated as something that everyone just knows to be true.

However, as a jobseeker, the number of the qualities felt overwhelming at times. There were many occasions when I thought that maybe I am not just the right person for certain open position. How could I be, since I am not continually enthusiastic, goal-oriented or energetic? However, when I applied to these open positions, I transformed myself in the applications to be exactly the candidate which was sought in the job advertisements. Therefore, I found myself from a situation where I felt that it was not about what I am capable to do as an employee, but instead about which kind of a person I should be in the recruitment process.

As a student of *Leadership psychology*, these experiences got me interested about the relationship between ideals and job advertisements seeking for leaders: How is an ideal leader described in the context of job advertisements? Which kind of qualities, skills or behavior is desired from an ideal leader? How is an ideal leader defined in the context of job advertisements and what does this mean for those, who does not fit to the ideals? These questions led me to ponder which kind of ideals are represented and frequently repeated in the context of job advertisements seeking for employees to different leader roles.

Consequently, in this master's thesis my research objective is to study the concepts of an ideal leader in the context of Finnish job advertisements. Although this topic emerged from my personal experiences and thoughts related to ideals within the context of job advertisements, the research objective began to take shape when I familiarized myself with the previous research related to this subject. Recent research has found that recruitment process is often influenced by ideals which affect the possibilities to get employed and find potential candidates (see Meriläinen, Tienari & Valtonen 2015; Koivunen, Ylöstalo & Otonkorpi-Lehtoranta 2015; van den Brink & Benschop 2012). Similarly, Bosak and Sczesny (2008, 686–687) found in their study that candidates reflect their capability to the requirements and expectations of job

advertisements. Still, human resource professionals and managers often believe that the traditional recruitment process is fair and objective (Blommaer & Coenders 2024, 2484).

Although job advertisements are considered as an important part of the recruitment process (Ridgway, Oldridge & Mavin 2024, 5; Petry, Treisch & Peters 2022, 3019), in the organizational studies they are used moderately rarely as a research material (Varje 2014, 55). This is especially the case with the leader ideals within job advertisements in the Finnish context, since there are only few previous studies which analyzed leader ideals by using job advertisements as a research material during 21st century (see Jännäri, Poutanen & Kovalainen 2018; Varje 2014; Varje et al. 2013). From above studies, only Jännäri and others (2018) used online recruitment sites as a source, although online recruitment has become the most popular channel for external recruitment during past ten years (Joki 2024, 68–69; Viitala & Jylhä 2019, 272–274).

Furthermore, ideals as an organizational phenomenon are an important object to study, since they have been found to have various influences on organizations. For instance, previous research indicates that ideals are used as instruments to evaluate leaders (Hesmert & Vogel 2024), produce norms which favors certain kind of leaders and employees (Kmec, O'Connor & Schieman 2014; Kelly et al. 2010), establish and maintain gendered ideals (van den Brink & Benschop 2012; Acker 1990) and influence who gets and does not get promoted (Neely 2020). Especially job advertisements are considered to provide a valuable lens to analyze leader ideals, since they are produced without any interventions by a researcher (Jännäri 2018, 35).

1.1 Research Questions and Objective

In this study my research mission is to study leader ideals within job advertisements by using online job advertisements as a research material. My first research question is:

- 1) Which kind of concepts of an ideal leader are produced in the context of job advertisements?

This research question is approached from two different perspectives. First, my focus will be in linguistic practices which through frequent repetition systematically produces certain kind of concepts of an ideal leader. As previous studies of leader ideals in other Nordic countries have shown, there are certain desired qualities, skills and behavior which are frequently desired from an ideal leader (see Sølvsberg 2023; Askehave & Zethsen 2014; Askehave 2010).

According to Varje (2014), since the 1980s in Finland the ideal leader has been defined more by qualities such as competition, efficiency, result-orientation and innovativeness. In addition, expectations and requirements of an ideal leader have intensified, meaning that in the 21st century the number of qualities and skills expected from a candidate have risen sharply during the previous decades (Varje 2014, 252–259). Therefore, my research objective is to study which kind of systematically desired qualities, skills and behavior produce the concepts of an ideal leader, and how they are represented in relation to each other in the context of job advertisements. This research question directs my focus towards the language, content and implicit consistence that produces the concepts of an ideal leader in the context of job advertisements. Thus, my purpose is not only to analyze frequently repeated leader ideals, but also to study how they are represented in relation to each other.

Secondly, the concepts of an ideal leader are approached from the perspective of discourses, i.e. systems of meanings. From this perspective, the concepts of an ideal leader are not considered to represent leader ideals as a general description, but instead as systems of meanings which are produced from certain perspectives, positions and desires. As Fairclough (2003, 124) has described, discourses represent certain aspects of the mental, social and material world, providing certain kind of definitions for the concepts of an ideal leader. Thus, the concepts of an ideal leader are understood as taken-as-granted rules, desires and norms which shape the roles which they simultaneously define (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2019, 40; Jokinen 2016a, 179–181). This highlights how the concepts of an ideal leader are produced within the social practice of job advertisements. They are then produced in relation to relevant actors, desires and compatibility (Paso 2007, 34).

The second research question of this study is:

2) Which discourses enable the production of the concepts of an ideal leader?

In the second research question, my interest is on meta-discourses producing the concepts of an ideal leader. Through a critical discourse analysis, my purpose is to analyze how certain discourses are directing the production of the concepts of an ideal leader. As Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2019, 71–72) have argued, discourses are perspectives produced through the practices of meaning creation, and thus they are shaping and directing the objects which they produce, i.e. in this study the concepts of an ideal leader. Therefore, the purpose of the second research question is to analyze which discourses are embedded in the concepts of an ideal

leader, and thus directs which kind of concepts of an ideal leader can be produced in the context of job advertisements. Thus, as Reckwitz (2002, 245) has described, the objective here is to analyze systems of meanings that makes possible for certain kind of social action to be constituted.

Both research questions are approached from the perspective of a critical discourse analysis. From this perspective, the concepts of an ideal leader are considered as social objects, which according to Fairclough (2003, 43–44; 1995, 28) are produced from certain perspectives and positions, within certain social practice and through certain dominative discourses. Thus, as van Dijk (2001, 352) argues, a critical discourse analyst approaches the research phenomenon by taking an explicit position, aiming to understand and expose the social objects which are taken as granted. Therefore, my objective in this master's thesis is to make visible how the concepts of an ideal leader are produced and defined from certain restricted perspectives, simultaneously declining the possibility for the concepts of an ideal leader to be produced differently.

1.2 Structure of the Thesis

Here, I will briefly demonstrate how this study is structured. The second and third chapter provides a theoretical, epistemological and ontological basis for this study. In the second chapter, I will produce the theoretical framework of this master's thesis. Second chapter is constructed from three different components, which as a combination produces the theoretical framework. These components are 1) ideals as a research phenomenon, 2) job advertisements as the site of ideals, and 3) ideal leader in the context of job advertisements. Thus, the second chapter defines what is meant by ideals in organizational context and which kind of consequences they have on organizations, how ideals are understood in the context of job advertisements, and how an ideal leader is considered in this study.

In the third chapter, my purpose is to produce the ontological and epistemological basis of this study. Here, the chapter is divided to two different sections. First section is about demonstrating how this study approaches the concepts of an ideal leader from the perspective of social constructionism. Secondly, I introduce a critical discourse analysis which is based in social constructionism and is used as a broader research approach in this study. The third chapter can be also understood as a second theoretical framework, since as Siltaoja and Sorsa (2020, 247) argues, discourse analysis as a research approach provides a theoretical framework through which the research phenomenon is interpreted. Thus, the second and the third chapter are both

providing their own components to the theoretical framework: the second chapter defines the main theoretical concepts of this study, and the third chapter provides an interpretative approach to study leader ideals in the context of job advertisements.

In the fourth chapter, I present how this study is implemented. First section of the fourth chapter shows how the research material is gathered and processed, second section describes how a critical discourse analysis is used as an analysis method, and in the third section I discuss about the researcher's positions, reliability and ethics in this study. The purpose of this chapter is to present how the research material and analysis is practically worked and discuss how my position as a researcher may influence to this study. In the fifth chapter I provide the results of this study. Fifth chapter is divided according to the research questions. Results of this study are concluded in the sixth chapter. Final chapter in this study is the discussion. Here, I discuss about the implications of this study from the relevant perspectives, discuss about the potential consequences, evaluate how well the chosen research approach worked in relation to the research questions, and finally I make suggestions for further research.

2 Ideal Leader in the Context of Job Advertisements

In this chapter my purpose is to produce the theoretical framework of this study. My aim in this chapter is then to provide the theoretical framework through which ideals as an organizational phenomenon are approached and studied in this master's thesis. Theoretical framework in this master's thesis is built upon three dimensions: ideals as a research phenomenon (2.1), job advertisements as the site of ideals (2.2.), and an ideal leader in the context of job advertisements (2.3.).

I begin by observing how ideals are understood in previous research and how ideals as a research phenomenon are defined in this study. Next, I examine why job advertisements are a suitable research context for studying leader ideals. Finally, I will demonstrate what an ideal leader means in this research context and how leader ideals have been studied in previous research in the context of job advertisements. Therefore, this chapter presents the main theoretical conceptions of this study.

2.1 Ideals as a Research Phenomenon

Ideals as a research phenomenon is divided to two different sections. First, I examine what is meant by *ideals* in organizational context: how ideals in organizational context have been examined in previous research and how ideals are here understood as a multidisciplinary phenomenon. Secondly, my purpose here is to argue why ideals are a focal phenomenon to study in organizational context. To answer this, I observe which kind of consequences ideals have to organizational actors, practices and processes, emphasizing the perspective of recruitment process, since the research material of this study is produced as part of the recruitment process. Therefore, my purpose here is to produce a theoretical framework, which makes possible to analyze leader ideals in the context of job advertisements.

2.1.1 Ideals as a Concept in Organizational Context

In this study, the phenomenon of ideals in organizations is understood through three different dimensions, which are *ideals within socio-cultural conditions*, *ideals as action* and *ideals as desired states*. First dimension, ideals within socio-cultural conditions, emphasizes how socio-cultural framework, where organizations are operating, defines the possibilities and boundaries for ideals to emerge. Second dimension, ideals as action, observes how ideals are produced,

shared and reproduced through everyday activity in organizations. Third dimension, ideals as desired states, provides insight to the socio-psychological dimension of ideals.

Ideals within socio-cultural conditions. Socio-cultural conditions are what determines and directs the conditions and possibilities through which ideals are and can be produced (Väänänen & Turtiainen 2014b, 18–20). According to Neely (2020, 272), culture in this context refers “to a diverse collection of beliefs, discourses, and practices that provide the symbolic meaning through which people understand their lives and interactions.” Thus, what it means to be a leader is understood through the beliefs, expectations and desires embedded in the ideals of a certain time and context. Ideals are then considered as changing conceptions and images: perceptions that are grounded to a certain era and its social conditions, shaped by the cultural beliefs, ends and desires. (Väänänen & Turtiainen 2014a, 10–11.) Hence, ideals are inevitably bounded to certain socio-cultural conditions. As Hameed and others (2023, 2) have argued, based on their review of the literature, in cross-cultural studies the differences on ethical values, norms and standards between different countries produce different kinds of ideals related to leaders and leading.

The transformative dynamic of ideals is visible when ideals have been studied in the longer term, revealing that ideals are changing with and during societal transformations. In labor markets, scientific, social, technological and industrial transformations are influencing what is considered as an ideal leader at a given time. According to Väänänen and Turtiainen (2014b), when societies transform and make progress, demographic factors (e.g. rate of education), economic and societal conditions (e.g. transformation of production) and organizations (e.g. leadership styles) are affected by the transformations. This in turn shapes the ideals of leaders (Väänänen & Turtiainen 2014b, 18). For instance, an ideal leader in industrial Finland was a trustworthy and non-drinking professional with know-how knowledge during 1940s and 1950s, while in the knowledge economy of 21st century, formal education, social skills, competitive attitude, team leading capability, and stress tolerance became desired ideal qualities and skills of a leader in job advertisements (Varje 2014, 58–69).

Similarly with societal transformations, changing trends and novel theories influence and shapes ideals in organizational context. According to Scholz (2015, 48), “organizational theory and research has been produced by men for men and used men as subjects and objects of study,” suggesting that this masculine dynamic is embedded in ideals through biased theory. This idea of research trends and theories shaping ideals of certain positions is shared by Kuokkanen

(2014, 85), who argues that organization and leadership theories have always influenced to leaders, since they are adopting leadership ideals through the education, media and literature.

Furthermore, ideals are produced and maintained in relation to *an object*, which is already part of the shared, social reality. When Sølvsberg (2023, 1206–1208) argues that an ideal leader is described by certain qualities and skills, they also indicate how *a leader* is the subject in which ideals are embedded in. Then, specific *leader ideals* can be constructed only in relation to the subject of *a leader*, which in turn is shaped by various influences and certain conditions. Similarly, previous empirical research has shown that gendered ideals are embedded in the recruitment processes seeking for *managers*, since recruiters are emphasizing and favoring masculine traits (see Tienari et al. 2013; Van den Brink 2012) and simultaneously suggesting that *managers* as job positions are already established as general, social objects of organizations. It is in these socially produced and maintained positions, where ideals are “hidden within the concept of a job” (Tienari, Quack & Theobald 2002, 252). Since ideals are found in and from different positions, these positions provide a lens through which it is possible to study how ideals are constructed at a given time, and how these ideals are shared across different organizations.

Ideals as action. Second dimension of ideals is that they are continuously produced and maintained, consciously and unconsciously, through behavior, thinking, interaction, and routinized organizational practices and processes. As Granberg (2015, 793) states, ideals are enacted in everyday work. According to Koivunen and others (2015, 4), ideals are informal practices shaped by “tacit ideas and implicit settings of day-to-day interaction.” Consequently, ideals are treated more as taken-as-granted truths rather than merely abstract images, reflecting the organizational thinking and its logics. Similar perspective is proposed by Scholz (2015, 47–48), who claims that ideals are considered “to be unconsciously embedded as a model” within organizational processes and practices, used as an approach to organizational life. This implies that ideals are very much in the center of shaping organizational processes and practices, giving guidance to how one should act in the reality of workplaces. Thus, ideals are considered as components guiding the practical activity (Granberg 2015, 795).

Furthermore, ideals are considered both as an objective of action and as an object directing action. In labor markets and organizations, different sort of interests, aspirations and ends are pursued through the active shaping of ideals by various actors and agencies. According to Kuokkanen (2014, 114–115), management literature is often influenced by actors and

institutions from abroad who have an objective to influence the leadership ideals across the globe with an aim to establish certain type of desired practices and processes in organizations. Therefore, ideals can be used as a mean to influence organizations, groups and actors. Similarly, according to Varje, Anttila and Väänänen (2013, 248), the “changes in management ethos are implemented largely by altering the picture of the ideal manager.” Thus, what is considered as an ideal has been an object of interest and disputes for and between many societal actors: e.g. employers, trade unions, employers’ associations and politicians, who are trying to achieve their own ends by shaping the ideals in labor markets (Väänänen & Turtiainen 2014b, 20).

Therefore, an important aspect of ideals is that they represent organizational desires that are considered worthy to pursue. According to Väänänen and Turtiainen (2014b, 21), through the job advertisements, organizations have shaped and defined ideals by describing what kind of qualities and behavior are wished or demanded from leaders: qualities, abilities, and norms that are desired, wished and expected from the perspective of employers. Through ideals, organizations then communicate which qualities *are* and *are not* included in the concepts of ideal. Thus, organizations define what is allowed (Scholz 2015, 46), and they often expect that employees embody a professional identity which fits the ideals (Reid 2024, 998). According to Halpin and Smith (2019, 724), especially through the recruitment process organizations produce various ideal categories to find the ideal candidates, and these ideal categories are embodied by the job seekers who are competing against each other in labor markets. Thus, produced and maintained ideals are connected to the action of different stakeholders in labor markets through the desires and expectations.

Since ideals are directing and used to direct the conduct of organizational actors, they are understood as techniques of power. This idea comes from the Foucauldian approach to power, which is based to an idea of the conduct of conduct (e.g., Dean 2010; Foucault 1982). The conduct of conduct refers to different techniques of power (Ettlinger 2011, 538); tendencies and ends that aim to shape the conduct of others or self (Rose 1999, 3). The conduct of others or self is shaped “by working through the desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs of various actors” (Dean 2010, 18). Hence, through the conduct of desires and aspirations, ideals can be considered to include power relations: when actors, organizations or institutions shape the ideals within organization, they are pursuing to shape the conduct of others or self to a certain direction. Ideals are then reflecting to organizational actors as what is seen as worthy to pursue. As Väänänen and Turtiainen (2014b, 21) argues, through the job advertisements organizations

have shaped and defined ideals by describing what kind of qualities are allowed and wished in certain positions.

Ideals as desired states. Third dimension of ideals in organizational context are that they are considered to be part of one's identity work, thus highlighting the intermingle of psychological and social aspects of ideals. Identity work here includes images of the self that relate to the beliefs and norms guiding and structuring everyday behavior and practices in workplaces, and thus helps actors "to cope with both demands and expectations articulated by others in the domain of practice and individual aspirations and ambitions" (Styhre 2012, 634). Similarly, Watson (2016, 137) argues that, as part of the identity work, individuals attempt to "maintain a coherent sense of who and what they are" by engaging in organizational identities and using them as resources for maintaining personal self-identity, social sensemaking, and directions for action. According to Gioia and others (2010, 35), identity work in organizational context is then considered as continuously and progressively negotiated via interaction between employees and external stakeholders. Reid (2024, 998) notes that identities in organizations are constructed "in relation to attributes of the job and organization". This approach emphasizes organizations as a regime where people are guiding themselves and each other towards certain identities.

In the process of identity work, it is the ideal self that is considered as an important concept influencing the production of organizational identity (Styhre 2012, 633–635). According to Wieland (2010, 512),

ideal selves are drawn on in both individual's constructions of selves and others' regulations of those constructions. In identity work and regulations, individuals draw on and convey ideal selves and encourage one another to align their identities with these ideals. A focus on ideal selves draws attention to the social pressures involved in identity construction and considers how workers maintain and repair their identities so that they align with these ideas.

As above citation indicates, ideal selves are produced both in an individual and a shared level. As Styhre (2012, 635) observes, the negotiation of identities in organizations is enacted within the framework of ideal selves, which are in turn influenced by the social pressure of organizational context. Thus, ideal selves are produced through the expectations and demands that are discursively constructed and culturally situated, providing proposals and direction of how one should be and behave in a certain workplace, hence shaping and regulating the identity work in the organizational context. As Wieland (2010, 511) argues, the concept of ideal selves "draws attention to shared expectations for whom one should be within a given locale."

From this perspective, ideals are understood as “the totality of images of the self and norms and beliefs related to such images that guide and structure everyday practices and behaviors” (Styhre 2012, 634). As Neely (2020, 272) argues, ideals are impacting at the symbolic level reflecting “the schemas that govern rules of behavior,” directing what is seen and imagined as possible. Consequently, ideals are considered as a socio-psychological phenomenon giving guidance and cues about how one should behave or think about oneself in a certain situation and environment (e.g. in organization). This guidance is considered as essential in organizational life. As Granberg (2015, 795) observes, actors in organizations are part of the world of work where they operate “according to a logic beyond their control”. Thus, ideals provide an important domain which guides members to act within the organizational practices and processes.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that all three dimensions conceptualized in this chapter are interacting with each other, producing the framework through which leader ideals can be approached from the organizational perspective. Hence, it is necessary to note, that my conceptualizing is not an attempt to produce hierarchies or causalities which defines ideals as strictly to be certain kind of an organizational phenomenon but, instead, my purpose is to highlight those dimensions that are relevant when studying leader ideals in organizational context. Through the three dimensions, ideals as an organizational phenomenon are concluded and simplified in Figure 1.

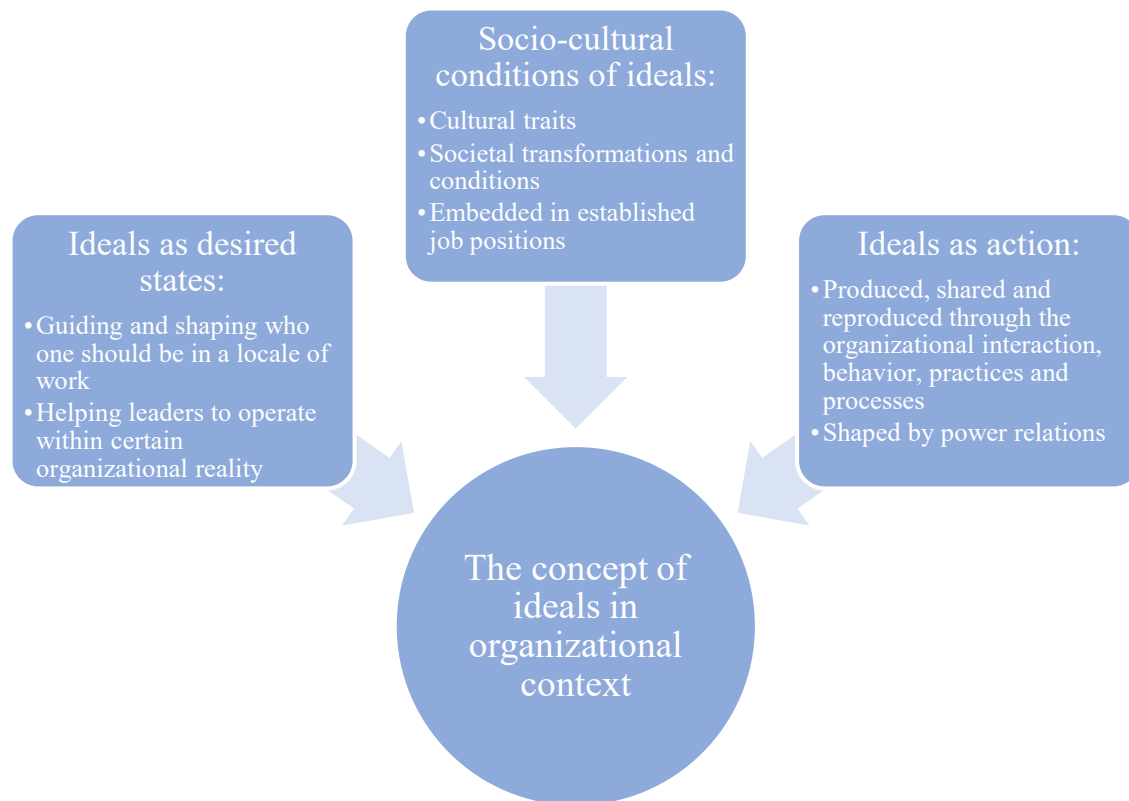


Figure 1. Theoretical concept of ideals in organizational context

As summarized in Figure 1, socio-cultural conditions provide a framework where ideals are produced, and thus they direct the possibilities and boundaries of ideals in organizational context. Thus, leader ideals are dependent about the socio-cultural context influencing the labor markets and organizations, and vice versa: defining and guiding which kind of ideals are desired and pursued. Moreover, through everyday interaction and behavior ideals are produced and maintained within organizational practices and processes. Hence, ideals are influencing the organizational life both in conscious and unconscious level. They are continuously produced, reproduced, established and maintained on everyday interaction, behavior, practices, and processes. Leaders are guided to embrace those identities that are in line with the image of an ideal leader. Thus, as desired states, ideals give guidance and cues to individuals and groups about what is suitable or desirable, how a leader is expected to behave in a workplace, and therefore ideals guide towards and produce a certain kind of behavior in organizations.

2.1.2 Consequences of Ideals in Organizations

Since ideals influence organizational behavior, practices and processes, it is necessary to examine what consequences they have; What kind of evidence there is about the influence of

ideals in organizations? How are practices and processes shaped by ideals and what kind of consequences this has to workplaces? According to Väänänen and Turtiainen (2014b, 18–20), different kind of ideals about what it means to be a leader and which kind of a leader one should be, have both real and symbolic effects: thoughts about how one should behave in a workplace or what kind of qualities a leader should possess, are connected to the real demands of organizations. Hence, organizational demands and expectations represented within ideals do not only reflect symbolic aspirations and wishes towards leaders, but also directs their everyday action.

Previous research has shown a fair amount of evidence about the influence of ideals on the organizational behavior. Ideals about how leaders should act, and which kind of behavior is approved in workplaces, produces norms and methods of assessment through which organizational behavior is enacted and evaluated. According to Kmec and others (2014, 64–65), organizational norms shaped by ideals “are built into the structure and culture of the workplace. Employers use these norms as a metric against which to measure workers’ commitment, competence and success.” Similar findings have been made by Hesmert and Vogel (2024) who found that ideal leader prototypes are used by employees to measure the success of leaders in workplaces: employees reflect the behavior of leaders in contrast to their embraced concepts of an ideal leader. Depending about how well a leader is fitting to the ideals, this have either positive or negative influences on the quality of leader-employee relationship (Hesmert & Vogel 2024, 562–564). From this perspective, ideals are considered as objects through which it is possible to reflect the organizational reality, its rules and norms. Therefore, ideals construct instruments that provide information about a certain workplace and helps to make sense about it.

As instruments of measurement, ideals shape the relationships and action in workplaces by directing what kind of behavior is seen as desirable and suitable. As one of the respondents described in an interview when Cooper (2010, 382) studied masculinity in Silicon Valley: “He’s a real man, he works ninety-hour weeks; he’s a slacker, he works fifty hours a week.” Indeed, according to Kelly and others (2010, 287–289), ideal workplace behavior often includes working long hours, looking as being busy to others, and quick responsiveness to unplanned tasks is: these are taken as prove that one is committed and productive. Similarly, Østerud (2023, 742) claims that an ideal leader is considered to “be productive, efficient and available.” This kind of concept of an ideal leader, as a durable and efficient individual who is capable to work long hours and is constantly available, is an often-recurring finding in previous research

(e.g. James, Zanin & Damon 2023; Brumley & St. George 2022; Hytti 2015; Meriläinen et al. 2015).

In the context of North America, especially men are considered to follow above ideals. According to Kmec and others (2014, 78), “working long hours, fully devoting oneself to one’s employer, and placing work above personal responsibilities are ways in which men do masculinity.” However, it is not a novel idea that gendered qualities influence ideals, expectations, practices and processes in organizations. As Acker (1990) argues, gendered qualities are always directing how work is understood and perceived: work and workplace are implicitly gendered concepts, since both are defined by separating them from other dimensions of life (e.g. family life) as not belonging to the reality of work. This separation between work and private life spheres makes it possible to produce ideals such as working long hours and being constantly available, which are considered as the supreme demonstrations of an excellent worker. Thus, these gendered ideals and beliefs towards work embraces the historically produced image of work as the sphere where men devote their life for working, while women take care of the requirements of private life. (Acker 1990, 254–256.)

Furthermore, those who follow ideals and norms embedded in organizational life have been found to get more opportunities compared to those who do not. According to Neely (2020, 273), ideals have “material consequences for how work organizations dole out opportunities and rewards.” Thus, those who fit to the contemporary ideals, such as approaching work as something that one needs to dedicate their life for, are getting promotions more easily and better work assignments compared to those who does not devote as much time for working, e.g. part time employees (Kmec et al. 2014. 64–65). Contrarily, ‘violators of the ideals’ are often treated unfairly. According to Kmec and others (2014, 65), in many cases “employers view workers who violate ideal-worker norms as uncommitted, unmotivated, and poor organizational citizens.” Similarly, Rudman and Mescher (2013, 330–336) found in their study that men workers who asked for a family leave, were regarded as poor employees and they suffered from “femininity stigma”, since they were evaluated as weaker employees, which again projected lower rewards compared to others. Similarly, Butler and Skattebo (2004, 559) notes that “it appears that men who conform to gender stereotypes regarding work and family are somewhat rewarded, whereas men who do not conform are punished.”

However, when examining ideals related especially to leaders, gendered ideals have consequences particularly at the expense of women. Above all, this is visible in recruitment

processes. Van den Brink and Benschop (2012, 79) argues in their study related to gender inequality in the recruitment processes of universities in Netherlands, “that women candidates are seen as different from men when judged alongside the stereotypical ideal of the strong, authoritarian, masculine leader.” In their research women who did not fit into the gendered ideal image of a leader, were not getting hired. However, this is often expressed indirectly. As one of the male respondents in their research noted about a woman candidate, after admiring her résumé and experience, that “she failed on academic leadership.” (Van den Brink & Benschop 2012, 79–80). Although this candidate would have been an excellent choice from many perspectives, her failure in this case was that she did not fit to the ideal image of a masculine leader embraced by the recruiters.

Besides gender, ideal body shape can affect to the possibilities to get hired in leader positions. Meriläinen and others (2015) found in their study that headhunters, i.e. consultants whose job is to find executives and top managers for companies, do evaluate the potential candidates through the ideals that have similarities with the efficient and durable image of an employee. This is shown when headhunters attract their attention to the body shapes of the candidates: by describing sporty looking guys as “hunting dogs” and unfit ones to “St Bernhard’s”, headhunters evaluate potential candidates by comparing them to the ideal body image embraced by the recruiters. Thus, “being overweight (a ‘St Bernhard’) is unacceptable in executive management - a sign of not being fit - and that this concerns men in addition to women.” (Meriläinen et al. 2015, 13–15.) Their findings suggests that for headhunters correct and desired body image represents qualities such as durability and efficiency. These qualities are often embedded in the concepts of an ideal leader (see Ridgway et al. 2024; Varje 2014; Askehave & Zethsen 2014).

Previous research and field experiments have shown that recruitment processes particularly are influenced by the ideals, affecting the possibilities of a job seeker to get employed and in turn to organizations potential to find candidates that would fit their needs (e.g. Sølvsberg 2023; Scholz 2017; Koivunen et al. 2015). According to Jännäri (2018, 30), in recruitment process “the ‘ideal’ candidate for a certain kind of job is defined, forwarded, and finally established, and becomes the ‘norm’ for an ideal employee or manager in certain position.” Recruiters (e.g. managers, HR professional) are then considered to have focal impact to organizations and individuals, since they act as gatekeepers by having the mandate to decide who may or may not be hired, and thus they have power to choose who does or does not get access to the labor markets (Koivunen et al. 2015, 4). Furthermore, generalized ideals and beliefs embraced by

recruiters about which kind of individuals are considered as capable or suitable to act in a certain job position influences the decisions in recruitment process (Nichols, Pedulla & Sheng 2023, 2).

From the perspective of this study, the problematic consequence of ideals is that they are used as objects which produces inequality between people participating to the labor markets. They are embedded in the organizational life, processes and practices such as recruitment processes, in where behavior, gender, body and other qualities are measured, opportunities are decided, and hierarchies are produced. As Neely (2020, 273) argues, those who “embody the ideal are hired and advance more easily”, suggesting simultaneously that for those who do not embody the ideals, advancing and getting hired is relatively more difficult. This produces unequal norms and hierarchies within organizations. According to Koivunen and others (2015, 3–4), the ideals influencing the recruitment process produces inequality in organizations and labor markets, as well as they might prevent organizations for being able to recruit and hire “the most suitable person.”

Consequently, even most personal and inborn attributes as body shape (Meriläinen et al. 2015), gender (Hytti 2015; Van den Brink & Benschop 2012) and ethnicity (Blommaer & Coenders 2024; Ahmad 2020) can reduce or deny individual’s possibilities to get employed. Although previous research has shown that leader and employee ideals shape the decisions made made by the recruiter’s during the recruitment process (Meriläinen et al. 2015; Koivunen et al. 2015; Van den Brink & Benschop 2012), it is not necessarily seen similarly within organizations. As Blommaer and Coenders (2024, 2484) notes in their research, many human resource professionals and managers “are often convinced that traditional selection procedures are fair and objective: many believe that applicants’ migrant origin, age or gender do not affect the outcome of the selection procedure.” This suggests that there might be a contradiction between the recruitment processes and previous research related to the influence of tacit informal processes such as ideals.

Furthermore, previous research indicates that although ideals are embedded broadly in organizational thinking and processes, they do also produce scattered, specific settings depending about the context and subject. As Koivunen and others (2015, 11–12) observes,

there are always certain norms about the ideal worker for each job, even though the norms might not be explicit or even acknowledged. These norms are gendered:

a leader is a man rather than a woman and a person who sells lingerie is rather a woman than a man.

Indeed, there are many findings of sets of ideals related to various job positions: e.g. managers (Varje et al. 2013), human resource professionals (Ridgway, Oldridge & Mavin 2022), journalists (Powers 2021), social media workers (Duffy & Schwartz 2018), graphic designers (Dziobczenski, Person & Meriläinen 2018) university employees (Pitt & Mewburn 2016) and accountants (Tan & Laswad 2018). This suggests that ideals or combinations of ideals are differing between certain professions, making employee ideals a complex and dynamic web to study.

2.2 Job Advertisements as the Site of Ideals

As the second part of the theoretical approach, my aim here is to provide a theoretical framework for the research context by examining how job advertisements, as a site of ideals and part of a recruitment process, are approached in this master's thesis. Recruitment process generally contains two different phases. First, it includes defining the requirements for the open position and choosing the best channels and forums from where to reach for potential candidates. Secondly, it contains the selection process, which is “the human resource function that pares down the number of applicants,” and which eventually ends with hiring a new employee. (Viitala & Jylhä 2019, 272–273; Orlitzky 2007, 273–274.)

One essential part of the first phase is the production and publishing of job advertisements. Although there are recruitment strategies that do not include job advertisements (see Dessler 2012; Rowley & Jackson 2011; Orlitzky 2007), they are still considered as “a key contact point between potential applicants and employers for sparking early job pursuit intentions” (Petry, Treisch & Peters 2022, 3019). This is especially the case when an organization needs to recruit new employees externally. According to Ridgway, Oldridge and Mavin (2024, 5), job advertisements are considered as a valuable tool for seeking and reaching for potential candidates from outside of the organization. Especially, job advertisements are an often-used practice to find new candidates for open positions in which they do not need to have particularly rare and special skills or when there are many candidates from whom to choose (Rowley & Jackson 2011, 190).

Through job advertisements organizations are trying to find candidates that fit to the requirements that are put for the open position. Hence, before job advertisements are published,

recruiters must decide which kind of skills and qualities are needed, where to find potential candidates, and how to approach them (Orlitzky 2007, 273–274). The purpose of job advertisements is not to get the attention of everyone, but instead reach those candidates whose education, previous experience, personality and skillset would fit to a certain job position (Joki 2024, 68–70; Kim & Angnakoon 2016, 327). In addition, job advertisements include information about the desired qualities of organization. Recruiters are often seeking candidates that fit to their organization's values, norms, strategies and culture (Tholen 2024, 709; Viitala 2013, 98–99), which means that, for instance, a professional competence is only one of the qualities that is desired from the applicants. If successful, job advertisements get the attention and interest of desired candidates and encourages them to apply for an open position (Dessler 2012, 121).

However, beyond the formal role of job advertisements as a recruiting practice and tool, they do include and communicate various ideals that are embedded in organizational processes, practices and thinking. According to Jännäri (2018), job advertisements are inherently occurring material since they are not produced for the research mission. Thus, job advertisements are existing without any interventions from the researcher, and therefore “it is possible to analyze how people are actually constructing the social world together” (Jännäri 2018, 35).

Rafaeli (2006, 749) argues that job advertisements are not only providing open positions for jobseekers but offers information about desired qualities, skills and behavior that employers expect from the potential candidate. Thus, according to Kim and Angnakoon (2016, 327), by examining desires expected from applicants, “those who want to be competitive in the job market can tailor their preparation to meet the employer's expectations.” Job advertisements are not then only representations of employers' expectations and desires but means to direct the qualities and behavior of the actors that are participating to the domain of job advertisements. Indeed, as Bosak and Sczesny (2008, 686–687) found in their study, candidates do evaluate their capabilities by reflecting it to the requirements of job advertisements: consequently, women were less likely to apply in leadership positions since they were embedded with masculine traits.

Furthermore, various ideals related to the organization and its desires are embedded in job advertisements. Engstrom and others (2017, 337) argue that job advertisements represent ongoing discussions within organizations: reflecting ideals about what kind of workplace a

certain organization would want to be, how they want to see themselves, and what kind of working culture they envision for themselves. Similarly, Harper (2012, 31) notes that “job adverts may be written to reflect a desired future state, rather than a current reality.” Hence, job advertisements are not only formal descriptions of an organization or an open position, but rather documents or written statements that are embedded with information reflecting the ideals related to professions, workplaces and labor markets. They are embedded with “personality packages” (Bhargave & Theunissen 2019, 8) and detailed information of expected qualities (Bernhard & Russmann 2024, 613) that are treated as ideal in a certain position. Therefore, job advertisements are especially useful for analyzing which kind of ideals are embedded in specific professions.

From this perspective, job advertisements can be considered as a channel through which organizations do communicate ideals, consciously and unconsciously. According to Van Selm and Heijkant (2021, 290), through employer communication such as job advertising, organizations do produce, maintain, and shape work related beliefs. Job advertisements are particularly outlining the ideal candidate of a certain workplace, indicating skills, qualities and knowledge that is desired by the employer (Powers 2021, 14). Therefore, job advertisements are considered as a fundamental source for studying employer knowledge (Petry et al. 2022, 3025). In addition to employer knowledge, job advertisements are also a locale that is influenced by socio-cultural beliefs and desires, shaping the organizations, and thus they provide insights to naturalized ideals in labor markets. Petry and others (2022, 3020) argue that by studying job advertising scholars can produce knowledge about employment and employers, since job advertisements “not only inform about job openings but convey a sense of contemporary employment culture as they usually come grouped, for example on job boards or in newspaper sections.” Similarly, Rafaeli (2006, 748) notes that by studying material, such as job advertisements which are produced by multiple employers, a researcher can provide new insights from both employees and employers.

Since job advertisements are published in same online job boards and channels, they start to maintain certain cultural thinking patterns and beliefs by reminding each other. According to Engstrom and others (2017, 337), cultural content that is described in job advertisements do reinforce and produce repetitive practices, beliefs, and values. Hence, by examining which kind of embedded ideals there are within job advertisements, it is possible to show how they should not be considered merely as a mean of recruitment but especially as a site where ideals are produced and communicated. According to Bernhard and Russmann (2024, 613), job

advertisements “provide current and comprehensive information about what the job market seeks at any given time.” This suggests that job advertisements are more than merely an organizational practice for recruitment, and thus, as a research context, corpus of job advertisements provides valuable information about the ideals related to organizations in a certain context.

Therefore, job advertisements provide specific information and knowledge, since organizational ideals, beliefs and thinking visible in job advertisements are produced for certain actors, and in a certain socio-cultural context. Studying ideals can provide new perspectives and insights related to managers, supervisors, recruiters and other relevant professions: they provide information about how a leader is expected or desired to be, making visible how these concepts are dynamic and produced from a certain position, and thus reflecting the perceptions of a certain time, context and actors (Väänänen & Turtiainen 2014a, 13). As Jännäri (2018, 32) notes, “by studying job advertisements, it is possible to find out what kinds of understanding employers and recruitment professional have about an ideal candidate in certain cultural settings.” This makes job advertising an important source to study ideals at regional level (Napierala & Kvetan 2023, 244).

Moreover, previous research indicates that job advertisements often contain a large number of qualities of an ideal leader (see Sølvsberg 2023; Varje 2014; Askehava and Zethsen 2014), which does not seem realistic for a one person to fit to all of them. This evokes to ponder if the desired qualities are really in line with the actual qualities needed in open positions. Indeed, even qualities and competences highlighted in academic literature are not often found from job advertisements. The study by Rios and others (2020, 84–85), which included more than 100 000 job advertisements, concluded that “many of the skills suggested in the [academic] literature as being critical for workplace success are in very low demand by employers, and some were not found to be mentioned at all (e.g. social responsibility).” This indicates that the qualities and skills expected by the employers does not necessarily provide the most valuable basis even for the organizations themselves.

Finally, the benefit of analyzing ideals within job advertisements is that it is a context where recruiters must explicitly describe which kind of employee is considered as an ideal. As Varje and others (2013, 248) argue, job advertisements are a channel through which ideals of a certain open positions are publicly represented and communicated. Not only job advertisements can be considered as a site which reflect the contemporary ideals desired from the candidates, but they

also project broader cultural beliefs related to qualities and skills thought to be needed in a certain position (Jännäri et al. 2018, 547). Therefore, job advertisements are particularly interesting research material, since they are produced as part of the recruitment processes of various organizations providing an opportunity to analyze organizational meanings such as is ideals that are shared between various actors of different organizations.

2.3 Ideal Leader in the Context of Job Advertisements

Third component of the theoretical framework of this study is to define how *an ideal leader* is considered, since the analysis of the concepts of an ideal leader is the research objective in this master's thesis. In the context of the research material (job advertisements), *a leader* refers to those organizational open positions where *leading* is included and considered as part of the job description. This contains many types of job titles, making it possible to analyze also those ideals that pervades on different organizational levels, e.g. top executives, managers, team leaders and supervisors. The purpose is not then to analyze leaders within a specific organizational level, but rather, through the versatile material of open positions, my aim is to make visible which kind of concepts of an ideal leader are produced across organizations. Furthermore, previous study that analyzes ideals in a Finnish context found that there was “surprisingly little variation between the different managerial levels,” and thus suggesting that top managers, middle managers and supervisors might share similar ideals (Varje, Anttila & Väänänen 2013, 252). As Jännäri, Poutanen and Kovalainen (2017, 554) argue, in globalized and digital network ideal expertise is becoming more unified, and thus the desired qualities and skills in job advertisements are more unified than before.

Therefore, the research material in this thesis includes open positions that involves leader roles. Here, I share the definition of leader roles described by Yukl (2013, 45):

Managers are responsible for making their organizational subunit function as an integrated whole in the pursuit of its basic purpose. Consequently, the manager must provide guidance to subordinates, ensure that they are motivated, and create favorable conditions for doing the work. A number of managerial activities are expressly concerned with the leader role, including hiring, training, directing, praising, criticizing, promoting, and dismissing. However, the leader role pervades all managerial activities, even those with some other basic purpose.

This suggests that leader roles are found from different job positions across the organizations and are an important part of various managerial activities. According to Tienari and Meriläinen (2021, 328), a leader is considered as an employee, whose work tasks include responsibilities

and obligations related to *leading*. Terms in above citation as *hiring, training, directing, praising, criticizing, promoting* and *dismissing* suggests that leaders are especially expected to *lead others*, since all mentioned verbs are indicating to an interaction between a leader and other employees. Thus, the mission of the employees in leadership roles is to actively participate to the interaction, work with others, and thus to co-produce the future of the workplace (Tökkäri 2019, 22).

In a Finnish context, there are two previous studies made that have analyzed which kind of qualities and skills are desired from an ideal leader in job advertisements. Both studies include leader roles from different organizational levels. Varje and others (2013) studied the emergence of emotional management in job advertisements. Similarly, although Varje (2014) in his article *Työpaikkailmoitusten työntekijä* analyzes about how an ideal employee is considered between different decades, he also differs the changing ideals of leaders. These studies provide an insight about how qualities and skills of an ideal leader have increased and transformed between the years 1949 and 2009 in Finnish labor markets. Table 1 concludes the results of these studies, showing those ideal qualities that are required from leaders during different decades (Varje 2014, 58–69; Varje et al. 2013, 252–259).

Table 1. An ideal leader in Finnish job advertisements between 1949–2009

Years	Ideal leader	Qualities of an ideal leader
1940–1950	Fully competent manager	• Technical skills of a certain profession • Ability to organize • Authorative and paternalistic leadership • Appreciated: leadership training from the military
1960–1970	Cooperative manager	• Professional competence • Communication and interaction skills • Democratic leadership • Cooperative attitude • Self-development • Teamwork
1980–1990	Cooperative and inspiring manager	• Professional competence • Communication and interaction skills • Collaborative leadership • Cooperative attitude: manager as part of the team • Inspiring and encouraging employees to become more successful • Emotional sensitiveness • Competitiveness • An ideal person: open-mindedness, creative, positive, friendly, sensitive • Dynamic innovator • Entrepreneurial attitude • Result- and profit-orientated • Tolerance for stress

2000–2010	Competitive, dynamic and inspiring manager	• Professional competence • Good communication and interaction skills • Democratic and efficient leadership • Cooperative attitude: manager as part of the team • Inspiring and encouraging employees to become more successful • Emotional sensitiveness • Competitiveness • An ideal person: open-mindedness, creative, positive, friendly, sensitive • Dynamic innovator • Entrepreneurial attitude • Results- and profit-orientated • Good tolerance for stress • Highly efficient • Motivated to develop • Flexibility
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Note. Adapted from Varje et al. (2013) and Varje (2014)

As Table 1 indicates, the qualities and skills desired from an ideal leader have transformed, increased and intensified when approaching to the 21st century. According to Varje and others (2013), before 1960s an ideal leader was someone who mastered the technical skills of a certain profession. When approaching to 1970s, the ideal leader became more social, inspiring and emotionally persuading. However, these requirements were accompanied by more aggressive and masculine traits from 1980s onwards, when competitiveness, innovativeness, efficiency and result-oriented leading occurred and was established as part of an ideal leader. (Varje et al. 2013, 252–259.) Indeed, previous research studying employee ideals in the 21st century have found that masculine qualities are often embedded in the requirements of an ideal leader (Ridgway et al. 2024; Askehave & Zethsen 2014; Bosak & Sczesny 2008).

In other Nordic countries, similar qualities of an ideal leader have been found in previous research. Askehave and Zethsen (2014) studied which kind of leadership qualities an ideal leader has by analyzing Danish job advertisements of top executives. They found that an ideal leader 1) has relevant professional background and experience, 2) possess analytical and strategic competences, 3) has natural authority, decision-making skills and ability to hit through, 4) is ambitious, dynamic, energetic and capability to act, 5) has down to earth presence, 6) is result- and goal-oriented, and 7) possess cooperative abilities as communication skills, supportive attitude and sensitively is able to listen to others (Askehave & Zethsen 2014, 537–539. Another study made in Danish context studied leader ideals by investigating how “language is used in the job ad to construct the “ideal” applicant” in the banking sector. According to this study, an ideal leader in the banking sector is 1) “driven”, i.e. ambitious, energetic, initiative and so forth, 2) have knowledge of the business, 3) possess cognitive ability to think strategically and 4) motivated. (Askehave 2010, 323–328.)

Similar findings were made by Sølvsberg (2023) in a Norwegian context. She studied elite, upper-class citizens (i.e. managers, directors), and found that there were two different ideal leader types among job advertisements. Among directors and on top-manager level the ideal leader was analyzed to be an authoritative leader, and among middle managerial roles an ideal leader was recognized as the coaching leader type (Sølvsberg 2023, 1204–1208). There are slight differences between the content and hierarchy of the requirements of these two ideal leader types (Table 2).

Table 2. Ideal leader types of elite employees in Norwegian job advertisements

Coaching leader	Authoritative leader
1. Higher education and relevant experience 2. Sociable networker: social, cooperation and communication skills, being energetic, enthusiastic, flexible and trustworthy 3. Abilities to improve one-self and others, motivating skills 4. Goal-oriented: results-driven attitude, being strategic, structured and ambitious 5. Work-specific personal skills: high capacity for work, analytical skills, being vigorous and independent worker, personal aptitude	1. Higher education and several years of relevant experience 2. Leadership skills, experience, confidence, capability to motivate 3. Result-oriented mindset, capacity to improve and develop 4. Ambitious, innovative and drivenness towards success 5. Good networking abilities: being enthusiastic, energetic, having good social and cooperative skills 6. Attitude of a hard worker, i.e. being analytical, vigorous, hardworking and resilience for work load

Note. Adapted from Sølvsberg (2023)

All studies of Askehave and Zethsen (2014), Askehave (2010) and Sølvsberg (2023) found similar qualities required from ideal leaders. Relevant background is seen as vital, meaning that an ideal leader is expected to have experience in leading from suitable field and is often desired to have a higher-level education. As Askehave and Zethsen (2014, 538) notes, some of the job advertisements required documentation of the relevant experience. Moreover, there are many qualities that connects an ideal leader of the 21st century between Finnish (Varje 2014), Danish (Askehave & Zethsen 2014; Askehave 2010) and Norwegian (Sølvsberg 2023) context. All these studies show how an ideal leader is expected to have qualities related to competitiveness, results- and goal-orientation, a will for development and improvement, capability to inspire and motivate others, ambitious, energetic and dynamic attitude, and good social, cooperation and communication skills. This indicates, as claimed by Jännäri and others (2017, 554), that in digitalized and globalized network qualities and requirements are more similar between different organizations and even countries than before. Furthermore, these studies provide knowledge about how much qualities an ideal leader is expected to possess according to job advertisements.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that *concepts of an ideal leader* are considered in this study by similar manner as it is in above research articles. This means that by analyzing the concepts of an ideal leader, my purpose is to analyze systematically repeated words and phrases, which indicates what an ideal leader should or is desired to be. Thus, the purpose in this study is to analyze the desired, demanded and expected qualities, skills and behavior of ideal leaders (den Hartog, Caley & Dewe 2007, 63). Therefore, the interest is in desired and expected qualities skills and behavior that are frequently repeated, and through this routinized representation, the concepts of an ideal leader are produced and legitimized in the context of job advertisements. However, my purpose is not only to study which qualities, skills or behavior of an ideal leader are produced and reproduced within job advertisements, but also to analyze the relationships between these ideals. Hence, my focus is on analyzing how desired qualities, skills or behavior are represented in relation to each other. Moreover, my interest is to analyze which discourses enable the production of the concepts of an ideal leader. This makes visible how concepts of an ideal leader are directed by taken-as-granted knowledge, representing certain leader ideals in the context of job advertisements, while declining the possibility for other qualities to belong to the concepts of an ideal leader.

3 Critical Discourse Analysis

In this chapter, I demonstrate how the critical discourse analysis is used as an approach in this study. Critical discourse analysis is part of the qualitative research methods. Qualitative research is interested in the experiences, thinking, emotions, and meanings that people give to various research phenomena (Juuti & Puusa 2020, 9). In this study, the interest is especially in the meanings that are producing the concepts of an ideal leader and those systems of meanings, i.e. discourses, that are enabling these concepts. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative study is to broaden our thinking, perspectives and knowledge by moving towards analysis of language, representations and social organizations (Silverman 1997, 1).

In organizational and management studies, qualitative research methods have challenged the quantitative paradigm that dominated the research tradition during 20th century. According to Puusa and Juuti (2020b), this paradigm has changed during recent decades, when the usage of qualitative research has risen strongly in organizational context. Consequently, the theoretical and methodological possibilities have diversified, providing approaches through which the various phenomena of organizational life can be studied, not only from general, but also from situational perspective, providing access to the analysis of meanings, interpretations and symbols (Puusa & Juuti 2020b, 61–62).

However, it is important to note that there are still tensions and disputes between the qualitative and quantitative research. Puusa and Kekäle (2020a, 44–48) argues that the roots of these tensions emerge from the ontological differences and disputes: the natural sciences often understand world from a positivist view, i.e. there is an objective world that can be studied, while qualitative research often approaches world from a constructivist view, meaning that the world is produced in interaction and interpretations. In addition to the criticism from positivist view, which is still an ongoing dispute and debate in 21st century, qualitative research and its approaches are continuously progressing, and thus new methods are produced (Denzin and Lincoln 2017, 1–2). Indeed, qualitative research methods include various philosophical approaches that influences the progress of research. Some research approaches start from the empirical material, while others are more theory-orientated: chosen approach depends about the original research problems and methodological decisions. (see Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018, 30–63.)

Because of the disputes and various approaches within the qualitative research, it is vital to be explicit about the methodological decisions that guides the research process. According to Puusa and Juuti (2020a, 37), methodological decisions include those rules that guides the practical activity of the research. Hence, methodological decisions must be made in relation to theoretical framework of the study. As Alasuutari (2011, 79) notes, theoretical framework defines the possibilities and boundaries from which the research problems can be approached. Consequently, in this chapter my purpose is to make visible the ontological and epistemological basis that directs this study. In the first section of the chapter, I will examine social constructionism, which provides epistemological and ontological basis upon which a critical discourse analysis used in this study is built upon. In this section, my purpose is to provide how it is understood and applied in the context of this study. In the second section, my purpose is to show how a critical discourse analysis is understood and applied in this study. This is an important section, since it provides an interpretative framework through which the research phenomenon and material are studied. According to Siltaoja and Sorsa (2020, 247), in a critical discourse analysis this interpretative framework is understood as the second theoretical framework.

3.1 Social Constructionism

The epistemological basis of this study is built upon social constructionism. Social constructivist approach has been popular within organization and management studies during the past few decades (Cunliffe 2008, 124) and it has challenged a traditional approach in organizational studies which assumed that the nature of organizations is similar with an objective, physical reality (Matikainen 1999, 223). According to Helkama, Myllyniemi and Liebkind (1998, 69), social constructionism considers that the best way to understand humans is to study those systems of meanings that are maintained and produced when humans participate to everyday interaction. The approach of social constructionism was first introduced by sociologists Berger and Luckmann (1967) in their book *The Social Construction of Reality*. It was built upon the interpretative understandings of social sciences (Jännäri 2018, 34) and as an alternative to positivist approach (Pääkkönen 2021, 35). My approach here is based upon the constructivist epistemology of Berger and Luckmann (1967). This is an important distinction to make: as Hjelm (2014, 6–7) notes, social constructionism is not an unambiguous concept that could be simplified to certain framework. Instead, how it is understood is dependent about the chosen research phenomenon and research field (Puusa & Kekäle 2020, 46).

Social constructionism approach considers that reality is socially produced and reproduced through language and interaction (Puusa & Juuti 2020a, 46; Jännäri 2018, 34; Phillips & Di Domenico 2009, 549). Thus, the main questions here are: What does reality mean from this perspective and in this study? What is this reality that is constructed socially and how? In the work of Berger and Luckmann (1967), reality is understood as “the reality of everyday life”. This approach is connected to their conceptualization of knowledge, which refers from this perspective to “what people ‘know’ as ‘reality’ in their everyday, non- or pre-theoretical lives.” It is then understood as a common sense, i.e. what one knows to be real in their everyday life (Berger & Luckmann 1967, 15–16, 19–20). As Granberg (2015, 795) argues in his study, in workplaces employees, including leaders, follow certain ideals which they consider as truths. Thus, viewed from the perspective of social constructionism, those employees are taking these ideals as a common sense, as knowledge representing the organizational reality. Therefore, ideals are considered as objects of the shared reality.

Furthermore, societies are considered to exist both as an objective and a subjective reality (Cunliffe 2008, 125). As Pääkkönen (2021, 34) argues, an intersubjective common-sense world is constructed through social constructionism. Meaning of this can be understood through a dialectical process which defines the essential aspects of socially constructed reality. This dialectical process of social construction includes three different *moments* (Hjelm 2014, 19; Cunliffe 2008, 125):

1. Externalization
2. Objectivation
3. Internalization

First moment, externalization, is considered as an essential part of social constructionism, since it produces social order (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2009, 26). Externalization means that when the meanings, which humans give to their actions and to the world in relation to that world, becomes shared, “the world outside the individual actors attains an independent status.” Thus, externalization emphasizes the role of face-to-face interactions, since only through them meanings become social facts that an individual perceives as an objective reality. (Hjelm 2014, 19–21.) The process of externalization can be defined through the concepts of habitualization and institutionalization. According to Berger and Luckmann (1967), activities of humans are subjects to habitualization. This means that any kind of activity that is frequently repeated, starts to produce patterns which can be reproduced routinely in the future (Berger & Luckmann

1967, 53). Similarly, Cunliffe (2014, 125) argues that the social world of humans is produced through ongoing routines and activities. Job advertisements as part of the recruitment process are one example of this. When someone aims to seek for a new job through the online job advertisements, it is not difficult for one to notice that most of the job advertisements are following the same kind of style, model, order and even content; repeated as an ongoing routine of numerous actors across different organizations.

Above example brings me to the institutionalization. Since humans live in constant interaction with each other, repeated practices and routines are not only embodied by an individual, but instead they are shared with others (Hjelm 2014, 20). Therefore, they become as part of the shared reality and social order through institutionalization. According to Berger and Luckmann (1967, 54), “institutionalization occurs whenever there is a reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors.” Through the typification, humans generate sense and foresight for the actions of others, providing order, categories and predictability to the shared social reality (Hjelm 2014, 20). For instance, when certain qualities are repeated routinely in job advertisements of leader positions, through this frequent repetition those qualities are typified as being part of the reality of leader positions. Thus, they occur as part of the leader positions, i.e. taken as granted.

Moreover, institutionalization includes also the typification of actors, meaning that the repeated activity and routines are embodied to certain roles (Hjelm 2014, 20; Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2009, 25). According to Berger and Luckmann (1967, 78–79), the institutional order of social facts is treated as real only through performed roles, which are in turn representing that same institutional order. Thus, constant, typified and taken-as-granted routines which are treated as part of the natural reality, are embedded in certain roles which simultaneously represent those routines. For example, filling and publishing job advertisements are considered as a routine of recruiters and human resource professionals, and hence the action of describing and defining an ideal leader is treated as naturally being embedded in these roles. Therefore, individuals are participating to the world by playing and internalizing certain roles, and through these roles, the world becomes subjectively real for them (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2009, 28; Berger & Luckmann 1967, 91–92).

Second important part of social constructionism is the moment of objectivation. Objectivation refers to the process where certain institutionalized typifications become as external objects, representing social facts and meanings that individuals are treating as a natural part of the

reality. As Hjelm (2014, 21) describes, these objects represent the attitude of “this is how these things are done.” According to Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009, 28), institutions can be closed and provisional, meaning that certain institutionalized routines, behavior, symbols and meanings are “reserved for certain people and groups and are closed to outsiders.” They mention cults as an extreme example of a provisional, closed institution. However, objectivation especially refers to institutions and roles that become such rooted and grounded to the social reality that they are internalized by most people and are transferred to next generations. As Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009, 27) states, through objectivation, knowledge and experiences about institutions are stored in memory layers in and between humans. By sharing the knowledge of institutions to new generations and others that were not already familiar with them, institutions get detached from “the actors and their action, and achieve an independent status” (Hjelm 2014, 21; Berger & Luckmann 1967, 59). Therefore, as Cunliffe (2014, 125) concludes, through the process of objectivation, the social world is “experienced as being objective in that it affects our lives as an ongoing basis, and we have to go out and learn about it.”

From the organizational perspective, leader roles can be considered as social objects and facts that are grounded to socially shared reality and its memory layers, and thus they are experienced as objects belonging to the natural order of organizations. The knowledge of what roles organizations contain, are transferred e.g. from older to younger generations through education and parenting, and thus most of the individuals consider leader positions as taken-as-granted, objective part of the reality of organizations. Therefore, leader roles become as tradition in social reality, grounded to the organizations (Hjelm 2014, 22) through the logic of ‘this is how things are done and how these things just are’. In the context of organizations, this becomes visible in the study of Varje (2014), when he demonstrates how the requirements and qualities of an ideal leader within job advertisements changes during and between different decades. Still, although there are major changes in ideals, the object of a leader itself is maintained as a social fact.

Third vital part of social constructionism is the moment of internalization. Internalization demonstrates how this social world, treated as natural and objective, is adopted by individuals. Cunliffe (2008, 125) argues that internalization describes how “we are socialized in the world as we interpret meanings of events and/or others’ subjectivities, and in doing so we take on the world, the identity of others and therefore our own place and identity.” According to Berger and Luckmann (1967), the process of internalization can be divided in two different concepts,

primary and secondary socialization. Primary socialization refers especially to childhood, when most of the understanding and conceptions about the social world is adopted: an individual learns about his or her society or certain sectors of it, and thus one is inducted to the objective order and world of a society. This adopted social order is given by the "significant others", mainly parents and other central actors, who teach about the world they are inhabiting, and therefore transfer and define the roles, norms and possibilities of that social world to next generations. (Berger & Luckmann 1967, 130–131, 134–135.)

Another important aspect of primary socialization is that it is considered as an important part of the formation of identity. Through it "individual's self-identification becomes stable and continuous, and reflects an understanding of his or her role and place in the overall society, not just in relation to the significant others" (Hjelm 2014, 24). Therefore, through the primary socialization an individual can identify oneself in relation to society and others. As Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009, 28) argues, through primary socialization, individuals are inducted and simultaneously producing social reality, which in turn is producing individuals themselves. This highlights the intersubjectness of an individual in social constructivist approach.

Secondary socialization in turn refers to the internalization of institutional "sub-worlds" (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, 28; Berger & Luckmann 1967, 138). Organizations are one example of this kind of sub-world. According to Hjelm (2014, 24), through the secondary socialization, individuals learn the norms and rules of a certain institutional sub-world. Thus, an individual learns about how to operate in a workplace and an organization. However, compared to "base-world" that is produced through the primary socialization (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2009, 28), sub-worlds are more changeable and hence less inevitable for individuals. For instance, in one's daily work a recruiter can produce job advertisements that are filled with certain leader ideals, but simultaneously this same individual can be critical towards these ideals of a leader outside of his or her role as an employee. Therefore, as Hjelm (2014, 24) argues, sub-worlds are more easily challenged and less taken-as-granted by individuals. Still, it is not likely for the recruiter of above example to be critical towards the position of a leader, which is considered to be produced through the primary socialization.

Finally, there are some notions that are important to emphasize from the perspective of this study. Although all three moments provide the basis of social constructivism, they are not meant to demonstrate world as a stable, ever-being objective structure. Instead, as Hjelm (2014, 25) notes, socially constructed facts and reality must be continuously maintained and produced, and

hence it is prone to changes. If someone challenges norms and rules of a certain institutional sub-world, often individuals within that sub-world try to produce arguments that strengthens the legitimate of that sub-world (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2009, 28). For example, an ideal leader with masculine and competitive qualities could be legitimized by producing a narrative in which organizations are described as surviving in highly competitive markets, demanding result-orientated, efficient, productive and competitive attitude, and other qualities that are often considered as masculine (see Jännäri et al. 2018; Hytti 2015).

Furthermore, social constructionism highlights the role of language and interaction. According to Jännäri (2018, 34), language and images produces the reality and its phenomena: individuals mediate shared meanings in a certain culture and context through language and texts. Therefore, in the context of this study, job advertisements are considered as texts which not only describe but also produce ideals of leaders. Moreover, the practices and processes during recruitment processes are part of this production of meanings, such as ideals. Certain ideals of a leader become self-evident and leads to what Pääkkönen (2021, 36) describes as a *natural attitude* of the subject, meaning that the phenomena of everyday life occur as being “constituted by an order of objects that have been designated as objects before my appearance on the scene.” Therefore, ideals embedded in recruitment process and job advertisements are not only taken-as-granted, but in addition they are making these social objects possible. As Berger and Luckmann (1967, 35) argues, “the reality of everyday life is not only filled with objectifications; it is only possible because of them.” Consequently, ideals as social constructions and facts are providing the knowledge for recruiters and other professionals to be able to operate in their organizational processes, e.g. in recruitment process, and thus ideals in job advertisements represents the intersubjective knowledge of everyday organizational life.

3.2 Critical Discourse Analysis as an Approach

In this study I approach the research phenomenon and context from the perspective of a critical discourse analysis. It is one of the various approaches and methods within the tradition of discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis is based especially on the epistemology of social constructionism and to the linguistic turn in social sciences which took place during the 1970s and 1980s (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2009, 240). Latter one changed the tradition of social sciences from a positivist approach towards a philosophical approach where language is

understood as productive, instead of being merely representative, and thus language became an important inquiry of societal analysis (Pälli & Lillqvist 2020, 380).

In the core of discourse analysis is an idea of language as a social action (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2009, 5). Language is considered “as a situated, interpretable phenomenon that serves to construct social reality, including identities” (Ainsworth & Hardy 2004, 155). Similarly, Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009, 232) argues that in discourse analysis language is considered both constructed and constructive. According to Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy (2004, 636), this approach is especially useful when studying social production of organizational phenomena. By studying discourses, a researcher can analyze, for instance, how and what kind of concepts are constructed through language, and study issues related to identity, ideology or gender (Paltridge 2012, 186; Phillips & Di Domenico 2009, 549; Alvesson & Sköldberg 2009, 232–233). Thus, a critical discourse analysis is a suitable approach for analyzing the concepts of an ideal leader in the context of job advertisements.

As a research method, a critical discourse analysis is above all a framework rather than only an analysis method (Paso 2007, 31). Moreover, Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2009) emphasizes that there is no unambiguous approach of a critical discourse analysis. Instead, researchers need to construct a framework which provides a suitable approach for analyzing certain research problems and material (2009, 240–241). Hence, as Siltaoja and Sorsa (2020, 230) emphasizes, researchers need to be open about how they are applying a critical discourse analysis and how *discourse* as a concept is approached in the research context. Therefore, my purpose in this chapter is to clarify how the critical discourse analysis as an approach is applied in this study: how discourse is understood, what is meant by criticality in this research context, and how the critical discursive approach is influencing the reading of the research phenomenon and context, as well as the decisions made during this study.

In this study I use the critical discourse analysis as an interpretative framework, which directs the research orientation throughout the research process. *Discourse* is understood as representational meanings, which Fairclough (2003, 124) defines as “ways of representing aspects of the world – the processes, relations and structures of the material world, the ‘mental world’ of thoughts, feelings, beliefs and so forth, and the social world”. Therefore, the concepts of an ideal leader are considered as part of the discursive production of meanings; representing certain aspects of the mental world, social world and material world; thus, producing specific definitions of concepts and aspects of an ideal leader. Moreover, according to Pietikäinen and

Mäntynen (2019), discourses are perspectives produced from the practices of meaning creation, which are systematically influencing and directing those objects that they are producing. This perspective is inspired by Michel Foucault's approach to discourse, who has argued that discourses are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak", and thus discourses represent the systems of meanings and practices through which the meanings are simultaneously produced (Foucault 1972, 46–49). Thus, discourses are considered as a collection of words and images that do not only produce but also legitimate a given reality (Allan 2003, 47).

Furthermore, discourses are considered as an intermingle of social practices and language. Although discourses are communicated through language, they are shaped by naturalized, taken-as-granted norms and rules that shape how certain roles (e.g. leaders) are defined and represented, what qualities and perspectives (e.g. ideals and discourses) are included in the definitions of certain roles, and from which kind of positions and desires they are produced in a certain context (e.g. recruiters and job advertisements) (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2019, 40). As Fairclough (2003, 124) observes,

different discourses are different perspectives on the world, and they are associated with the different relations people have to the world, which in turn depends on their positions in the world, their social and personal identities, and the social relationships on which they stand to other people.

From the perspective of a critical discourse analysis, the concepts of an ideal leaders in job advertisements are then considered to include various discourses, as well as broader institutional and ideological discourses and desires influencing the labor markets; often dominated by certain hegemony of discursive production, and simultaneously being connected to other societal discourses influencing the organizational ones (Fairclough 1995, 76). In addition, it is important to emphasize that discourses are connected to other social practices and material conditions (Balogun, Jarzabkowski & Vaara 2011, 768; Vaara & Tienari 2008, 986). Consequently, ideals of leaders within job advertisements can be studied from different perspectives, and every perspective would be connected to slightly different network of discourses. Thus, this study does not claim that this approach is the only way to analyze discourses that are producing leader ideals in the chosen research context, but instead it provides a specific approach that is inevitably connected to the vast network of discourses, which dialectically influence each other (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2019, 40). Therefore, the concepts

of an ideal leader that are produced in this master's thesis are collections of various discourses, which are influenced by other societal discourses, social practices and material conditions.

From a critical discursive approach, leader ideals in job advertisements do not represent how leaders consider themselves in contemporary workplaces, but instead which kind of an ideal leader is desired. It is these desires that direct and shape the production of leader ideals in job advertisements. According to Fairclough (2003, 124), "discourses not only represent the world as it is (or rather it is seen to be), but they are also projective, imaginaries, representing the possible worlds which are different from the actual world, and tied into projects to change the world in particular directions." Thus, ideals embedded in job advertisements are considered to belong to the dimension of power and knowledge, one of the focal interests of a critical discourse analysis (Paltridge 2012, 188). As Vaara and Tienari (2008, 986) argue, a critical discursive approach highlights the role of discourse in relation to "the social constitution of power relations and structures of domination in contemporary society".

According to Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2019, 41), discourses are power since through language they produce social reality that is considered as truth and natural, shaping what something is and is not at a given time, thus defining the possibilities for other definitions. Therefore, through the representation of specific, frequently repeated leader ideals, job advertisements are producing certain, narrow perspective about which kind of a leader one should and should not be. Moreover, by analyzing discourses that are guiding and shaping the production of the concepts of an ideal leader, job advertisements provide an interesting domain to study which discourses are allowed, desired and highlighted as part of the recruitment of leaders.

Furthermore, in this study these defined and communicated concepts of an ideal leader are considered as social objects. According to Balogun and others (2011, 768), by adopting social objects, constituted through different discourses, actors produce their organizational reality. Since job advertisements are produced texts, they include certain discourses of a certain social context, where texts are produced in relation to relevant actors, desires and compatibility (Paso 2007, 34). Thus, job advertisements are not only formal organizational practices but instead directed by discourses that are relevant to the actors participating and for the desires pursued through the social practice of job advertisements, shaping the organizational reality and understanding. Therefore, through the discursive practices actors are drawing the social reality,

and hence discourses are considered to have ontological power (Wenzel & Koch 2018, 643–644).

Finally, there are two important critical discursive perspectives from which this study is approaching the research phenomenon and context. First, criticality means in this research that the concepts of an ideal leader produced in job advertisements are considered as part of what Fairclough (2003; 1995) describes as a “taken-for-granted background knowledge”. From this perspective, constructed concepts of an ideal leader at a given time are taken as a common sense, although they include and are embedded with ideological, political and institutional representations. The purpose of critical discourse analysis is to unnaturalize this taken-as-granted knowledge and make visible how it is constructed from a certain perspective, situation and positions, through certain dominative discourses that are repeated and produced (Fairclough 2003, 43–44, 124–125; 1995, 28). Consequently, my critical orientation in this study starts from the assumption that the concepts of an ideal leader, which are represented as natural on the surface, are produced through specific discourses that define whom and which kind of actors are allowed and wished to participate in the positions of leaders. Therefore, as van Dijk (2001, 352) argues, “critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality.”

Secondly, in this study job advertisements are considered to be produced from a certain restricted position, which is described here as a *recruiting genre*. Jokinen (2016a) argues that genre refers to restricted positions from where the discourses are produced. It represents an institutional position that is accessible only for some actors, and whose activity is conditional to certain institutional desires, rules and norms guiding the activity of that genre (Jokinen 2016a, 179–181). According to van Dijk (2001), this forms a context for recruiters to control the discourse, through which the recipients (e.g. job seekers) “tend to accept beliefs, knowledge, and opinions” made by experts and professionals in a reliable context. Therefore, recruiters are considered to be in an institutional position that is treated as trustworthy and credible. Through the institutional position, a specific social context, different forms of discourse and certain given meanings, job advertisements are considered as a site that is directing and “controlling minds” of the participants (van Dijk 2001, 357). Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyze how the concepts of an ideal leader are produced; through which kind of textual elements; through which kind of discursive practices; and through which kind of situational and institutional context.

Consequently, a critical discourse analysis views organizational phenomena, e.g. leader ideals, as a discursive activity constituting the social reality of organizations (Phillips & Di Domenico 2009, 550), representing certain discourses that have been naturalized and legitimized, and thus this master's thesis is studying the discursive structures of power and domination (van Dijk 2001, 353). Job advertisements are then part of the "order of discourse", meaning that job advertisements as a social activity include certain set of components, participants, desires, roles and institutional goals, which are frequently repeated and emphasized in relation to various discourses (Fairclough 2003, 125–126; Fairclough 1995, 38, 75–77). Therefore, a critical discursive approach "enables scholars to gain insights into the subtle enactment of discursive practices through which social reality is constructed" (Wenzel & Koch 2018, 643). As Ferry (2019, 604) argues, the purpose of a critical discourse analysis to critically study, make visible and challenge those discourses that are often considered as natural and value neutral. Therefore, my objective in this master's thesis is to make visible how the concepts of an ideal leader are produced and defined from certain restricted perspectives, which are simultaneously declining other possibilities from producing different leader ideals in the domain of job advertisements.

Finally, it is important to note that the critical discourse analysis in this research context is used as an interpretative framework in two different levels. For the first research question, this approach provides an interpretative framework through which I can analyze which kind of concepts of an ideal leader are produced in the context of job advertisements. Thus, I concentrate in the discursive practices within job advertisements, through which the systematically repeated language constructs certain kind of concepts of an ideal leader. In the second research question, my focus will be in the analysis of meta-discourses. Here, I will be analyzing the produced concepts of an ideal leader from the perspective of intertextual analysis. According to Fairclough (1995, 188), "intertextual analysis shows how texts selectively draw upon orders of discourse – the particular configurations of conventionalized practices which are available to text producers and interpreters in particular social circumstances." Therefore, in the second research question my analysis focuses on meta-discourses, through which the concepts of an ideal leader are considered as understandable and natural for participants within the social practice of job advertisements.

4 Implementation of the Study

In this chapter, my purpose is to present how the analysis process in this study was implemented and how my own position as a researcher influences to the research process. I begin by demonstrating how the research material was gathered and processed before the analysis. Next, my objective is to show how the analysis is implemented in this study. Finally in this chapter, I will discuss how reliability and ethics are concerned in this study, and how my position as a researcher may influence to this research process.

4.1 Research Material

Research material in this study is gathered from online job advertisements of various leader positions (defined in chapter 2.2). There are two valuable aspects to this, which is why online job advertisements were chosen as research material. First, they are considered as inherently occurring material, i.e. produced without interventions of a researcher (Jännäri 2018, 35). This provides a valuable and interesting position to analyze discourses within the research material. In addition, job advertisements often resemble each other, providing basis to analyze routinized, similarly produced social practices between different organizations, representing cultural beliefs and shared assumptions (Rafaeli 2006, 752). Secondly, although job advertisements are considered as an important part of the recruitment process, as a research material they are often overlooked and undervalued (Bauer 2000, 132). As Varje (2014, 55) argues, job advertisements are moderately rarely used research material in organizational sciences. According to Jännäri and others (2018, 547), this is especially case with the knowledge related to “positions that include managerial tasks and duties.”

In this study online job advertisements were gathered from online recruitment sites provided by private companies. I used three well-known online recruitment sites as a source: Duunitori (www.duunitori.fi), Oikotie (www.tyopaikat.oikotie.fi/tyopaikat) and Jobly (www.jobly.fi). The benefit of using online recruitment sites that are provided by private companies is that they include job advertisements from organizations across different sectors: from private, public and the third sector. This provided an opportunity to gather diverse collection of online job advertisements. Since my research mission is to study online job advertisements of open positions including different kind of leader roles, I first used different kinds of search terms to identify those online job advertisements that were relevant from the perspective of this study. After testing several search words, I found that a term *supervisor* gave the best outcomes in

each of the online sites, since it surprisingly provided leader roles from supervisors to team leaders and from managers to directors. It is important to note that my aim was to select diverse material that represents different kinds of fields and leader roles. Hence, I did not choose the online job advertisements by selecting certain preferences, but instead my aim was to gather a collection of material randomly, which I had not pre-read before the whole material was gathered. In addition, the research material was gathered between April and September in 2024. Between this period, I gathered new online job advertisements once a week in every Tuesday, and thus I was able to gather material evenly throughout the process.

Online job advertisements were saved as pdf-files to the same folder. After all the material was gathered, I started to organize the material for the analysis process. Although I did organize the research material into different categories in excel-file according to different organizational levels (operational level, middle management, top management), this was done only to make the material easier to manage, not to analyze them as separate categories. This was implemented by creating three different categories to an excel-file, in which I listed all the job titles of the gathered online job advertisements according to organizational level. Simultaneously, this provided a first insight to which kind of job titles and leader roles the material included as a whole. Ultimately, I did gather 127 online job advertisements (Duunitori 46, Oikotie 43 and Jobly 38), which surprisingly included 89 pieces of slightly or entirely different job titles. This suggests that the task of gathering a diverse collection of online job advertisements, representing different leader roles of different organizations, was implemented successfully according to the plan.

Next, I started to organize the research material for the analysis process. This was made by converting the pdf-files to text-files, and by combining all the research material within one word-document. First, I combined all the content of the job advertisements within the same Word-file, which included in total of 142 pages of text. In the beginning of the analysis, I started to read the research material and identify content that are important and relevant from the perspective of this study. This was repeated multiple times and, in the end of reducing the material by removing irrelevant parts of it, mostly general information or advertising related to the organizations, I had 71 pages of relevant text that was ready for the analysis process. Finally, it is important to notice that most of the research material was gathered in Finnish, rest of the material was already written in English. After the analysis was completed, the results and other evidence related to the research material was translated to English.

4.2 Critical Discourse Analysis as an Analysis Method

Here, my purpose is to introduce how the critical discourse analysis is applied as an analysis method in this study. This is an important chapter to emphasize, since the invisibility and obscurity of the set-up and phases through which a critical discourses analysis is implemented has been an often-argued critique of this analysis method (Siltaoja & Sorsa 2020, 247–248; Pälli 2003, 27). According to Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2009, 244), the mission of a critical discourse analyst is to analyze which kind of meanings are produced, what consequences they have and how the systems of meanings, i.e. discourses, are organized in relation to social practices.

From this perspective, both research questions of this study are emphasizing slightly different aspects: By studying the first research question of *which kind of concepts of an ideal leader are produced in job advertisements*, my aim is to interpretate and analyze which kind and how the concepts of an ideal leader are defined and produced in the research material. Second research question of *which discourses enable the production of the concepts of an ideal leader* instead focuses to interpretate and analyze which discourses are in the core of producing the concepts of an ideal leader, making the concepts seem as desired, meaningful and understandable.

Consequences can be understood from two different perspectives in this analysis: first, consequences are considered as analysis of the relations between different elements producing the concepts of an ideal leader, making the concepts and its components to be considered as natural and coherent. Another perspective is given through the analysis of discourses, since here discourses are considered as systems of meanings through which certain concepts of an ideal leader are produced and communicated; without certain discourses, specific concepts of an ideal leader would not be considered as part of the social context of job advertisements. Therefore, certain discourses make possible for certain concepts of an ideal leader to become as part of the social context and its practices in a certain manner.

According to Fairclough (2003), there are three types of meanings that are analyzed in a critical discourse analysis: action, representations and identification. Action as a type of meaning emphasizes the aspect that texts are considered as a social relation, in where producers of the texts provide certain aspects and content to the specific audience through *ways of acting*; by informing, advising, expecting and so forth. Representation, understood as *ways of representing*, implies how particular systems of meanings, i.e. discourses, are represented while

others are not. Thus, representations “enact social relations between participants in social events and the attitudes, desires and values of participants; and coherently and cohesively connects parts of texts together, and connects texts with their situational contexts”. Finally, identification is considered as *ways of being*. This means that meanings in texts are expressed in certain ways that are identifiable for participants. (Fairclough 2003, 26–28.) These three types of meanings are summarized in Figure 2.

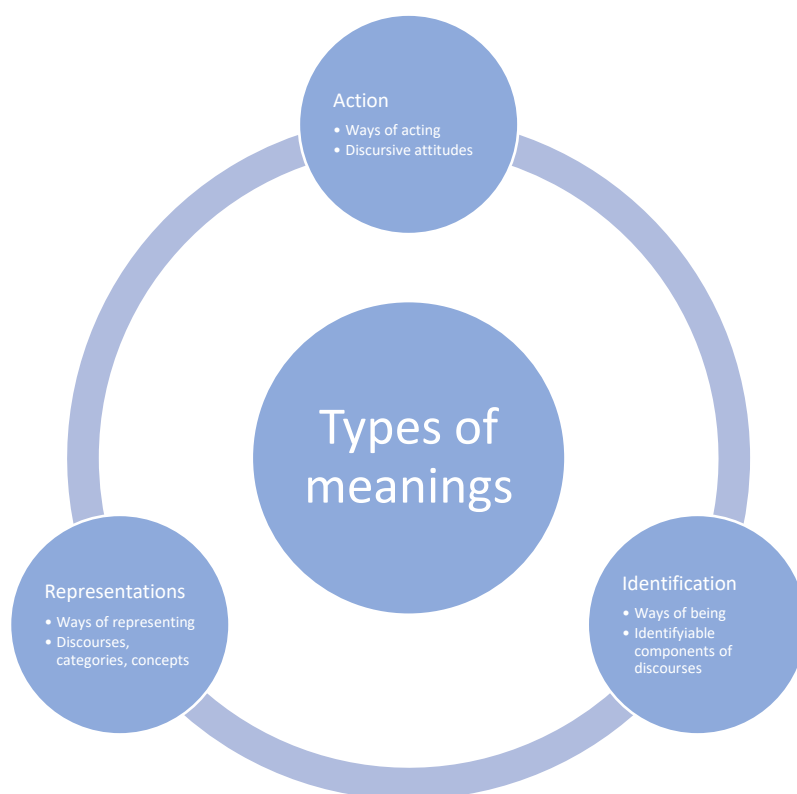


Figure 2. Three types of meanings under the analysis

Note. Adapted from Fairclough (2003)

Consequently, in this analysis process I am then doing two interconnected things. First, my interest is in analyzing three aspects of meanings (Figure 2), and secondly, making a connection between “the concrete social event and more abstracts social practices” by analyzing how these ways of acting, representing and being are drawn upon and articulated together in research material (Fairclough 2003, 28). From the perspective of this study, the analysis process of the three types of meanings can be understood as follows: By analyzing *action*, my interest is to analyze how readers are directed to the concepts of an ideal leader; how job advertisements are articulated by using various methods to direct participants towards certain coherently represented ideals that are expected in leader roles. By analyzing *identification*, my purpose is to recognize and analyze those components and relations that are producing the concepts of an

ideal leader. Thirdly, *representations* are considered as produced systems of meanings. Here I analyze how certain concepts and discourses are systematically produced through the types of action and identification, simultaneously giving a taken-as-granted sense and legitimating for the types of action and identification themselves. Furthermore, all three types of meanings are dependent about the social context and practice of job advertisements, through which it is possible to identify certain desired concepts and where certain systems become constituted by such a way that they are considered as being as taken-as-granted part of that social context.

In this study the analysis process is divided into four phases. First three phases are focusing to answer to the first research question and fourth phase to the second research question. However, this must not be understood as an unambiguous description about the analysis process, since both research questions are produced in relation to each other. In practice, the second research question is also analyzed throughout the analysis process. Thus, these four phases are meant to demonstrate which research questions are mainly focused on which phases. Four phases of the analysis are summarized in Figure 3.

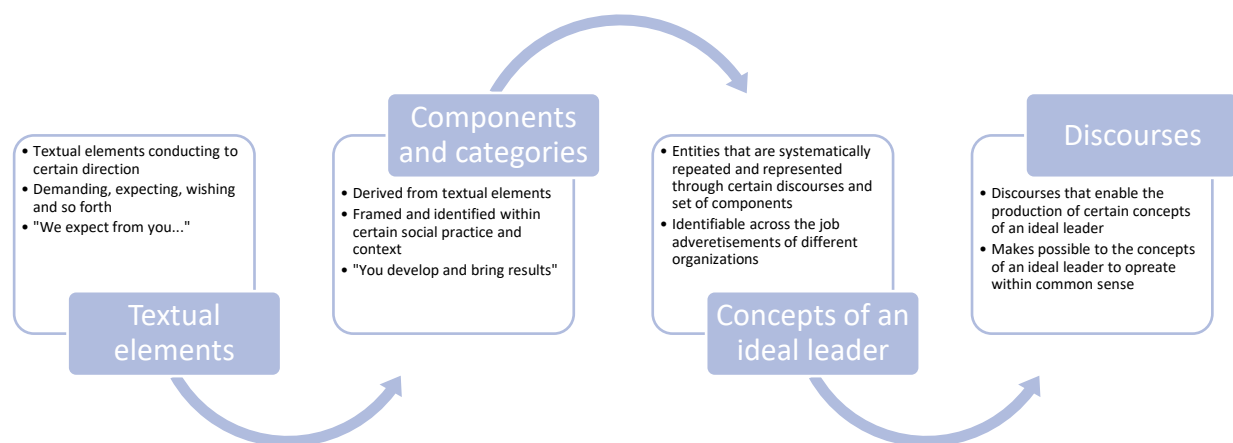


Figure 3. Four phases of the analysis process

In the first phase I have produced what Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2009) describes as an analytical description. This means that the research material is systematically analyzed with an aim to identify and organize the relevant material from the perspective of research questions (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2009, 244–245). Here the purpose was to reduce the research material to include only relevant information for the analysis and interpretation. The research material was reduced by using NVivo, which is an often-used software for qualitative data analysis.

In the first phase, my aim was to avoid making intense interpretations of the research material, and instead to concentrate in organizing and identifying the relevant material through the textual analysis without shaping the material or detaching it from its context. Thus, my focus was on textual elements. I started to organize the material by transferring those words, phrases and paragraphs to a separate folder in Nvivo, which relatively directly indicated towards desires and expected qualities and behavior of an ideal leader. Thus, I analyzed how language is used in the research material by such a manner, that it directs a reader towards the demands, requires and qualities of an ideal leader. In Table 3, I demonstrate the different kind of phrases and words that were treated as conducting the participants towards the qualities, attributes, behavior, categories and concepts of an ideal leader, suggesting which kind of a candidate is considered as an ideal one.

Table 3. Examples of the phrases and words that directs towards the concepts of an ideal leader

Directing phrases and words
• To be succesful in this role we expect you to have... • We hope that you have... • You are the one we are seeking for, if you have... • We expect from you... • We demand from you... • We wish from you... • Requirements: • Demands: • What we demand from you: • It is important for us that you are... • You will be an excellent fit to our organization, if you are... • To be successful in this role, we expect you to have... • To succeed in this role, you will need... • For this role, we believe your starting point is: • In this role you need... • What do we expect from you?

In the second phase, I began to interpretate the research material. Here, the purpose is, through the interpretation, to analyze and synthesize the research material by examining, identifying and analyzing the relationship within the research material that answers to the research questions, and thus produces broader understanding about the research phenomenon (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2009, 245). Here, I started to analyze the organized and reduced research material by producing categories that answers to the research questions. Production of categories followed the crucial idea that they must represent systematically repeated leader ideals throughout the research material. For this reason, some of the categories were afterwards removed, since they were not represented broadly enough in the research material.

Therefore, in the second phase a researcher begins to interpretate the research material by producing a synthesis between the textual elements, produced meanings and social practices of the research phenomenon and material (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2009, 245). In this study this means the creation of different categories. The production of categories included analysis and questions from different perspectives: What is systematically expected or demanded from an ideal leader from supervisors to directors? How are certain expected qualities and behavior recognized as an own category? Consequently, in this study the second phase was about producing the categories which eventually produces the concepts of an ideal leader and discourses directing these concepts. As Jokinen (2016b, 341–342) argues, different concepts are categorized in texts: described through certain qualities, settings and context that forms the concepts (Jokinen 2016b, 341–342). The emphasis is then in those frequently and systematically represented components, categories, language and relations that are defining the phenomenon (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2009, 244). Throughout the analysis in the second phase, I found useful to ask a question proposed by Gee (2011, 110): “what socially recognizable concepts the speaker is trying to enact or to get others to recognize?”

Table 4. Example of a category and its components

Category	Expected qualities and skills	Desired behavior
Innovative leader	Enthusiasm, energetic, creativity, determination, innovativeness, vision, future-oriented, will and ability to develop and improve	- Acts as an example - Develops functions and oneself

Table 4 demonstrates an example of how a category is produced: it includes different qualities and desired behavior related to those qualities. Thus, produced categories are not understood only as components which are represented as words or phrases in the research material. In contrast, the components described in Table 4 are chosen because they are connected to each other; qualities are meaningful in the research material only when they are represented in relation to other components such as desired behavior or similar qualities. Therefore, the second phase of the analysis is also about analyzing the relationships between the different components. How certain qualities or behavior is systematically expected or demanded in relation to other qualities and behavior? Furthermore, I analyzed the relationships between the components from the perspective of the whole research material. This means that if the produced categories were not represented widely enough in the research material, they were removed. For instance, a category of *experienced leader* was removed from the final categories,

because there was not enough job advertisements that demanded those components that were included to the category of an *experienced leader*.

In the third phase of the analysis process, I began to produce the concepts of an ideal leader. The objective in this phase was then to abstract broader concepts from the analyzed research material (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2009, 290–293). This was done through the produced categories. As the components of the categories were analyzed in relation to each other, similarly in the third phase my purpose was to analyze how certain categories are represented in relation to each other. My focus here was to combine those categories that were in relationship to each other, producing a certain broader concept of an ideal leader; thus, the concepts represent certain demanded and expected combinations of qualities, skills and behavior from an ideal leader, which were systematically repeated in relation to each other in the research material.

Consequently, the purpose in the third phase of the analysis is to study how certain categories and components are produced in relation to each other, and thus produces certain concepts which are shaped by certain social context and practices (Fairclough 1995, 112–121). After the concepts of an ideal leader were produced, I began to examine if there are similarities between different concepts and categories which they included. Here, my purpose was to re-analyze if there are concepts that are not clearly and systematically enough identified and repeated in the research material, or if there were concepts which had many similarities with each other, and thus it was possible to combine those concepts. Therefore, the first three phases included the analysis of all three aspects of meanings (Figure 2): which kind of concepts of an ideal leader are produced through the systematic representation (representations), what qualities and components are frequently desired (identification), and how these are in relation to action in job advertisements (action).

Finally, in the fourth phase of the study, my purpose is to analyze which discourses enable the production of the concepts of an ideal leader. As Hyland (2005, 6) argues, by analyzing discourses a researcher is examining those textual practices that are used to achieve social ends. Thus, my focus was on those systems of meanings that direct and shape all three concepts of an ideal leader. Therefore, in the fourth phase I use intertextual analysis to study meta-discourses which are shaping and guiding the concepts of an ideal leader in the social practice of job advertisements. As Fairclough argues (1995, 188–190), intertextual analysis connects the linguistic practices and social context by showing how certain discourses provide certain

elements for the texts, through which textual material becomes considered by a certain way in a particular social context. Consequently, in the fourth phase I analyzed the produced concepts of an ideal leader by studying which kind of discourses are embedded in them, and simultaneously directing the production of the concepts of an ideal leader.

4.3 Researchers' Position, Reliability, and Ethics

All qualitative research has subjective elements, which is why it is important to discuss about how reliability, researcher's position, and ethics are considered in this research process. According to Puusa and Julkunen (2020), for researchers using qualitative research methods it is practically impossible to achieve objectivity. Thus, the mission of qualitative research is to thoroughly study the selected research phenomenon and problems (Puusa & Julkunen 2020, 189–190). Moreover, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2017, 16), in qualitative research “an individual enters the research process from inside an interpretive community.”

This emphasizes the context, and researcher's position in that context, where qualitative research is generally operating. Thus, especially from the perspective a critical discourse analysis, a researcher is part of the research phenomenon which one is studying, and thus “a value-free science” is not thought to be possible to achieve (van Dijk 2001, 352). Therefore, Aaltio and Puusa (2020, 181) argues that for a researcher it is important to be open about one's preconceptions during the research process. In this research this has means that during different phases of the research process I have been trying to reflect and re-evaluate the decisions which have been made and to reaffirm that they are within the research context. Thus, my aim throughout the research process have been to return to evaluate the decisions which I have made and to critically reflect my position as a researcher.

According to Juhila (2016), there are three different researcher's position in discourse analysis which are all active during different phases of the research process: an analyst, attorney and interpreter. An analyst refers to the positions where a researcher aims to keep certain distance to the phenomenon under inquiry. Thus, the task is to analyze the research material in the defined research context. An attorney instead refers to the position where a researcher aims to analyze and study the research phenomenon from a certain, selected perspective. From this perspective, a researcher does not even try to be objective, but instead have decided the aspect from which one is approaching the analysis. An interpreter implies how a researcher is interpreting the research material and simultaneously gives it certain meaningful frameworks

through which a research phenomenon is understood and described in the research. Thus, a researcher is in interaction with the research material, and interpretes it from a cultural perspective through which both a researcher and the target audience can understand it. (Juhila 2016, 412–414; 418–419; 423–425.)

In this study above positions can be considered to be found during different phases of the study. My aim is to be an analyst especially in the analysis process, where my interest is to strictly analyze the research material. Thus, my task is to systematically study how the concepts of an ideal leader are represented in the research material. However, already at the beginning of the research process I did choose a side by selecting a critical discourse analysis as a research approach. As van Dijk (2001, 352) argues, in a critical discourse analysis a researcher begins with the certain explicit position which critically approaches the research phenomenon. Therefore, the critical orientation makes visible the position of an attorney which is especially emphasized in the theoretical framework and discussion. Finally, by analyzing, interpreting and finally producing the results of this study I am taking a position of an interpreter. In this context this refers especially how the results are presented by a way which makes them understandable. Thus, by presenting the results in certain understandable way, a discursive analyst is participating to the production of social reality (Juhila 2016, 443).

According to Aaltio and Puusa (2020), when evaluating the reliability of the research process an important aspect is to discuss how well research methods, research phenomenon and purpose of the research are in line with each other. This is especially important when using a discourse analysis, since it is presumed that if a research context or research problems would be framed differently, it would also affect to the interpretation of the research material (Aaltio & Puusa 2020, 181–182; 186). In this study, the epistemological and ontological premises of a critical discourse analysis provided a suitable and coherent approach to study the concepts of an ideal leader in the context of job advertisements.

The decision to approach ideals from a critical perspective was justified, since I had some prior information about the subject which indicated that ideals in organizational context have problematic outcomes. For instance, previous research which indicated that within recruitment processes, where the research context of job advertisements belong, ideals are connected to practices which produces inequality between different participants (see Meriläinen et al. 2015; Koivunen et al. 2015; van den Brink & Benschop 2012). Thus, the theoretical framework and methodological choices was made to support this research task. During the research process

there has been many occasions when I have returned to re-evaluate my decisions and the suitability of the theoretical and methodological decisions in relation to the research mission. Consequently, there was moments during the research process when some of the material was re-evaluated as not suitable from the perspective of a research mission, and thus was removed before the analysis process. Moreover, Aaltio and Puusa (2020, 186) argues that in a discourse analysis the reliability can be examined by how well a researcher is able to make visible of how one is reaching to certain conclusions. Therefore, my aim has been especially to be explicit of how I have analyzed and interpreted the research material in this research process.

Finally, the critical orientation in this study means that my approach is inevitably ethical. As is argued by Cannella and Lincoln (2017), critical approach is ethical since it aims to make visible the “contemporary forms of domination” and show that things could be differently. From this point perspective, a critical discourse approach does not align with the traditional approach in social sciences that begins by following certain methodological rules to find out universal results that would provide positive outcomes for people. Instead, this universalist perspective is considered as part of the production of the dominative conditions (Cannella & Lincoln 2017, 84–85). Therefore, ethics in this study are embedded to the critical research orientation, which aims to make visible how the concepts of an ideal leader are produced from certain perspectives, positions and relations. Thus, this study challenges the taken-as-granted nature of the concepts and shows that discursive constructions can be changed (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2019, 101–102).

5 Results

In this chapter I present the results of the analysis process, which has been produced through the combination of the critical discourse analysis and theoretical framework of this study. Results are divided in two different sections: First, I present the three concepts of an ideal leader, which are the 1) *inspirational innovator*, 2) *efficient high-flyer* and 3) *collaborative influencer*. Secondly, I present the main discourses that enable the production of the concepts of an ideal leader, which are *individual discourse*, *discourse of continuous movement*, and *utility discourse*. Here, it is important to emphasize that the concepts of an ideal leader are produced through the analysis of the research material; thus, it is a combination of systematic analysis and interpretation. Second section instead is interpreted and analyzed from the concepts of an ideal leader. Therefore, the results in the second section are emphasizing the interpretation of the results answering to the first research question.

5.1 Concepts of an Ideal Leader

The concepts of an ideal leader presented here answer to the first research question of *which kind of concepts of an ideal leader are produced in the context of job advertisements*. All the concepts include different kind of desired qualities and behavior which, as a combination, produces certain kind of concepts of an ideal leader. Furthermore, all three concepts of an ideal leader highlight different dimensions of ideals from the perspective of the theoretical framework of this master's thesis (Figure 1). For instance, there are specific qualities that are expected, wished or required from an ideal leader (ideals as desired states), through which certain type of behavior is wished (ideals as action), and – especially in the third concept – there are certain cultural conditions where an ideal leader is expected to act (socio-cultural conditions of ideals). However, the concepts of an ideal leader emphasize ideals as organizational phenomenon especially from the perspective of *ideals as desired states* and *ideals as action*. Thus, they represent those qualities and abilities that are expected and desired from an ideal leader, which in turn are connected to certain type of wished and desired behavior, i.e. action.

Moreover, in this chapter I use citations from the research material. The purpose of this is to provide transparency and to liven up the interpretation and analysis of the research material. Citations have been *italicized* when they are part of the text, and indented, when the purpose is to demonstrate how certain qualities, behavior or desires are expressed frequently or by different ways. In addition, when citations are indented, I have marked as a “speaker” the title

of the job advertisement from which that citation is quoted from. This also provides an insight to the multiplicity of the research material.

5.1.1 Inspirational Innovator

First concept of an ideal leader is what I nominate here as the inspirational innovator. Inspirational innovator includes various frequently repeated aspects of an ideal leader. It contains certain sets of ideal qualities, which in turn is expected to lead to the ideal behavior that emphasizes innovative and developing attitude. Inspirational then refers especially to the qualities that make a leader to be considered as inspiring in the research material. Innovator instead refers especially to the behavior: how the leader of this concept is desired to act as a leader. However, it is important to note that different sets of qualities and behavior that are desired here acts in relation to each other, and thus they become meaningful only in relation to each other.

Inspirational innovator is an individual who is enthusiastic, inspirational and determined. There are two important aspects related to these abilities: first, they act more as a combination rather than singular abilities, and secondly, all three abilities include certain set of other abilities and other qualities. These provide three important aspects that influences how an inspirational innovator is ideally desired to behave and impact the workplace. First, enthusiasm in this context refers to the essence of a leader and to the leadership style: one is continuously excited about the opportunity to lead, and thus spreads the excitement around the workplace. As one large public organization expects from the *head of the operative services unit*, as a leader *you are skillful and enthusiastic leader of others* as well as *your leadership style is enthusiastic*. These are often connected to certain ideal abilities and qualities representing continuous movement and excitement. For instance, an inspirational innovator is described as *joyful* and *prosperous* but also as *active, curious, energetic* and *proactive*, suggesting that an inspirational innovator is continuously and actively operating within the organization with a *positive, optimistic* and *enthusiastic* attitude. In addition, an inspirational innovator is not only having these abilities, but one is also able to transfer them to others:

Sales Manager: As a supervisor, you energize the members of the teams.

Head of General Administration: Your leadership style is enthusiastic, and you get individuals and teams to spark towards the goals.

Cloud Application development team manager: we also appreciate if you have/are: Proactive, optimist, motivated, and able to transfer these skills also to your team members.

Furthermore, an inspirational innovator has *vision, new ideas, creativity* and *innovativeness*. When these are combined to the abilities of *enthusiasm, joyfulness* and *energetic attitude*, an inspirational innovator is considered as an ideal leader who is actively, enthusiastically and continuously seeking for *new ideas* and *opportunities* as well as aims to *inspire others*. This emphasizes two aspects: First, the mental activities of an individual, since an inspirational innovator does not refer to innovativeness as a co-produced creation, but instead as the ability of an individual. For instance, as a *supply chain manager*, it is the individual who finds the potential: *you follow the trends and development of the industry to find possibilities for new innovations* and *you have vision and new ideas to develop our organization*. Similarly, as a *shift manager* in restaurant, *you have creativity to solve problems, and you are innovative*. Secondly, an inspirational innovator is an ideal leader by acting and leading through the example. Thus, it is not enough to have and produce new ideas and innovativeness, but to do it by manner that inspires and is visible to others; one is being the object of inspiration by taking action and an active leader at the forefront:

Head of Marketing: Above all, we're looking for a strategic visionary who not only leads but also takes action.

Assistant Store Manager: You inspire and motivate through your own example.

Supervisor at the Bank: We hope from you an ability to lead through the example.

The ability to take action brings me a third important quality of an inspirational innovator, which is *determination*. This emphasizes how *enthusiasm, innovativeness* and *being an inspiration* are connected to the determined attitude through which an ideal leader is able to lead at the forefront with inspiring and innovative manner. It includes abilities as *determination, an ability to confront future challenges, courage to try new things* and *a will to improve*. For instance, a job advertisement seeking for a supervisor in a nursing home describes, *you have the will and ability to develop activity and courage to learn new things and answer to future challenges*. Therefore, an inspirational innovator is not only joyful, active, inspiring and innovative, but one must have a will to manifest these abilities as an ideal leader. One must then *be motivated to lead, ready to confront challenges* and *willing to seek new opportunities*, emphasizing again the narrative of continuous movement and active participating. This is represented in job advertisements through diverse use of language:

Team Manager: A true passion and willingness to lead people.

Supervisor: With your go-ahead attitude you willingly bring the momentum to run the everyday life.

Engineering Manager: Willingness to take a leading role.

All three sets of abilities – enthusiasm, inspiration and determination – are components that refers to a particular, desired orientation of an ideal leader in job advertisements: continuous driven towards developing and improving. Therefore, abilities and qualities of an inspirational innovator become meaningful only in relation to the concept of an ideal leader that emphasizes the importance of developing and improving. Developing and improving is represented through two different aspects in job advertisements. First, an inspirational innovator is someone who develops and thus improves the potential of the workplace or organization, and secondly, developing and improving includes the aspect of developing oneself. Moreover, desire for a develop-oriented individual makes visible the presumption of continuous movement, improvement and learning:

Production Support Manager: In order to succeed you have a will to develop the functions and drive continuous improvement.

Assistant Store Manager: You are motivated to learn new things and you want to continuously develop yourself as a supervisor.

Restaurant Manager: Creativity and enthusiasm to develop workplace and develop oneself.

Area Manager: Training and continuous development of subordinate managers and employees.

However, an interesting part of the desire for a develop-oriented individual is that what is meant by developing is often articulated quite unclearly. For instance, one may need to *have positive attitude towards developing, have an ability to develop processes, develop the functions and drive continuous improvement, aim towards developing, develop different areas of business or to be ready to develop*. Therefore, depending about the context, develop-orientation may refer to a general interest in developing, developing as an attribute, developing as an orientation or developing as a working attitude. Even when the expectations related to development are expressed with a little more detail, they are still referring to a certain function as personnel or production in a general manner, and thus approaching developing as a general action. However, when developing and improvement is understood as developing oneself, it is expressed more straightforwardly:

Store Manager: You are motivated to learn new things and want continuously to improve yourself as a supervisor.

Finance and Administrative Director: A will and capability to learn new things.

Supervisor in Nursing Home: You have a will and ability to develop the functions and courage to improve (yourself) and to answer to the future challenges.

As above citations suggest, developing oneself especially refers either to a motivation or to an ability to learn new things, which provides possibility for oneself to continuously improve and develop. This means that one must have *a will for development* and *ability for improvement*. Above citation of developing oneself as a supervisor refers to supervising as a general concept, similarly as it were with developing functions, processes or an organization. However, although it is not clearly defined what is really meant by *developing oneself*, they still communicate which kind of orientation is wished and expected from an ideal leader: you are someone who is interested about oneself, examining oneself as an entity which is never ready or satisfied to the contemporary set of skills and qualities, and therefore one needs to be interested about oneself on the behalf of a better future of an individual or an organization. Therefore, there is a certain attitude hidden into the idea of *developing oneself* in the context of job advertisements: current state of oneself is demanded and expected to be moving towards the reformation of oneself. This is reflecting the idea of continuous movement included to the concept of an inspirational innovator. Thus, contemporary state is considered as a negative state, reflecting passivity and opposite of innovativeness and creativity, and thus being something that needs to be avoided.

5.1.2 Efficient High-flyer

Second concept of an ideal leader is the efficient high-flyer. Efficient high-flyer is an individual who is ambitious, rational and has an entrepreneurial mindset. Similarly with an inspirational innovator, also the qualities of an efficient high-flyer are representing different set of skills and abilities, which are expressed in relation to each other, and thus acts as a dynamic combination. However, these three main qualities of the efficient high-flyer are representing three different aspects of the concept: ambitious represents the attitude towards work, rationality describes the skills that are needed, and entrepreneurial mindset provides the orientation towards economic thinking. Through these sets of ideal abilities, it is possible for the efficient high-flyer to be a successful and result-oriented leader.

Ambitious attitude is what drives the efficient high-flyer towards goals and success. This means that one is a *determined, responsible, proactive, and independent* actor. All these are articulated as individual abilities and capabilities. Efficient high-flyer is determined because an ideal leader *has hunger for sales*, as is described in the open position of *regional sales manager*. For a *project manager* in construction industry the success comes from *a will and capability to bear responsibility*. Moreover, with an ambitious attitude the efficient high-flyer is someone who constantly seeks for an opportunity to be successful and make sales. One must then be active and capable to do independent decisions, i.e. to have *initiative-taking mindset*. All these ideal components of the ambitious attitude are represented diversely in the research material:

Finance Manager: We wish from you... self-initiative, determination and an inner fire for sales.

Service Manager: A will and courage to take responsibility.

Manager, Cash Management: Proactive and independent, capable of performing duties with minimal supervision or push.

Head of Sales: Goals and exceeding them are in your blood.

However, the efficient high-flyer with an ambitious attitude is desired in relation to a certain set of ideal skills that represent capabilities of an ideal leader to act rationally. When an ideal leader is rational, one is then *analytical, accurate, problem-solver*, and can *prioritize*, is *capable to organize* and have *a strategic mind-set*. It is necessary for the efficient high-flyer also to be *resilient, flexible*, have *tolerance for pressure* and be able to *deal with stress*. These skills represent how it is desired for the efficient high-flyer to approach success and goals in the workplace. By being rational, one calculates and evaluates the impacts of the decisions and action, solves potential problems, and does this by critical and precise manner, without letting the pressure lower the level of working. As it is described in the research material, it is *expected* that the efficient high-flyer has *strong problem-solving and critical-thinking* and *an ability for a systematic, comprehensive and strategic thinking*. In addition, it is necessary that as the efficient high-flyer *you do not startle of quickly changing situations* and *you thrive best in a varied and fast-paced everyday life*.

Therefore, it is not necessary for the efficient high-flyer to draw visions that drives the workplace towards success, but instead this kind of an ideal leader drives success through a more rational, controlling, and systematical way, i.e. by being *efficient*. In addition to systematic way of approaching the challenges, efficiency includes also the ability to manage uncertainty. Thus, the efficient high-flyer *controls various things at the same time, controls different phases*

of the projects and enjoys keeping work tasks in order. As it is expected from a shift manager in a security sector, one needs to understand the impact of 24/7/365 operations to business. Thus, instead of being innovative and creative creator of possible directions, the efficient high-flyer drives success by rationally and systematically calculating the potential paths, simultaneously keeping the direction of an organization in control. This orientation is diversely expressed in the research material:

Maintenance Manager: Your working style is analytical and solution oriented.

Global Communication Manager: You deliver impact over volume.

Sales Manager: You are independent and active, and you can organize efficiently your own working.

Customer Insights Manager: With your strong analytical approach and strategic mindset, you will play a pivotal role in shaping our business strategies and driving meaningful outcomes.

Store Manager: Effective management and organizing of everyday routines, while ensuring the achievement of high-quality goals and ensuring smooth run of operations.

Third desire, which makes the ambitious attitude and rationality to be part of the concept of an ideal leader, is an entrepreneurial mindset. Entrepreneurial mindset means that you *want to achieve result, are interested in numbers, are business-oriented and continuously aiming towards goals. With an entrepreneurial mindset you can handle numbers, and you are only motivated by a little pressure.* Therefore, numbers and understanding of economic indicators are strongly emphasized in the entrepreneurial mindset. For instance, as a *store manager* in retail sector, *you have strong commercial vision and capability to do decisions that support growth and profitability.* This is why it is important to work systematically and have an ambitious attitude: it provides a possibility to apply efficient working style to be in line with economic indicators such as *profitability, costs, cost effectiveness and sales.* Therefore, the efficient high-flyer must rely on the knowledge based on the numbers reflecting the business potential. An ideal leader of this concept is then leading through a certain kind of knowledge, which is why systematical and rational way of reading the business environment is more important than making visions based on the material outside the rational activity of an organization. Efficient high-flyer is then based on the knowledge management, although knowledge is understood here mostly through economic indicators, simultaneously defining other kind of knowledge as irrelevant. As it is expressed in job advertisements:

Supervisor: You have understanding about meaningfulness of knowledge management and cost effectiveness.

Regional Manager: Business-oriented with a focus on costs and profitability.

Restaurant Manager: You know versatile tasks of restaurant, the corner stones of profitability and important economic indicators.

Store Manager: You are motivated to find ways through which a store can grow sales and pursue towards even better goals.

Area Manager: Responsibility for sales, turnover and inventory.

All three sets of qualities – an ambitious attitude, rationality and entrepreneur mindset – are needed to become an ideal, successful leader which is desired in job advertisements; to be someone who is not only capable to achieve results, but instead who can effectively and analytically achieve the results. Moreover, the efficient high-flyer is an ideal leader who is capable of achieving the results from two different perspectives: first, one is generally able to lead an organization towards better results, and secondly, one is able to lead others to become more successful. Prior one means that you are expected to find those necessary ways that improve the results of an organization. Efficient high-flyer must then *actively follow the main indicators of sales and react to them if necessary*. In addition, as a leader *your orientation towards work is goal-oriented and you are responsible for leading daily operations and for achieving the goals that are decided*. Therefore, it is not necessary for the efficient high-flyer to be able to produce goals, as long as one is capable of reaching ones. It is strongly emphasized in the research material that it is the leader who is responsible for successfully achieving the goals:

Supervisor: You lead a team of sales, and you are responsible for the results of your team.

Head of Unit: You run the unit effectively with results.

Director of Sales: You ensure, that you are able to reach the results.

Finally, the efficient high-flyer can transform and lead others to become more successful. Here, it is the leading capabilities that matter. There are two important aspects that dictates the effectiveness of leadership: first, it must be *you* that leads others to become more successful, and secondly, success is measured by how efficiently *you* can reach the goals. Thus, what matters is that you, as an individual, can lead others towards success, and that the success itself can be measured by economic indicators. Therefore, to be successful as an efficient high-flyer, you must be able to lead individuals as well as groups. However, it is not necessarily that

important how you are able to lead others to become more successful. Thus, you are expected to be a leader who...

...is enthusiastic, and you get individuals and teams to motivate towards goals.

...believe in a coaching leadership style and you can coach your team members to achieve better performance.

...have an ability to motivate people to reach common goals.

...have an ability to direct your team towards common goals successfully.

...have a will to improve professionals to better performance.

...have a will to help others to become more successful as team members.

...have a pursuit to support the development of your team members and help them to achieve their own goals.

Finally, it is important to note that on many occasions the efficient high-flyer must be able to show his or her efficiency when applying to an open position. This means that one needs to have a track record, which provides proof for the recruiting organization about the capability to lead successfully. Often, this refers to track records of economic indicators but sometimes it is described more generally. For instance, as it is expressed in various job advertisements, one must have *verified evidence of effective management, evidence that demonstrates capability for sales and of leading sales, a proven track record of building a marketing machine that has delivered significant results, or demonstration of previous experience that shows capability and skills that are required for managing work tasks successfully.*

Required track record summarizes the whole concept of the efficient high-flyer. From this perspective, there are certain ideal sets of skills, abilities, attitudes, and a mindset that are required to become an ideal, successful leader. An example of the concept of the efficient high-flyer is described well in a job advertisement seeking for *head of marketing*, where – besides other goal- and result-oriented skills and abilities – *a sales-driven approach, initiative-taking mindset, entrepreneurial spirit, and proactive work ethic are also highly appreciated traits.* However, in the end, the success is defined through a narrow lens of economic indicators and entrepreneurial thinking. Thus, results and evidence are considered to be more important than the means through which they are achieved.

5.1.3 Collaborative Influencer

Third concept of an ideal leader is the collaborative influencer. This is the last concept that is strongly represented in the research material. Collaborative influencer is ideally required to have three sets of qualities. First, one must be ready to interact and communicate in an international environment. Secondly, an ideal leader of this concept is an individual who enjoys working with others and is pleasant and easily approachable. Thirdly, it is important for a collaborative influencer to be a cooperative person with an ability to influence to different stakeholders. Through these sets of qualities, a collaborative influencer can operate as it is ideally desired in the research material, i.e. one can be an excellent networker and have a capability to influence to relevant stakeholders. Once again, the ideal qualities and the behavior desired from the collaborative influencer are considered to act in relation to each other, as a combination: the qualities are meaningful only in relation to behavior and desires, and vice versa.

Internationality is important in relation to interaction and communication skills. The collaborative influencer is frequently required to have knowledge of a second language, which is often English. Swedish is demanded mostly in those job advertisements that are produced by public sector, where the national laws require it. Moreover, international interaction and communication skills are frequently required in the research material from directors to supervisors. Although the level of interaction and communication skills is often expressed quite generally, it is still expressed through various adjectives that refer to the required skill level. The level of interaction and communication skills should be either *solid*, *good*, *fluent*, *excellent*, *strong* or *superior*. However, often it is not enough to only be solid, excellent or superior international communicator, but these are connected to various desires expressing how you should be and feel as an individual in an international environment:

Shift Manager (Restaurant): Work community and customers are international, so we hope that you feel at home in an international environment.

Shift Manager (Café): You are the person we are looking for, if you enjoy being in an international environment.

Store Manager: You communicate effortlessly also in English – but of course!

Engineering Manager: Desire to work in an international environment.

Consequently, internationality refers only to the language, which is why the language requirements are expressed in relation to *international environment* in the research material. It is rare that internationality would refer clearly for instance to the knowledge from different cultures. Furthermore, it is required that both written and verbal interaction and communication skills are equally solid, excellent or superior. As it is expressed in a job advertisement seeking for *country market director*, your *starting point* is to have *superior written and verbal communication skills, fluency in Finnish and high-level proficiency in English*. Both verbal and written skills are considered especially valuable for influencing different stakeholder groups by communicating complex subjects by understandable manner.

Furthermore, in the research material interaction and communication skills are desired in relation to the ability of cooperativeness. Here, cooperativeness means that an ideal leader can encounter different stakeholders and is able to build strong and long-lasting relationships with them, and thus it is important for the collaborative influencer to be *easily approachable*. As it is expressed in the research material, one can *encounter different kinds of people, situations and expectations* and *have a capability to build long-term relationships with customers and stakeholders* as well as can *establish strong working relationships*. Especially through the interaction and communication skills, it is possible for the collaborative influencer to cooperate with others:

Production Support Manager: As a person you communicate smoothly and co-operate well between units.

Project Manager: It is also important that you can come along with others, and you have fluent verbal and written communication capability.

Development Manager: To succeed in your tasks, it is required that you have excellent interaction and interpersonal skills, and you can communicate fluently with professionals and other external stakeholders across various fields of business.

However, cooperation, interaction and communication skills are important only in relation to a certain kind of ideal leader. There are two aspects that are emphasized here: First, the collaborative influencer is considered as someone who is a pleasant colleague to work with and whom with it is easy to get along with. Secondly, one must be customer service oriented with a firm presentation skill, which can be understood as a combination of interaction and communication skills. Thus, above all the collaborative influencer is desired to be an individual

who enjoys working with others, and vice versa. This kind of an ideal leader is *casual, a pleasant colleague and trustworthy*. As it is expressed in a job advertisement seeking for *cloud application development team manager*, it is expected from an ideal leader to be *a people-person at heart*. Consequently, collaborative influencer is described as *a team player, a good listener and easily approachable*. Through these qualities, one can act as a people-oriented leader who can establish and maintain relationships with colleagues, customers and other stakeholders.

Customer service orientation means in the research material that the collaborative influencer is strongly oriented to work in a close connection to different stakeholders. For this, one needs to have *customer-oriented attitude* and *natural networking skills*. Thus, it is desired that a leader is *proactively* collaborating with stakeholders. Here is combined most of the ideal qualities of the collaborative influencer: international interaction and communication skills, ability to cooperate and build relationships, with an orientation emphasizing customers and other stakeholders. Consequently, the collaborative influencer can act in a close relation with various stakeholders and is able to build such strong relationships with them, through which an ideal leader in this concept has a possibility to influence relevant stakeholders. For being able to influence, the collaborative influencer needs firm presentation skills.

Indeed, the meaning of certain desired work orientation and attributes – as well as interaction, communication, presentation and cooperation skills – is that they give an opportunity for a leader to act on behalf of organizational desires, i.e. to perform *successfully* with relevant others within the organizational realm. Thus, the desire of the collaborative influencer is not merely to produce strong relationships and to act in close relations with customers, but to be able to influence them, i.e. to ensure the benefits of an organization. Through strong presentation skills, one can influence others by summarizing and articulating relevant and complex subjects:

Administrative Director: You are talented at summarizing the relevant subjects even of challenging issues.

Manager: You have a good eye for clear and illustrative visualisation and presentation of data to the benefit of your audience.

Supervisor, Logistics: Strong presentation skills and an ability to produce clear presentations.

Partnership Manager: Excellent verbal and written communication skills, with the ability to articulate complex technical concepts to diverse audiences.

Therefore, the ideal abilities, which makes the collaborative influencer a pleasant colleague to work with and which provide an opportunity to produce strong relationships, are also means to get to the situations where one has an opportunity to influence others. Consequently, as the collaborative influencer you have *the ability to influence others, and to focus on strategic priorities and good communication skills and the ability to influence people at all levels of the organization*. The collaborative influencer is then an individual, who is at home when interacting, communicating and collaborating with others, and thus one is also making an impact from the perspective of organizational desires by influencing to different stakeholders through certain sets of skills and personal attributes.

5.2 Enabling Discourses

In this chapter, I answer to the second research question of *which discourses enable the production of the concepts of an ideal leader*. Results of this section represent those meta-discourses that direct the production of the concepts of an ideal leader presented in the previous chapter. These discourses are 1) *individual discourse*, 2) *discourse of constant motion* and 3) *utility discourse*. However, these discourses are represented slightly differently in the concepts of an ideal leader, and thus my purpose is to emphasize how they can dynamically enable the production of different kind of concepts of an ideal leader. Furthermore, this chapter highlights the third dimension of the theoretical framework of ideals in organizational context (Figure 1). Thus, these discourses are considered as systems of meanings which reflect the socio-cultural conditions; they direct the possibilities of the production of concepts of an ideal leader and reflect the socio-cultural perceptions, beliefs and values that are grounded in organizational thinking. Therefore, the discourses presented here are systems of meanings through which the concepts of an ideal leader are considered as meaningful and as a common sense.

5.2.1 Individual Discourse

First discourse enabling the production of the concepts of an ideal leader is *individual discourse*. This highlights the aspects through which the concepts of an ideal leader are considered in the context of job advertisements: an ideal leader is an individual with certain personal qualities, and an individual who can impact the organization by different ways. Moreover, the focus on an individual is often expressed in the research material through expressions such as *you are, you will, you act, you work, you inspire, you motivate, or you have*. Thus, action of the work

community is considered to be dependent about the individual qualities and action of an ideal leader. However, the individual discourse is emphasized differently in the different concepts of an ideal leader. There are two aspects from which the individual discourse can be approached: First, individuality refers here to the expectations of the future action of an ideal leader, and secondly, it refers to certain qualities that define which kind of an individual an ideal leader should be.

The concept of inspirational innovator highlights the role of an individual as someone who develops and improves the organization and its employees, whereas the efficient high-flyer brings success for the organization, and the collaborative influencer is an individual who influences to relevant stakeholders and thus benefits the organization. From this perspective, there is an intermingle between the individual and an idea of controlling the environment around of an individual, since the assumption in the research material is that it is the individual who can bring the impact to the workplace. In other words, it is up to a leader and his or her capability to make a difference; to act as a conductor. It is the individual who inspires, influences or makes the organization and its actors succeed, and thus it is in one's control to make certain organizational desires to be fulfilled. This idea of an ideal leader is strongly emphasized in the concepts of an ideal leader.

Moreover, the concepts of an ideal leader are all grounded to a certain kind of an individual: one must be for instance *easily approachable*, *analytical* or *enthusiast* and have certain specific skills, such as *problem-solving*, *developing* or *communication* skills. Therefore, the boundaries of which kind of an individual one should be is quite strictly defined in the concepts an ideal leader and research material. An ideal leader as an individual is then defined through the combinations of certain personal qualities and skill sets. Therefore, the inspirational innovator is inspirational only if one is an individual who is *enthusiastic*, *energetic*, *positive* and *optimistic*. Similarly, efficient high-flyer is successful only if one is *proactive* with an *initiative-taking mindset*. Consequently, the individual discourse directs the concepts to be defined and understood by a certain manner, conducting how an ideal leader is considered in a profound level. Thus, it directs both the production but also the interpretation process of the concepts of an ideal leader.

Finally, both ideal qualities and skills as well as desires for a certain kind of ideal behavior produce specific concepts of an ideal leader that thrive and can be understood only through the individual discourse. Individual discourse is then the basis from which certain kind of ideal

concepts can be built upon. Thus desires, such as *you act as a motivational leader* or *you can motivate everyone to achieve the common goals*, can be taken-as-granted when it is assumed that leaders are desired to be certain kind of individuals. From this perspective, the individual discourse as a taken-as-granted system of meanings acts as a commonsense assumption through which the different components of the concepts of an ideal leader are defined and interpreted. Therefore, the concepts of an ideal leader as they are represented also must be considered and produced from individualist perspective. However, the individual discourse does not only direct how an ideal leader is considered or produced, but also how it is interpreted. Thus, only through the individual discourse the concepts of an ideal leader can become understandable and natural part of the social context of job advertisements. Consequently, since I am able to study, interpretate and analyze the concepts of an ideal leader that are penetrated by the individual discourse means that I, as a researcher, also both possess the individual discourse myself and live in a social context which emphasizes the discourse. Thus, the individual discourse is what makes the concepts of an ideal leader understandable for me.

5.2.2 Discourse of Constant Motion

Second discourse enabling the concepts of an ideal leader is the *discourse of constant motion*, which is considered to direct which kind of qualities and action are considered as ideal. This is especially represented in the first two concepts of an ideal leader – the inspirational innovator and efficient high-flyer – but it is also recognizable in the concept of collaborative influencer. There are two aspects from which this discourse can be approached: First, the concepts are mostly included by qualities, skills and behavior which refers to continuous movement as a desirable and positive manner. Second aspect is that qualities or skills that would refer to the opposite of continuous moving or being active are missing from the research material, i.e. they are excluded from the concepts of an ideal leader.

The concepts of an ideal leader include many qualities that suggest that an ideal leader should also be an active leader. It is desired in the research material that an ideal leader is an *energetic, proactive, innovative, results- & goal oriented, creative or flexible* person who can *influence, aim towards goals, develop, seek new opportunities, build relationships, interact & communicate, control or inspire*. In addition, it is desired that one has a *customer oriented, sales-driven, initiative-taking, entrepreneurial or developing* mindset. Thus, the concepts of an ideal leader are built upon the assumption that considers continuous movement as a natural part

of the organizational context. From this perspective, it is understandable why, for instance, the efficient high-flyer includes the qualities of *flexibility* and both *pressure* and *stress tolerance*: if constant motion is part of the organizational reality of leaders, thus there must be certain qualities which enables an ideal leader to keep up with the constantly moving and changing work environment. Thus, one needs to have tolerance and be ready in an environment where others are in continuous movement as well.

Therefore, the constant motion is expected through different kind of action that is desired from an ideal leader. The discourse of constant motion is produced and expressed from this perspective in the research material. If an ideal leader is innovating, one is *seeking for new ideas* and *finding new possibilities*; after an ideal leader has produced an innovation, it is expected that one begins to act towards new ones. Similarly, if an ideal leader is *aiming towards goals* such as *growth* or *profitability*, it is assumed that after achieving these goals there will be new ones. In addition, it is expected from the collaborative influencer, that one influences relevant stakeholders over and over again. Consequently, *innovating*, *aiming towards goals* and *influencing* are expected to be repeated continuously in the future.

Finally, the discourse of constant motion provides an insight about what is not desired in the research material and within the concepts of an ideal leader. Ideal leaders are not desired to be passive, calm or patient. It is not expected that an ideal leader would develop the organization or its members by approaching development from careful, long-term perspective through which the organization would be improved slowly over time. Instead, an ideal leader is wished to be ready to act by a *fast-paced* manner. Thus, an ideal leader considers organizations from a perspective that considers leading and working as something that needs to be implemented quickly and actively. Therefore, the discourse of constant motion directs the production of the concepts of an ideal leader by approving only certain kinds of qualities and behavior, while simultaneously excluding those which do not reflect the discourse of continuous movement.

5.2.3 Utility Discourse

Third discourse that enables the production of the concepts of an ideal leader is the *utility discourse*. This represents how the concepts are produced in relation to certain desires, wishes and expectations given for an ideal leader. This discourse represents especially the organizational desires: defining the purpose of the production of the concepts of ideal leaders, and thus giving them a justification. An ideal leader must then be *an influencer*, *a high-flyer* or

an innovator. Thus, through the utility discourse, potential candidates can understand the expected role of an ideal leader as well as which kind of outcomes are desired from one. Therefore, the utility discourse highlights how the concepts of an ideal leader are produced to accomplish certain tasks, desires and goals.

Utility discourse is recognizable in all three concepts of an ideal leader. Inspirational innovator as an ideal leader is desired to *develop* and *innovate* as well as produce *new possibilities* and *improve* the organization to be better; thus, the purpose of the inspirational innovator is to change the organization from the present condition to something else. Efficient high-flyer instead drives *growth* and *achieves results* as an ideal leader, i.e. one needs to achieve the goals which are defined through the economic indicators. Thus, the efficient high-flyer is expected to improve the organization from the economic and competitive perspective. Similarly, the collaborative influencer is expected to be able to *influence* other people through certain sets of skills and qualities. Consequently, the utility discourse highlights the role of specific desires which directs the production of the concepts of an ideal leader.

Thus, the utility discourse represents how the social context and practices of job advertisements are part of certain conditions of labor markets and organizations, where it is natural to drive certain purposes. It is then taken as granted that the concepts of an ideal leader represent perspectives that are considered as a common sense from the perspective of utility discourse. Furthermore, utility discourse represents how the desires and goals are defined by a certain manner. Therefore, *motivating* or *inspiring* others are important only when an ideal leader is able to transform this action to outcomes of *innovativeness* or *profits*. Consequently, the concepts are meaningful only when they are directing an ideal leader to act behalf of an organization. Utility is then defined from the perspective of organizational desires. Influencing stakeholders, innovating new ideas or achieving goals are meaningful only if they benefit the organization by growing profit for instance.

Finally, all three discourses can be considered in relation to each other. There are two recognizable aspects of the discourses as part of the production of the concepts of an ideal leader. First, discourses can be seen as supporting each other. For instance, the discourse of constant motion and utility discourse can be considered to support each other: constant motion and the emphasis of active and energetic behavior is providing a possibility for an ideal leader to benefit the organizations repeatedly. Thus, utility discourse and discourse of constant motion provides a combination that reflects organizational desires, and thus directs the production of

the concepts of an ideal leader. However, since the concepts of an ideal leader are produced and defined by a certain manner, it is possible that found discourses may prevent the organizational desires from being achieved. For instance, since the individual discourse defines an ideal leader through a certain kind of lens, there is a possibility that other types of concepts of an ideal leader are not produced, although it could be more beneficial from the perspective of organizational goals and desires (utility discourse). Similarly, the desired outcomes that are produced through the utility discourse could be achieved better if the discourse of constant motion would not exclude various qualities and behavior outside the concepts of an ideal leader.

6 Conclusions

In this chapter, my purpose is to conclude the main findings of this study. I have answered to two research questions:

1. Which kind of concepts of an ideal leader are produced in the context of job advertisements?
2. Which discourses enable the production of the concepts of an ideal leader?

Findings of the first research question show that there are three concepts of an ideal leader that are produced in the context of job advertisements through a systematic repetition of certain desired qualities, skills and behavior. These are called in this study as the *inspirational innovator*, *efficient high-flyer* and *collaborative influencer*. Findings of the second research question show that there are three main discourses which enable the production of the concepts of an ideal leader. These discourses are the *individual discourse*, *discourse of continuous movement* and *utility discourse*. Here, I summarize the main aspects of the results.

First concept of an ideal leader is the inspirational innovator. Inspirational innovator is an ideal leader which can be described as enthusiastic, inspirational and determined. These are considered as sets of qualities: Enthusiastic refers to an individual who is active, positive, energetic and proactive. Inspirational and determined instead as sets of qualities refers to an ideal leader, who has creativity, innovativeness and vision, and is determined to answer to future challenges and lead others at the forefront, i.e. act as an example to others. Through the above qualities it is desired that the inspirational innovator would be an individual who can develop and improve the organization and its members as well as oneself as a leader. In addition, developing and improving is considered to continue as an ongoing process in the concept of inspirational innovator.

Second concept of an ideal leader is the efficient high-flyer. Efficient high-flyer is an ideal leader which can be described as an ambitious and rational individual with an entrepreneurial mindset. Similarly to the concept of the inspirational innovator, also the main qualities of efficient high-flyer are sets of similar qualities. Thus, here an ideal leader is ambitious because one has an initiative-taking mindset and is proactive and determined to achieve agreed goals as well as ready to take responsibility of the results. Rationality refers to how an ideal leader is achieving the goals: by analyzing, calculating, controlling uncertainties, solving problems and critically approaching different challenges, i.e. by approaching organization rationally.

Entrepreneurial mindset instead describes the general orientation of the efficient high-flyer. From this perspective, an ideal leader is someone who is business-oriented, has a will to achieve results and understands the importance of commonly used economic indicators. Through above abilities an ideal leader is described as an individual who can efficiently direct the organization and its members towards success. Success in this concept is mostly defined through the economic indicators such as profit, sales and cost-effectiveness.

Third concept of an ideal leader is the collaborative influencer. Collaborative influencer is desired to have international interaction and communication skills, to be an individual who is cooperative and enjoys working with others and has an ability to influence others. International interaction and communication skills refer to a solid, excellent or superior skill level in English as well as to strong verbal and written interaction and communication skills. Cooperativeness means that the collaborative influencer is an individual who is easily approachable, trustworthy, a pleasant colleague and able to build long-lasting relationships with stakeholders. Therefore, an ideal leader has a good relationship to the stakeholders, and thus one has possibilities to influence them. Indeed, through the cooperative qualities and international interaction and communication skills, it is desired that the collaborative influencer can influence the stakeholders on behalf of the organizational desires.

First discourse that answers to the second research question is the individual discourse. Individual discourse emphasizes an approach where an ideal leader is considered above all as an individual, and thus one alone is expected to have an impact on the organization and its members. Thus, it is the ideal leader as an individual who can motivate, inspire, achieve goals, influence and so forth. Because of the individual discourse, the concepts of an ideal leader are produced upon two different aspects: first, describing which kind of personality and qualities an ideal leader as an individual needs to have, and secondly, providing certain types of desired behavior that is connected to the individual qualities. Consequently, the individual discourse makes the concepts of an ideal leader as they are represented to seem as a common sense: through the lens of the individual discourse, the desires and expectations of an ideal leader are taken as granted. Thus, through the individual discourse the concepts themselves are naturalized, interpreted and understood, providing a possibility for the concepts of an ideal leader to exist and be reproduced.

Second discourse is the discourse of constant motion. This highlights which kind of an individual is desired and how one is expected to act continuously as a leader. In addition, the

discourse of constant motion makes visible the cross-organizational mindset directing the production of the concepts of an ideal leader. Many of the qualities desired within the concepts of an ideal leader refer to an active and moving individual who can repeat certain behavior over time. It is desired that an ideal leader is a proactive, innovative, energetic and flexible individual with an initiative-taking, collaborative, develop-oriented and sales-driven mindset. Moreover, these are connected to the desires of certain behavior of an ideal leader: one is expected to influence, innovate, inspire and achieve results. However, these qualities, skills and behavior are expected to keep going on continuously: one's work does not end when the results are achieved or the organization is improved, but instead, after this an ideal leader tries to achieve new results and continues to develop the organization. Furthermore, one important aspect of this discourse is that the qualities, skills and behavior which would have referred to anything else than constant motion were mainly missing from the research material. Thus, the discourse of constant motion highlights how organizations are considered to continuously move forward.

Third discourse is the utility discourse. Utility discourse provides a lens to the relationship between the concepts of an ideal leader and organizational desires. Therefore, it highlights how the concepts are produced in relation to organizational goals and desired outcomes, making them valuable and meaningful from the perspective of organizations. Therefore, the efficient high-flyer is important only when one achieves results as a leader. Similarly, the concept of collaborative influencer is valuable to the organization as long as one can influence the stakeholders. Thus, the utility discourse provides a lens through which the concepts of an ideal leader are considered as organizational means: they are produced in relation to certain organizational goals, which are in the core of the concepts. From this aspect, the utility discourse connects the concepts of an ideal leader to the broader thinking embedded in the labor markets, where organizations are considered as units which are competing against each other. This approach provides the desired behavior of achieving, influencing or developing to be taken as a common sense. Consequently, the concepts of an ideal leader are naturalized by the utility discourse which normalizes the perspective that considers organizations as units that are meant to act by a manner that benefits themselves.

7 Discussion

In this chapter, my objective is to discuss about the results and their implications. This chapter is structured by following: I begin by discussing which kind of implications the result of this study has and may have. What does the concepts of an ideal leader and the enabling discourses imply in relation to previous research? Which kind of questions or perspectives arise from the results of this study? Which kind of potential consequences the results may have from the perspective of previous studies? Thus, I discuss both the scientific and organizational implications of the results. In the second part of this chapter, I evaluate how suitable the research approach was in relation to the research questions. How did I succeed in answering to the research questions? Therefore, my aim is to discuss how the theoretical framework and methodological decisions worked in relation to the research questions. Finally, in this chapter I present the suggestions for further research.

7.1 Implications of this Study

In this study my first research mission was to study *which kind of concepts of an ideal leader are produced in the context of job advertisements*. This study shows that there are three different concepts of an ideal leader produced in the context of job advertisements, which are combinations of certain qualities, skills and behavior that are desired from leaders. These concepts are the *inspirational innovator*, *efficient high-flyer* and *collaborative influencer*. Qualities, skills and behavior within these concepts were found to be emerging in relation to each other in the context of job advertisements. For instance, one of the concepts of an ideal leader, *inspirational innovator*, is expected to be enthusiastic, innovative and inspirational, because one is desired to improve and develop organizations and its members as a leader. Therefore, ideal qualities, such as being enthusiastic, innovative and inspirational, are important only in relation to an ideal leader who is expected to develop and improve the organization, i.e. to behave by a certain way.

This relation between qualities, skills and desired behavior makes visible how the concepts of an ideal leader are connected to the power relations; how they represent certain aspirations of organizations. Since leaders are wished to be certain kind of individuals and perform by a certain way, the concepts of an ideal leader represent organizational desires, i.e. what is wished and expected. The concept of *collaborative influencer* is desired to influence stakeholders, *inspirational innovator* is desired to develop and improve the organization (i.e. to change), and

efficient high-flyer is desired to bring success for the organization. Thus, these leader ideals represent the desires of employers (Powers 2021, 14).

Indeed, this study shows that the concepts of an ideal leader are produced around certain desires, indicating what an ideal leader is desired to be and do as part of the organization. Thus, all three concepts of an ideal leader make visible how job advertisements are not only means to recruit new candidates, but also a site of systems of meanings, i.e. discourses, that are representing different positions, perspectives and relationships (Fairclough 2003, 124). From this perspective, this study provides new knowledge about how different desired qualities, skills and behavior are not only producing certain kind of an ideal leader but are also represented and understood in relation to each other. Therefore, the findings provide an insight to the taken-as-granted nature of the concepts of an ideal leader within job advertisements by analyzing how the concepts of an ideal leader are produced from certain perspectives, positions, relations and desires.

Moreover, the concepts of an ideal leader found in this study shows how there are certain qualities, skills and behavior which are defined by various organizations in the context of job advertisements. According to Väänänen and Turtiainen (2014b, 21), this is how organizations communicate explicitly which kind of an ideal leader is desired, and simultaneously, they communicate which kind of leaders are not desired by emphasizing certain qualities and skills. Thus, they define the concepts of an ideal leader by including only certain qualities, skills and behavior, while excluding others. Therefore, as argued in Scholz's (2015, 46) study, the concepts of an ideal leader found in this study provide information about which kind of ideal leaders are allowed. Simultaneously, as Bernhard and Russmann (2024, 613) have argued, job advertisements provide information about which kind of leaders organizations are seeking in contemporary labor markets. From this perspective, the concepts found in this study provide information about which kind of ideal leaders are desired in contemporary labor markets in Finland.

In addition, the qualities, skills and behavior desired within the concepts of ideal leader are mostly found in previous research made in the context of Nordic countries in the 21st century: goal-orientation, result-driven attitude, strategical competence, networking abilities, drivenness towards success, innovativeness, creativity, capability to develop and improve, and communication and interaction skills are all emphasized in previous studies (Sølvberg 2023 1204–1208; Askehave & Zethsen 2014, 537–539; Askehave 2010, 232–328; Varje et al. 2013,

252–259). Therefore, this research supports the findings of other studies which have recognized similar kind of ideals that are desired from a leader in the 21st century in Nordic countries. However, only theme that was not highlighted in this study compared the above ones was the relevant education. Although many job advertisements of this study included expectations of certain education, the diversity of the positions meant that it was not demanded systematically through the research material. Many open positions of supervisors did not demand certain education compared to top-level positions where it was mandatory. Thus, it is important to note that above studies have analyzed leader ideals by studying certain positions or organizational levels, and thus ideal qualities, skills and behavior may have different hierarchies depending about the research material. Consequently, although this study shows that many ideals are shared between different organizational levels, it is still possible that these ideals are emphasized differently when examining certain field, positions or organizational levels.

There were numerous qualities and skills that were included in the concepts of an ideal leader. For instance, the *collaborative influencer* needs to have solid, excellent or superior international communication and interaction skills, must be able to summarize and present complex topics by a simplified manner, maintain strong relationships with others through cooperation skills, and to be an excellent networker among stakeholders. In addition, it is desired that the *collaborative influencer* is easily approachable, a pleasant colleague, trustworthy, casual, good listener, a team player and so forth. According to Varje (2014), at least from the 1980s onwards especially leader ideals have intensified in the context of job advertisements. This means that the number of expected qualities and skills have risen strongly and the ways of describing certain skills have become more demanding within job advertisements. Thus, it is not enough to possess different skills, but one needs to have good, strong, excellent or superior skills (Varje 2014, 64–69; 80–84). Both perspectives are clearly visible in the results of this study. An ideal leader must possess such many qualities and different skills that it is unlikely for an individual to be able to meet all the requirements.

This brings me to a question which I already started to ponder in the middle of the analysis process. Do recruiters, who are producing and publishing job advertisements of different leader roles, really have knowledge about which kind of a leader they need into their organization? This question is justified since it is not rare that the desired qualities, skills and behavior of two or three concepts of an ideal leader can be found from a single job advertisement. In addition, same qualities, skills and behavior desired from a leader are frequently repeated in job

advertisements between different fields as well as organizational levels. Thus, why it is that a supervisor and a director must share similar qualities?

Here, my interpretation is that the concepts of an ideal leader are representing more about beliefs related to leaders than they are necessary telling about organizational needs. As Jännäri and others (2018, 547) argue, job advertisements do project cultural beliefs related to skills and qualities that are thought to be needed in certain positions. However, above question of why leaders in different organizational levels do share similarly desired qualities, skills and behavior, could not be answered in this study. Instead, what can be argued from the perspective of the results of this study is that, indeed, there are a significant number of similar qualities and skills that are shared across different organizations and organizational levels.

When discussing about if the concepts of an ideal leader do represent the organizational needs or not, the results which answer to the second research question of *which discourses enable the production of the concepts of an ideal leader* becomes valuable. This study found that there are three discourses which enable the production of the concepts of an idea leader: *individual discourse*, *discourse of constant motion* and *utility discourse*. Especially *utility discourse* provides interesting information when it is compared to the three concepts of an ideal leader. *Utility discourse* shows how the concepts found in this study are produced in relation to certain organizational aims. *Collaborative influencer* is desired to *influence* relevant stakeholders, *efficient high-flyer* is about *achieving results* from an economic perspective, and *inspirational innovator* is wished to *develop* and *improve* the organization.

However, I must ask how it is that the desired qualities, skills and behavior do frequently emerge as they do in relation to the *utility discourse*? If it is important that the *efficient high-flyer* has a capability to achieve (economic) goals, why it is necessary for one to be proactive, flexible, independent, responsible or determined? How it is that an individual in this concept must be able to deal with stress, solve problems, think critically and have tolerance for pressure? If the utility perspective, e.g. achieving results, influencing stakeholders or developing and improving the organization, is important from the perspective of recruiters, why do they define the ideal leader candidate by using the same qualities between different positions and organizational levels? These questions are justified, since as Rios and others (2020, 84–85) found in their study, often skills suggested by academic literature are not generally demanded in job advertisements. Indeed, if the organizational desires are important, the concepts of an ideal leader appear to be relatively systematically defined, meaning that certain qualities, skills

and behavior are clearly emphasized in the job advertisements, excluding possibilities for different kind of concepts of an ideal leader to emerge. As the *discourse of constant motion* and *individual discourse* indicates, it might be more important for recruiters to define the concepts through a certain kind of ideal leader than merely to emphasize the perspective of *utility discourse*.

For instance, all three concepts of an ideal leader include desired qualities, skills and behavior that refers to *constant motion*. Thus, they emphasize qualities which describe the ideal leader as active, energetic, proactive, enthusiastic, motivated, optimistic, determined, efficient and so forth; suggesting that an ideal leader is someone who constantly brings movement to the organization. These kind of qualities within the concepts of an ideal leader suggests that the concepts are following the idea which claims that work has become more personal. As Julkunen (2008, 122–123) argues, professional competence and skills are not enough in contemporary working life, but instead a professional needs to involve in the working life by bringing one's feelings, senses and other personal attributes to the work as well. Similarly, Aro (2006, 13) claims that professional competence is not enough anymore, and thus one must also demand active involvement from oneself as a member of the organization in contemporary working life. These kinds of ideals are visible within the *discourse of constant motion* and *individual discourse*. Latter one is represented in the results by framing the concepts of an ideal leader through the perspective where a leader as an individual who is thought to be a game changer. It is expected than the ideal leader is the one who inspires, motivates, develops, improves, achieves and so forth.

Moreover, all three discourses emphasize how ideals are produced within a certain socio-cultural context. As it is argued by Väänänen and Turtiainen (2014b, 18–20), certain socio-cultural conditions produce the possibilities and boundaries of ideals. From this perspective it is understandable why supervisors, managers and directors from different fields are desired to share similar qualities and skills: they reflect socio-cultural beliefs, aspirations, desires and values; they represent which kind of qualities and mind-sets are appreciated in contemporary labor markets in Finland. Thus, through the concepts of an ideal leader it becomes possible to make sense about the positions and roles of a leader; what is expected from a leader in this specific socio-cultural context. As Neely (2020, 272) notes, beliefs, discourses and practices provide a lens through which it is possible for people to make sense of their interactions and lives. In addition, Kim and Angnakoon (2016, 327) argues that desired and expected qualities reflect to job seekers that want to be competitive in the labor markets about what they need to

be and possess to be successful. From this perspective, the concepts of an ideal leader and the enabling discourses provide a way to adapt oneself to the ideals of job advertisements.

However, this kind of approach that emphasizes the concepts of an ideal leader as something that should be embodied is problematic from the perspective of previous research. Thus, it is important to discuss about the potential consequences of the concepts of an ideal leader. Although this study does not provide new knowledge about the consequences, there are certain aspects that need to be pondered. Moreover, the consequences are an important discussion from the perspective of a critical discourse analysis. As Fairclough (2003, 124) argues, “discourses not only represent the world as it is (or rather it is seen to be), but they are also projective, imaginaries, representing the possible worlds which are different from the actual world, and tied into projects to change the world in particular directions.” Therefore, the concepts of an ideal leader and the discourses enabling these concepts should be discussed in relation to the direction where they are guiding and aiming.

According to Jännäri (2018, 30), when the ideal candidate is defined and established, it tends to become a norm in a certain position. Thus, the question is that do the ideals within the concepts of *collaborative influencer*, *efficient high-flyer* or *inspirational innovator* shift to those open positions which organizations are trying to fulfill through the recruitment process? In addition, do these ideals influence how leaders are measured in the workplace? Previous research indicates that both leaders and employees are measured through the norms and instruments that are shaped by ideals (Kmec et al. 2014, 64–65; Hesmert & Vogel 2024, 562–564). Thus, it is possible that the concepts of an ideal leader found in this study can have consequences beyond the social practice of job advertisements.

Especially, this is an important aspect to discuss from the perspective of recruitment processes. What do these results mean in relation to the previous research studying ideals within recruitment processes? As previous studies have shown, recruitment processes particularly are influenced by ideals that are connected to unequal practices and processes, where certain kind of participants are discriminated since they do not fit to the ideals (Meriläinen et al. 2015; Van den Brink & Benschop 2012). As argued by Meriläinen and others (2015, 13–15), sporty looking guys were evaluated as more potential leaders compared to unfit ones. From the perspective of the *discourse of constant motion*, which emphasized continuous movement and active personality, this can be a realistic concern.

Another question that needs to be emphasized is, that do the three concepts of an ideal leader include masculine qualities, that may lead to unequal decisions within recruitment processes? In the study of Van den Brink and Benschop (2012, 79–80) they found that women candidates were evaluated through the ideal image of a masculine leader, and thus a competitive and stressful environment were not evaluated as suitable for women. Indeed, similar qualities desired in a competitive and stressful environment were also found in this study, especially from the concept of *efficient high-flyer*. This concept emphasizes an ideal leader who has tolerance for stress, has a will to success, and is determined to achieve goals among other competitive qualities. Entrepreneurial qualities, which were found in above concept, were connected to a stereotypical image of a leader as a man (Dean & Ford 2017, 180–182). Therefore, based on the previous research there is a risk for unequal procedures within recruitment processes which emphasizes qualities, skills and behavior of the concept of *efficient high-flyer*.

Since both the concept of *efficient high-flyer* and the *discourse of constant motion* include qualities and aspects which have been connected to unequal evaluation and decisions within the recruitment processes in previous research (Meriläinen et al. 2015; Van den Brink & Benschop 2012), there is a possibility that the concepts of an ideal leader found in this study can be used as evaluative instruments that discriminates participants who do not fit to these ideals. Thus, the consequences could be, as Koivunen and others (2015, 3–4) have argued, that certain ideals produce inequality in labor markets, and in addition, thus ideals may prevent organizations to be able to recruit suitable persons, if they do not fit to the ideals. For instance, women have been found to be less likely to apply in open positions which represent masculine qualities (Bosak & Sczesny 2008, 686–687). Moreover, as Blommaert and Coenders (2024, 2484) have argued, these unequal procedures among the recruitment processes are not necessarily recognized by recruiters. This suggests that some ideals which were found in this study could be part of the production of unequal procedures which may have negative effects for the participants of recruitment processes as well as to the organization seeking for new leaders. Latter one especially is important to note from the practical perspective of recruitment processes, since recruitment is often recognized as “the most critical human resource function” of organizations (Taylor & Collines 2000, 304).

Finally, from the perspective of critical leadership studies, the *individual discourse* and *discourse of constant motion* are considered as problematic. Both discourses emphasized an ideal leader as an individual who gets things done. Thus, it is the individual who improves,

develops, motivates, achieves, inspires, influences and so forth. From the critical perspective, this kind of approach to leadership is following the traditional approach where an ideal leader is considered as a hero (Dean & Ford 2017, 178–179; Raelin 2016, 133–134). Critical leadership studies have been taking distinction to this kind of approach which emphasizes a leader as an individual as the core of leadership (Evans 2022, 417). Still, in the research material both discourses were visible on all three concepts of an ideal leader. In some cases, this was quite explicitly described in the research material: some organizations were seeking for a next rockstar, strategic visionary or key player. Therefore, the concepts of an ideal leader found in this study represent the traditional view of leadership which is considered through the lens of certain individual capabilities, qualities and skills. However, according to Evans (2022, 417–418), the ‘new wave’ of critical leadership studies approaches leadership as something that is practiced and co-created by everyone in the workplace. Although the concept of *collaborative influencer* did include desired qualities, skills and behavior, which fit to this critical conception of leadership, they were still mostly represented from the perspective of the *individual discourse*.

7.2 Suitability of the Research Approach and Limitations of this Study

Critical discourse analysis as an approach provided an excellent interpretative framework for analyzing the concepts of an ideal leader as well as the discourses enabling these concepts. Through this approach, it was possible for me to analyze which kind of concepts of an ideal leader are produced in the context of job advertisements, and how the concepts are connected to other expected qualities or behavior as well as organizational desires and discourses. Consequently, findings suggest that the concepts of an ideal leader are meaningful only in relation to the sets of qualities, which are connected to certain desired way of behaving as a leader. Moreover, expected qualities and behavior are desired to produce certain kind of outcomes for the benefit of an organization. Thus, the critical discourse analysis provided a lens through which I was able to ask and analyze two aspects: which kind of concepts of an ideal leader there are and how it is that certain concepts of an ideal leader are represented as they are? For these questions, a critical discourse analysis provided a suitable epistemological and ontological basis from which it was possible to answer at a deeper level to the research questions, and thus provide new knowledge about the concepts of an ideal leader in the context of job advertisements.

Moreover, previous research upon which the theoretical basis for studying leader ideals as a phenomenon in the context of job advertisements was built on, provided perspectives and definitions through which the research mission could be implemented. This basis was compatible with the critical discourse analysis, and as a whole they provided both the theoretical framework and interpretative framework through which the implementation of the research process proceeded without major challenges. In addition, previous research on ideals in organizational context – as well as in the context of job advertisements as part of the recruitment process – provided a basis through which the use of a critical discourse analysis as an approach was justified and needed for the research objective. Thus, the theoretical framework of ideals in an organizational context supported the critical orientation of this study.

The only aspect that I was not certain about within the methodological decisions was the research material, although afterwards it is safe to say that it provided deeper level knowledge than I was able to anticipate before the analysis process. I took a conscious risk with the research material, since I decided to gather job advertisements that were not from certain fields or positions, e.g. managers, supervisors or so forth. Instead, I gathered diverse research material from leader roles of various open positions. Here, my research material did differ from other previous studies of leader ideals in the context of job advertisements (e.g. Sølvsberg 2023; Askehave 2010; Varje 2014). However, previous research (e.g. Jännäri et al. 2018; Varje et al. 2013) indicated that there might be ideals that are shared between different organizations, positions and fields. Thus, uncertainty about the research material was based on the starting point where I had no examples from the usage of this kind of research material.

Another relevant perspective to discuss is the scope of the research material. For many qualities of the concepts of an ideal leader, the saturation point was reached in this research. Thus, additional material would not have provided new knowledge from the perspective of the research questions (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 99). Instead, it is possible that same results would have been reached with less research material, since many qualities of the concepts of an ideal leader were frequently repeated in the job advertisements. Thus, the qualities and behavior included to the concepts of an ideal leader represented well those expectations that were required across the research material. Consequently, the research material provided a suitable basis for the analysis process. In hindsight, the research material worked better than I anticipated before the analysis process.

Furthermore, there are certain limitations of this study. It is important to note that, although the concepts of an ideal leader were the ones which clearly were recognized during the analysis process, does not exclude the possibility of other kind of concepts of an ideal leader to exist. In contrast, from the perspective of a critical discourse analysis, discourses are always produced in relation to the network of discourses as well as other social practices and material conditions (Fairclough 1995, 76; Balogun et al. 2011, 768). In addition, a researcher is part of the systems of meanings which one is studying from the perspective of a critical discourse analysis, and thus the experiences, thoughts and feelings cannot be excluded from the research process (Juhila 2016, 411–413). Therefore, it is possible that beliefs, values and other aspects which unconsciously influences my thinking and behavior may have impacted to the research process.

Moreover, as Varje and others (2013, 252–259) found in their study, ideals in the context of job advertisements are considered in relation to societal transformations, and thus they tend to change over time. Therefore, the concepts of an ideal leader are understood as dynamic, changing representations of ideals that reflect the contemporary discourses, material conditions and social practices. Consequently, the results are always influenced by the socio-cultural conditions, and thus it is anticipated that the concepts of an ideal leader will change in the future. As Jännäri (2018, 31) notes, different contexts emphasize different elements of an ideal leader. Thus, since this study is made in the socio-cultural context of Finnish labor markets, the results may differ when the framework is applied into a different socio-cultural context.

7.3 Suggestions for Further Research

Finally, this study provides suggestions for further research. From the critical perspective, this study indicates that the consequences of the found concepts of an ideal leader should be studied further. As it has been discussed in this chapter, many of the desired qualities, skills and behavior are recognized in recent studies made in the Nordic countries (e.g. Sølvsberg 2023; Varje 2014; Askehave 2010). Moreover, many of the desired qualities, skills and behavior within the concepts of an ideal leader are connected to the biased decision-making in the recruitment process (Meriläinen et al. 2015; van den Brink & Benschop 2012) as well as they influence whether one decides to apply to the open position or not (Bosak & Sczesny 2008). Therefore, further research is needed to study how the found concepts of an ideal leader do influence the recruitment processes and the decisions of potential applicants.

Indeed, both the concepts of an ideal leader and the enabling discourses must be further studied. This study provides new knowledge about the frequently expected leader ideals and how they are produced in relation to each other within the context of job advertisements. Thus, it is important to study further how leader ideals are represented in different organizational levels or fields to provide better knowledge about which kind of leader ideals are desired and expected by employers. From this approach, it is possible to produce more specific knowledge of leader ideals within a certain context. In addition, this study encourages to use job advertisements as a research material, since they provide a suitable source to investigate especially discursive practices and organizational desires.

Moreover, this study indicates that the concepts of an ideal leader are understood from relatively narrow perspective. Therefore, further research is needed to provide knowledge about the desired qualities, skills and behavior. Why it is important that an ideal leader is energetic, enthusiastic, innovative, competitive and in constant motion? What kind of leadership is practiced through these qualities, skills, behavior and discourses? The relationship between the results of this study and their relation to leadership behavior is an important subject to study further, since it is important to understand which kind of leadership is acted through these concepts and discourses. In addition, from the perspective of recruitment process, it is important to study if the desired qualities, skills and behavior are emphasized in the recruitment process and how they transfer to the actual behavior of a leader.

Furthermore, this study suggests that job advertisements as an essential part of the recruitment process should be given more focus in organizations. As the results of this study indicates, there are certain problematic perspectives related to the concepts of an ideal leader. All concepts of an ideal leader demonstrate how the concepts are produced from similar, relatively narrow perspectives, defined by frequently repeated qualities, skills and behavior, and directed by certain discourses. In addition, the number of qualities suggest that an ideal leader should be a professional of various things, although the *utility discourse* shows how the desires are often quite explicitly described. Since the purpose of the job advertisements is to reach those candidates whose education, previous experience, personality and skillset would fit to a certain job position (Joki 2024, 68–70; Kim & Angnakoon 2016, 327), the results indicate that organizations are not necessarily able to define which kind of a leader they really need. Thus, organizations should re-evaluate whether it is practical to seek new leaders by describing dozens of qualities, since the results imply that often organizations mostly share the same desired qualities, skills and behavior, meaning that job advertisements are often desiring the

same kind of leaders. Thus, from the organizational perspective it is important to focus which kind of leaders are needed, which kind of aims are desired from a leader, and which kind of a leader would benefit the workplace and its members.

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Appendices

Figure 1. Theoretical concept of ideals in organizational context

Figure 2. Three types of meanings under the analysis

Figure 3. Four phases of the analysis process

Table 1. An ideal leader in Finnish job advertisements between 1949–2009

Table 2. Ideal leader types of elite employees in Norwegian job advertisements

Table 3. Examples of the phrases and words that directs towards the concepts of an ideal leader

Table 4. Example of a category and its components

Figure 1. Theoretical concept of ideals in organizational context

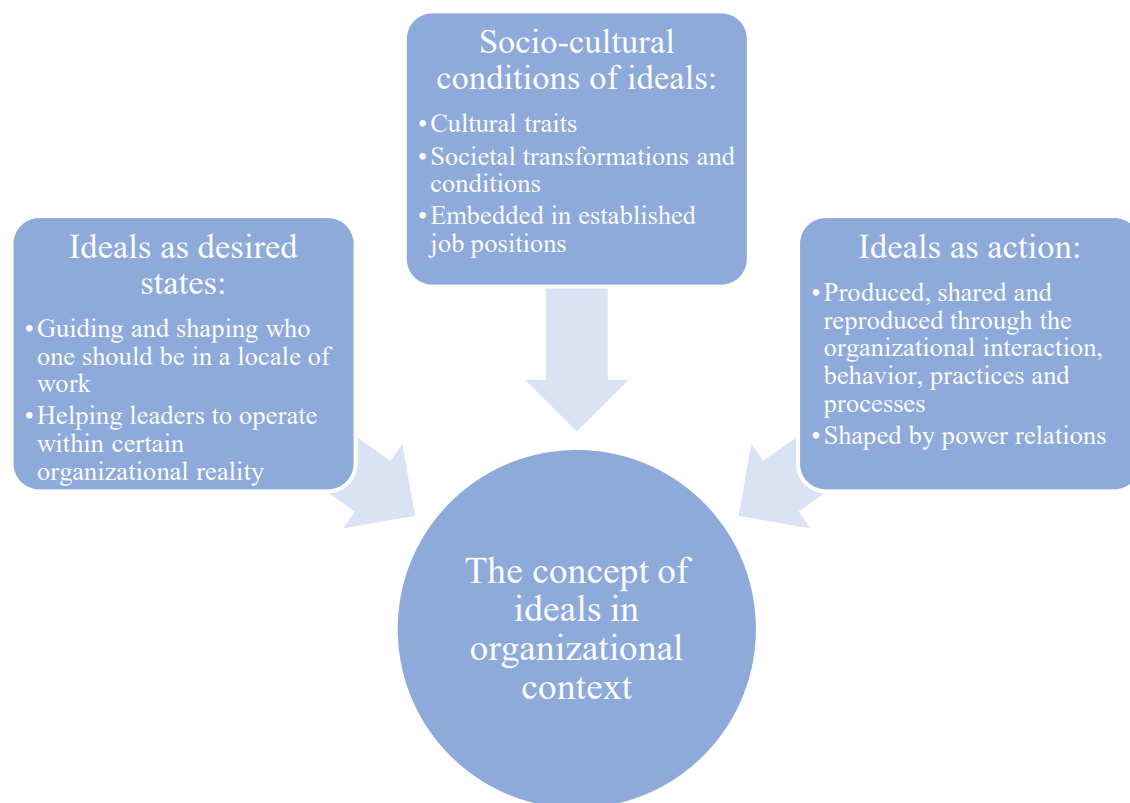
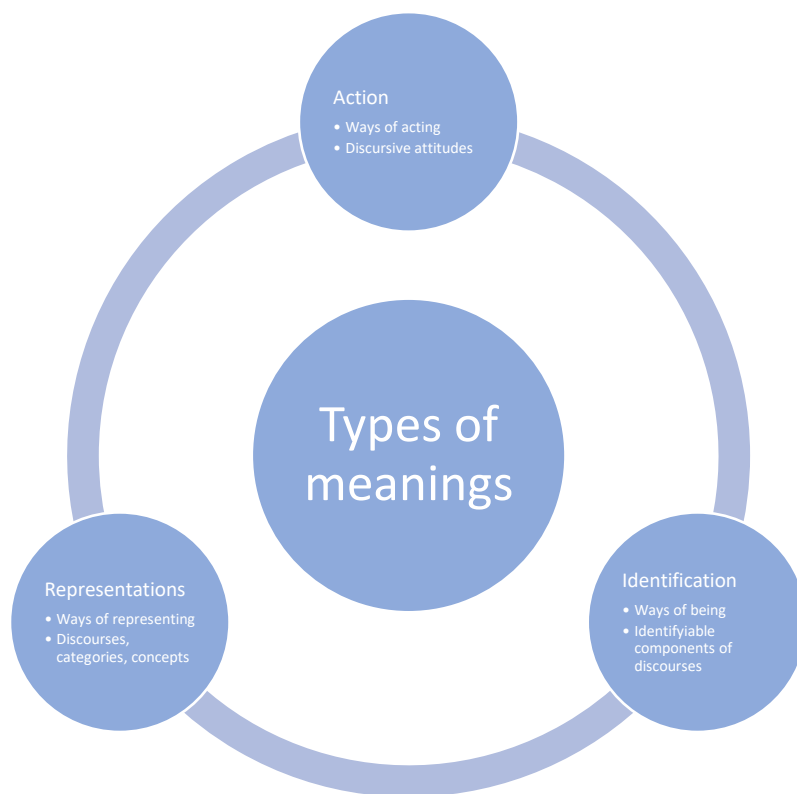


Figure 2. Three types of meanings under the analysis



Note. Adapted from Fairclough (2003)

Figure 3. Four phases of the analysis process

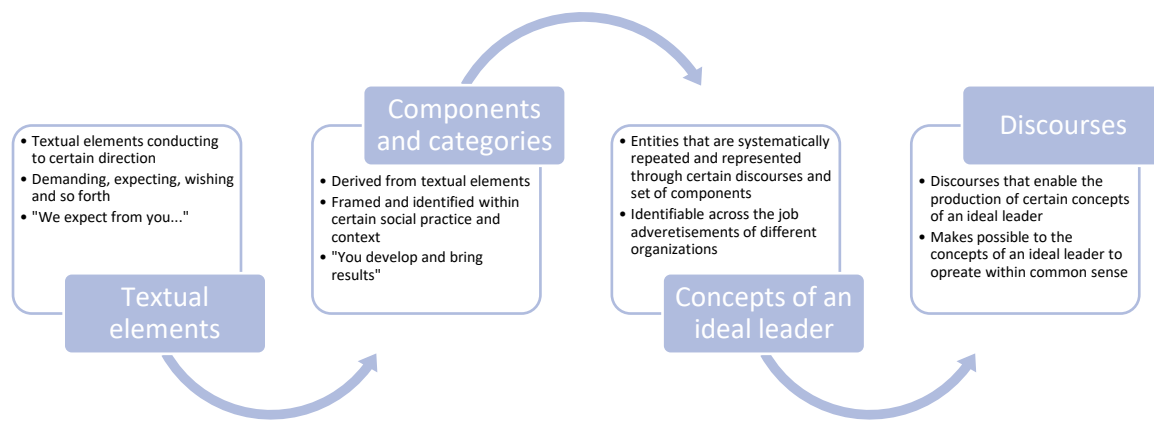


Table 1. An ideal leader in Finnish job advertisements between 1949–2009

Years	Ideal leader	Qualities of an ideal leader
1940–1950	Fully competent manager	• Technical skills of a certain profession • Ability to organize • Authoritative and paternalistic leadership • Appreciated: leadership training from the military
1960–1970	Cooperative manager	• Professional competence • Communication and interaction skills • Democratic leadership • Cooperative attitude • Self-development • Teamwork
1980–1990	Cooperative and inspiring manager	• Professional competence • Communication and interaction skills • Collaborative leadership • Cooperative attitude: manager as part of the team • Inspiring and encouraging employees to become more successful • Emotional sensitiveness • Competitiveness • An ideal person: open-mindedness, creative, positive, friendly, sensitive • Dynamic innovator • Entrepreneurial attitude • Result- and profit-orientated • Tolerance for stress
2000–2010	Competitive, dynamic and inspiring manager	• Professional competence • Good communication and interaction skills • Democratic and efficient leadership • Cooperative attitude: manager as part of the team • Inspiring and encouraging employees to become more successful • Emotional sensitiveness • Competitiveness • An ideal person: open-mindedness, creative, positive, friendly, sensitive • Dynamic innovator • Entrepreneurial attitude • Results- and profit-orientated • Good tolerance for stress • Highly efficient • Motivated to develop • Flexibility

Note. Adapted from Varje et al. (2013) and Varje (2014)

Table 2. Ideal leader types of elite employees in Norwegian job advertisements

Coaching leader	Authoritative leader
1. Higher education and relevant experience 2. Sociable networker: social, cooperation and communication skills, being energetic, enthusiastic, flexible and trustworthy 3. Abilities to improve one-self and others, motivating skills 4. Goal-oriented: results-driven attitude, being strategic, structured and ambitious 5. Work-specific personal skills: high capacity for work, analytical skills, being vigorous and independent worker, personal aptitude	1. Higher education and several years of relevant experience 2. Leadership skills, experience, confidence, capability to motivate 3. Result-oriented mindset, capacity to improve and develop 4. Ambitious, innovative and drivenness towards success 5. Good networking abilities: being enthusiastic, energetic, having good social and cooperative skills 6. Attitude of a hard worker, i.e. being analytical, vigorous, hardworking and resilience for work load

Note. Adapted from Sølvsberg (2023)

Table 3. Examples of the phrases and words that directs towards the concepts of an ideal leader

Directing phrases and words
• To be succesful in this role we expect you to have... • We hope that you have... • You are the one we are seeking for, if you have... • We expect from you... • We demand from you... • We wish from you... • Requirements: • Demands: • We expect from you: • What we demand from you: • It is important for us that you are... • You will be an excellent fit to our organization, if you are... • To be successful in this role, we expect you to have... • To succeed in this role, you will need... • For this role, we believe your starting point is: • In this role you need... • What do we require from you?

Table 4. Example of a category and its components

Category	Expected qualities and skills	Desired behavior
Innovative leader	Enthusiasm, energetic, creativity, determination, innovativeness, vision, future-oriented, will and ability to develop and improve	- Acts as an example - Develops functions and oneself