

ORGANIZATION

Humble Leadership

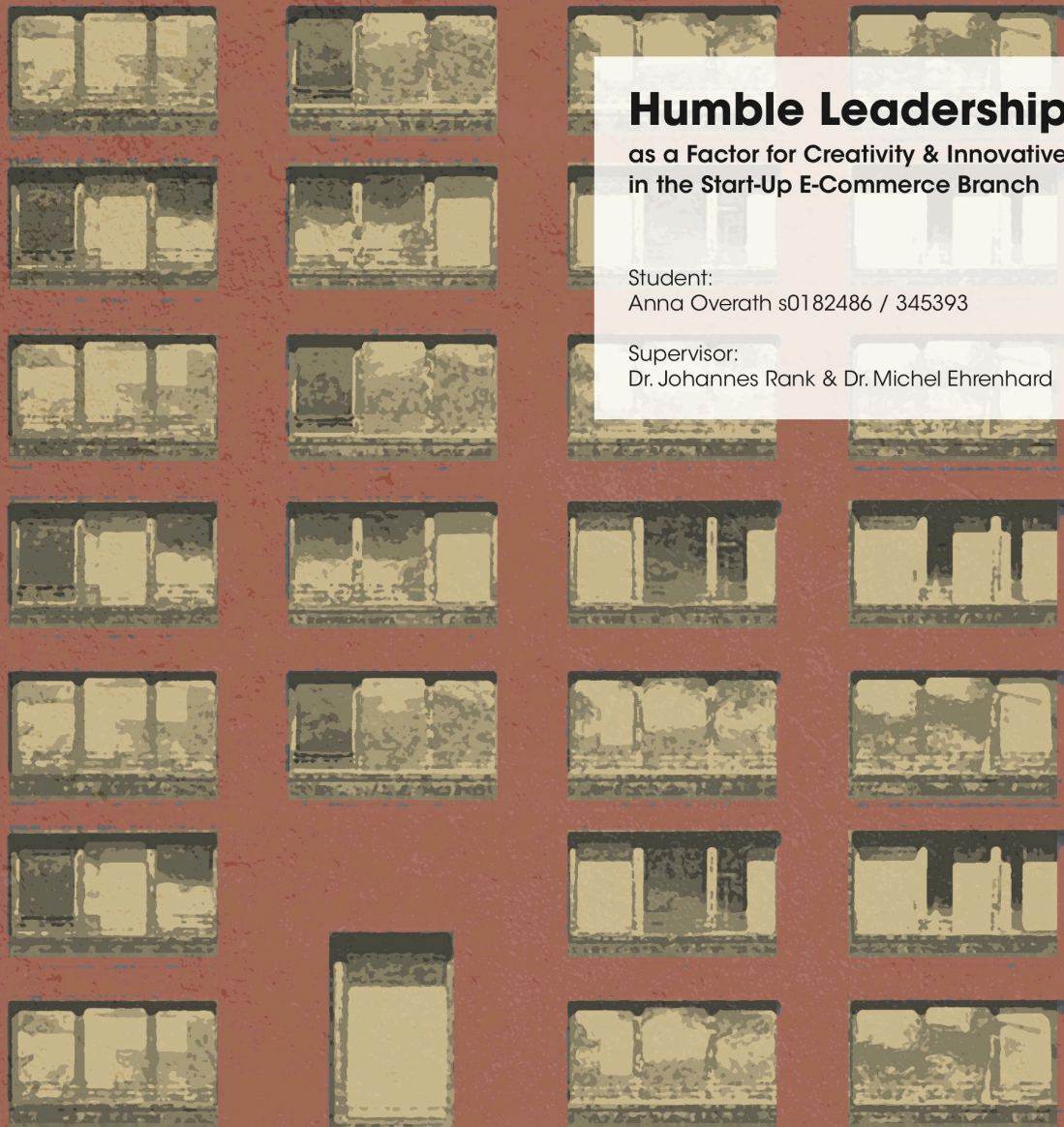
as a Factor for Creativity & Innovativeness
in the Start-Up E-Commerce Branch

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Acknowledgements

0. Abstract

Owens & Hekman (2012) came up with a new leadership style humble leadership which can be defined as a bottom-up leadership style, meaning that leaders consider their followers as equal and valuable cooperation partners who complement their leadership skills. This qualitative research was done with the purpose of discovering more about humble leadership behaviors and contingencies displayed as antecedents of humble behaviors that finally lead to the employee's creativity and innovativeness. Qualitative research is useful for theoretical elaboration. Since humble leadership has merely been investigated and no particular theories have been suggested, especially with regard to the employees' creativity and innovativeness, qualitative research in form of interviews is an approach to make first suggestions for the development of a theory. When it comes to the creativity and innovativeness of employees, all three humble behaviors defined by Owens and Hekman (2012) were confirmed to play a role. The interviewees described this as a non-direct relationship, since there are some motivating factors that can be regarded as mediators which stand in between. Throughout the study, four broad factors of contingencies (*type of decision, follower traits, leader traits and company environment*) could be defined, which allow leaders to behave humbly and can be regarded as antecedents of humble leadership behaviors. Further, this study contributes to research in the field of leadership and ambidexterity. However, during the interviews it became clear that a connection between humble leadership behaviors and the execution of ambidexterity is hard to detect and to explain for interviewees. Therefore, future studies should focus on that connection in order to make reliable conclusions.

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0.1 Quotation from Nelson Mandela (1)

“If you are humble, you are no threat to anybody. Some behave in a way that dominates others. That's a mistake. If you want the cooperation of humans around you, you must make them feel they are important – and you do that by being genuine and humble. You know that other people have qualities that may be better than your own. Let them express them.”

(Nelson Mandela, 2001)

1. The incentive for and purpose of this thesis

With growing globalization and growing complexity and diversity of firms, it becomes less feasible for leaders to know everything and lead alone at the top (Owens & Hekman, 2012). In honor of this occasion, the call for humility within leadership science is growing.

This thesis starts with a pertinent quotation from Nelson Mandela from 2001. It states that there are always humans around you that have other strengths than those you have. He believed that if you relied on cooperating with others or wanted to profit from their strengths you had to be genuine and humble. But what does he mean by humble? Owens and Hekman (2012) investigated a new leadership style that they called humble leadership. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relevance of humble leadership behaviors in conjunction with creativity and innovativeness of employees, for the role of several leadership constructs for creativity and innovation has already been examined in different studies (Murphy & Ensher, 2008).

During the last century, the science of leaders and leadership became increasingly important (Morris, Brotheridge & Urbanski, 2005). The glorification of leaders increased by characterizing them as idols, heroes, saviors, warriors and even magicians (Morris et al., 2005). CEO's, for example, appear more and more in the popular press where they are presented as a kind of superheroes who are considered to be accountable for organizational success and competitive advantage (Khurana, 2002). As early as 1994, Pfeffer argued that the workforce, and especially the way it is managed and organized by leaders, has become an important source of competitive advantage (Pfeffer, 1994).

Likewise, Reichard and Avolio (2005) showed with their meta-analysis of experimental and quasi-experimental leadership research that leadership can have several significant positive impacts. Therefore, according to Murphy and Ensher (2008), it is important that leaders are well “selected, trained and developed” (p.336) for modern-day organizations. Previous research focused on the theory of a transformational and charismatic leadership which is a popular approach to understand effective leadership (Hughes, Ginnet, & Curphy, 2003). Basadur (2004) found out that leaders do not only play a role on the team level but also when it comes to encouraging creative problem solving on an individual level (Murphy & Ensher, 2008). Leaders have impact on the creativity of individuals and teams by structuring and giving direction for problem solving, exercising influence, and balancing the need to be creative or innovative with the pressure from the organization to keep costs low (Mumford, Scott, Gaddis, & Strange, 2002). Shalley and Gilson (2004) speculated in their

review that the influence of leaders on creativity happens in an indirect relationship. Providing resources, training, job descriptions, rewards, and other factors, they act as mediators in this relationship like effect. De Jong and Den Hartog (2007) investigated how leaders can have an impact on their employees' innovative behavior. They found out that leaders influence innovative behavior through both, their deliberate actions which tend to foster the generation and application of ideas, as well as through their more general, daily behavior. To make clear the difference between creativity and innovation, I will refer to a definition of Baer (2012). He distinguishes between two activities within the concept of innovation: the development of creative ideas on the one hand and the actual implementation and usage of these ideas on the other hand. In order to entirely understand the Innovation process one needs to consider and investigate both activities and their relationship between one another. Creativity is the first step to innovation and innovation is crucial for long-term organizational success (Amabile, 1996).

Since leadership is shown to yield positive influence on a firm's competitiveness or to be more precise, is shown to be associated with creative and innovative behavior, Longenecker, Neubert and Fink (2006) believe that organizations must strive for a better understanding of factors that explain why managers fail to achieve their organizational goals. In their article they indicate that the highly volatile market environment that organizations face today creates a lot of pressure, especially on the managers of firms. At any time, managers at all levels must strive to achieve better results in order to stay competitive in the marketplace (Longenecker et al., 2006). In a highly dynamic and volatile business environment, and given the increasingly complex and diverse structures within organizations as mentioned above, it is merely impossible for leaders to know everything and lead alone at the top (Owens & Hekman, 2012; Longenecker et al., 2006). It is further indicated in a recent article in The Economic Times that "the moral dimension of the financial crisis has led to renewed interest in the ethics of executives, governments and regulated bodies" ("Why should a humble leader be put at the helm of an organization?", 2013), considering that '*Humility*' is an extremely important virtue of managers which had been overlooked in the realm of economics before. Owens' and Hekman's (2012) qualitative study is the first in which a model of humble leadership was suggested and defined and in this they investigated regarding behaviors, contingencies, mechanisms and outcomes. Humble leadership can be defined as a bottom-up leadership style, meaning that leaders consider their followers as equal and valuable cooperation partners who provide them with the necessary impetus, capabilities, resources and confidence to complement their leadership skills (Owens & Hekman, 2012).

Humble leadership dimensions may even be conducive to creativity and innovation, but these potential facilitating effects have not been researched yet.

As mentioned above Owens and Hekman (2012) made a start by identifying contingencies which influence the effectiveness of humble leadership behavior (Owens & Hekman, 2012). But exactly which situational contingency factors allow leaders to behave humbly? And which humble leadership behaviors are perceived as important for an employee's creativity and innovation?

Humble leaders show the three following behaviors: firstly, acknowledging personal limits, faults and mistakes. Secondly, spotlighting follower strengths and contributions. And thirdly, modeling teachability, which entails that humble leaders are perceived as rolemodels by their followers. Contingencies that were identified can be divided into two factors: personal and contextual. The leaders' competence as perceived by their followers is proposed to have an influence on the effectiveness of humble leadership. Such have the presence of extreme threat, time pressure, organizational learning culture and hierarchical structures, which are contextual factors influencing the effectiveness of humble leadership (Owens & Hekman, 2012).

As another factor within volatile market environments, Owens, Rowatt and Wilkins (2012) outline the importance of organizational learning as a source of competitive advantage. They refer to Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) who indicated that the most successful organizations were those who adapted more to their environment and adjusted quicker than their competitors to new circumstances in times of a turbulent market environment. Likewise, Owens and Hekman (2012) discuss in their article the concept of adaptability in connection with humble leaders. They believe that humble leaders may foster adaptability since "leaders admitting limitations, modeling teachability, and legitimizing uncertainty may provide the disequilibrium or shock to the system needed for an organization to stay in continuous change state and foster the unit reflexivity (reflection, planning and adaptation) needed for continual unit learning" (Swift & West, 1998) (p. 808). According to Birkinshaw and Gibson (2004) adaptability alone is not enough. They argue that successful organizations are not only able to quickly adapt towards new opportunities, to adjust to volatile markets and to avoid complacency, "but they are also good at exploiting the value of their proprietary assets, rolling out existing business models quickly taking the costs out of existing operations" (p. 47), what they call alignment. They believe that organizations that want to be successful in the long run need to be good at both – adaptation *and* alignment. This duality is mostly known

as “ambidexterity”. Since humility is often mentioned in connection with fostering adaptability, it would be interesting to examine how humble leadership facilitates ambidexterity. Likewise, Birkinshaw and Gibson (2004) call for more investigation concerning the role of leadership in regard to ambidexterity.

1.1 Scientific & Practical Relevance

As mentioned above, previous studies show that leadership styles are positively associated with creativity at both, the individual and the group level (Murphy & Ensher, 2008). But humble leadership has hardly ever been investigated (Owens & Hekman, 2012). The researcher of this study was especially interested in conceiving detailed, subjective and contextualized perceptions and interpretations of leaders with regard to the following constructs: humble leadership, ambidexterity, creativity and innovation, and the potential underlying relationships.

The goal of this study is to fill a gap in research by investigating if and how humble leadership impacts creativity and innovation (on an individual level and/or group level). Furthermore, organizational structures have gotten more complex and diverse as a result of an increasing globalization. Therefore, it is worthwhile to clarify this complexity by defining which contingency factors have an effect on the relationship of humble leadership and creativity & innovation. The concept of ambidexterity in regard to leadership styles has barely been analyzed. This research will be for a first step towards closing this research gap by examining how humble leadership may play a role in facilitating ambidexterity. In addition, this research contributes to the theoretical development in the field of leadership. When it is shown that leaders subjectively consider humble leader behaviors to be relevant for creativity and innovativeness and ambidexterity, further innovation-oriented research may profit from this study.

Besides the scientific relevance, this study can be considered for efficient leadership implementation and it can directly give practical implications for managers. The goal is to obtain information useful to both organizations and individual managers interested in improving their employees’ creativity and innovativeness in these dynamic and turbulent times. This analysis will examine how a leadership style like humble leadership is related to organizational outcome variables such as creativity and innovation on an individual level. The study furthermore describes which circumstances may facilitate or prevent that managers behave humbly and it will give practical advice on how this can be done. Executives

themselves could pick up these suggestions in order to enhance their firm's organizational performance in terms of creativity and innovation. Therefore, this research contributes to the science of leadership development, training and selection. Since interviews will be conducted with executives operating in the e-commerce market, practical implications will be branch specific. The objective and main aim of this study is to clarify whether humble leadership behavior plays a role for employee's creativity and innovativeness in the start-up e-commerce branch.

1.2 Research Questions

The e-commerce sector has been chosen for two reasons: on the one hand because of its accessibility and on the other hand because it is a rapidly growing, volatile and relatively new market, in which employees are forced to be creative and innovative in order to stay competitive. Further, it tests whether the above mentioned constructs of humble leadership and creativity and innovation are really influencing each other and in a last step to find out which contingency factors are perceived to facilitate or diminish a leaders ability to behave humbly. It is also explored if and how humble leadership has an influence on ambidexterity. Thereby, the subjective impressions of leaders in innovation-relevant contexts are of peculiar interest. In order to do so the following three research questions were formulated based on the main concepts introduced above:

- (1) Which aspects of humble leadership behavior do managers perceive as being important for an employee's creativity and innovation?*
- (2) From a leader's perspective, how does humble leadership facilitate innovation-relevant ambidexterity?*
- (3) Which situational contingency factors allow leaders in innovation-related contexts to behave humbly?*

In paragraph 3 the whole method (3.1 Research Design; 3.2 Participants; 3.3 Data Collection; 3.3.1 Instrument; 3.4 Data Coding & Analysis) to investigate the presented research questions will be described. Results and discussion will follow in chapter 4.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Main Concepts

In the following sections the main concepts of Humble Leadership (2.1.1), creativity and innovation as an outcome of leaders' behaviors to encourage competitive advantage (2.1.2), Contingencies of Humble Leadership (2.1.3), and Ambidexterity (2.1.4) will be discussed in detail. After a specific description of each concept the research questions of this study will be presented in paragraph 2.2.

2.1.1 Humble Leadership

Humility as a personality trait and virtue has long been a subject of research in many cultures that could be traced back to the early Greek philosophers (Morris et al., 2005). Contemporarily, humility is no longer merely seen as a trait but also as a behavior (Owen, Rowatt & Wilkins, 2012). Frequently, humility is viewed as a weakness and described as related to shyness, passivity or a lack of ambition and confidence (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004) – unlike Owens and Hekman did (2012). According to the two researchers (2012), humble leadership is a bottom-up leadership style. In other words “leading from the ground” (p.788), meaning that leaders consider their followers as equal and valuable cooperation partners, who provide them with the necessary impetus, capabilities, resources and confidence to complement their leadership skills. As mentioned before, in times of a highly volatile and turbulent market environment the interest in humility as a leadership concept has grown, since it is merely impossible for leaders to know everything and lead alone at the top (Owens & Hekman, 2012; Longenecker et al., 2006). Therefore, humility is not seen as a weakness anymore, but as a power that strengthens leaders and the organizations they working in (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004; Morris et al., 2005; Nielsen, Marrone & Slay, 2010; Owens & Hekman, 2012). According to Vera and Rodriguez-Lopez (2004) “humility offers strategic value for firms by furnishing organizational members with a realistic perspective of themselves, the firm, and the environment” (p.393). Likewise, Peterson and Seligman (2004) describe humility as a desire to look at oneself objectively and a willingness to take an accurate look at oneself.

Owens & Hekman (2012) were the first to explore the behaviors, contingencies, mechanisms and outcomes of this new leadership style. Behaviors of leaders that perform a humble leadership style include: 1) Acknowledging personal limits, faults and mistakes, 2)

spotlighting follower strengths and contributions and 3) modeling teachability. See table 1. for an overview of results from their study underneath.

Humble Leader Behaviors 1. Admitting Mistakes & Limitations 2. Spotlighting Follower Strengths & Contributions 3. Modeling Teachability				
Contingencies		Follower Perceptions		Reported Outcomes
<i>Leader Traits</i>	<i>Contextual Factors</i>	<i>Becoming</i>	<i>Doing</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competence • Sincerity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Threat & Time Pressure • Learning Culture • Hierarchical Adherence 	Legitimization of Followers' Developmental Journeys	Legitimization of Uncertainty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluidity of Organizing • Follower Engagement • Psychological Freedom • Continuous Small Change

Table 1. Overview of Owen's and Hekman's Study (2012)

The acknowledgment of personal limits and mistakes implies that humble leaders openly admit that they are not perfect and that it is human nature to make mistakes (Owens & Hekman, 2012). The acceptance of follower mistakes is beneficial for their development because it renders it possible to learn from made mistakes. Further, followers are not afraid of making mistakes anymore and hence perform confidently in achieving their goals. Humble leaders frequently recognize, appreciate, honor, praise the strengths, and compliment the work and efforts of followers (Owens & Hekman, 2012). Modeling teachability means that humble leaders serve as models for learning by showing openness to follower input, advice, ideas and feedback and by listening before they speak, by stepping into the role of followers or by giving followers the chance to overcome difficult situations and challenges by putting themselves into the role of a leader (Owens & Hekman, 2012).

The following possible outcomes or effects of humble leadership can be derived from Owens' and Hekman's study: increased relational satisfaction, loyalty and trust, enhanced psychological freedom of followers, followers who feel more secure to be themselves and subsequently do not lie about their specific knowledge (meaning that they do not pretend to know something that they do not know in practice). According to Amabile (1996), the engagement and intrinsic motivation of followers is equally increased which is an indicator for creative behavior. Furthermore, humble leader behaviors continually enhance adaptation

and adjustments of followers. Consequently, humble leaders emphasize the importance of an organizational climate of learning and experimentation where followers feel free and confident while testing their own approaches to solve upcoming problems (Owen & Hekman, 2012).

2.1.2 Creativity & Innovation

It is considerably evident that employee creativity can be conducive to organizational innovation, effectiveness, and survival (Amabile, 1996; Nonaka, 1991, West & Sacramento, 2012). With arising internationalization in markets it becomes inevitable to foster innovativeness within an organization in order to stay competitive within the markets (West & Sacramento, 2012). Baer (2012) distinguishes between two activities within the concept of innovation: on the one hand the development of creative ideas and on the other hand the actual implementation and usage of these ideas. In order to entirely understand the innovation process one needs to consider and investigate both activities and their relationship. Therefore, creativity is the first step towards innovation and innovation is crucial for organizational success in the long-term (Amabile, 1996). According to Amabile (1996) “a product or response will be judged as creative to the extent that (a) it is novel and appropriate, useful, correct or valuable response to the task at hand and (b) the task is heuristic rather than algorithmic” (p. 35). Therefore, creativity could range between incremental/ stepwise and radical/ breakthrough innovations (Shalley, Zhou & Oldham, 2004). Comparably, Baer (2012) describes that creative and innovative ideas are novel but useful. Novelty, in this case, may produce uncertainty and withdrawal which result in a resistance to implement new ideas. Implementation instrumentality describes the motivation to really engage in the implementation of employees’ ideas. It is likely to moderate the relationship between creativity and implementation. Further, Baer defines idea implementation as a social-political process, based on, amongst others, Van de Ven’s findings in 1986. Employees are able to influence this social-political process by their “ability to cultivate and use their social networks or, alternatively, the strength of their actual relationships” which in turn enhances the likelihood that their creative ideas will actually be implemented.

In the Componential Theory of Creativity Amabile and Müller (2008) tried to study creativity, its processes and its antecedents. They state that three internal components within the individual (intrinsic motivation, domain-relevant skills, and creativity-relevant processes) and one external component outside the individual (the work environment) influence the

creative process and the subsequent creative outcome which grows according to the level of each component (Amabile & Müller, 2008). The creative process is composed of four steps: 1) problem or task identification 2) preparation 3) response generation and 4) response validation and communication. In Figure 1 you can see a graphical depiction of the componential theory.

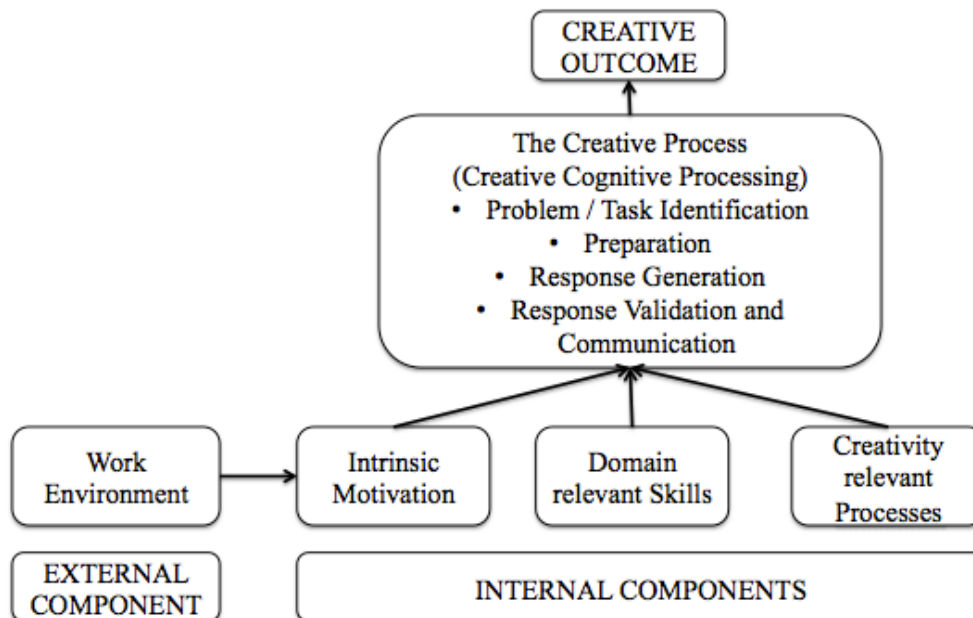


Figure 1. Graphical Depiction of Amabile's Componential Theory of Creativity

According to Ford (1996), creativity is “a process that is deliberately and intentionally undertaken” (Unsworth & Clegg, 2010; p. 77). Ford (1996) identifies three factors that convince or discourage employees to engage in creative actions: 1) a person who has a creativity oriented schema would more easily realize creative possibilities than a person who holds on to common structures, 2) motivation evolves from goals, rewards, capabilities, and emotions, and 3) knowledge and skills. Ford's theory of creativity (1996) tries to explain why employees become active in a creative way and therefore accomplish the first step towards innovation.

Amabile and colleagues (1996) did research in order to assess the work environment for creativity. They came up with the KEYS scale which is a questionnaire scale to assess work environment factors that are beneficial for and detrimental to creativity. Six stimulant scales (organizational encouragement, supervisory encouragement, work group supports, sufficient resources, challenging work, and freedom) and two obstacle scales (organizational impediments and workload pressure) were identified. Furthermore, Unsworth and Clegg

(2010) found out that work motivation, creativity requirements, cultural support for creativity, time resources, and autonomy were used as cues by employees in deciding if they undertake creative action. Judgmental processes of expectancy and instrumentality follow the perceiving of such cues. Shalley, Zhou, and Oldham (2004) demonstrated that individual characteristics, such as personality and the cognitive style of the respective employee, as well as contextual characteristics have influence on creativity. Besides task complexity and time pressure, interpersonal support, psychological safety, goal setting and feedback are contextual characteristics said to have significant impact on enhancing creativity (Shalley et al., 2004; George, 2007; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010). Interpersonal support entails that a supportive and non-controlling leader who values creativity is helping his or her employees to perform creativity. Further, in an environment in which employees believe that others will respond positively when they speak up, they will report problems or propose new ideas and display more creative behavior. Finally, constructive and developmental performance feedback is shown to have a positive impact on creativity while critical evaluation would have a negative impact on it. Shalley et al. (2004) found out that interaction effects between personality and contextual factors exist.

De Jong and Den Hartog (2007) investigated how leaders can have an impact on their employees' innovative behavior. They found out that leaders influence innovative behavior through both their deliberate actions tending to foster idea generation and application, as well as by their more general, daily behavior. They identified 13 leader behaviors that have been found to have a connection with the innovative behavior of employees. Innovative role modeling, providing vision, consulting, delegating, supporting innovation, recognition, and monitoring are shown to be connected with both creativity and innovativeness. See Appendix IV for a full overview of leader behaviors that were identified in De Jong's and Den Hartog's study.

2.1.3 Contingencies

Morris et al. (2005) investigated traits that predict humility and behaviors that are likely to show up when levels of humility are high. They suggest that high levels of narcissism, Machiavellianism, low self-esteem and defensively high self-esteem predict lower levels of humility – whereas high levels of emotional awareness and management suggest high levels of humility. This applies to what Peterson and Seligman (2004) stated: humility is a desire or willingness to look at oneself objectively and accurately. Further, they assume that leader

humility predicts three different outcomes in terms of leader behaviors: 1) supportiveness towards others, 2) socialized power motivation, and 3) participative leadership behaviors. However, these findings were based on a literature review. They did not substantiate their suggestions by conducting research.

Owens and Hekman (2012) made a start in identifying contingencies that influence the effectiveness of humble leadership behavior within their research (Owens & Hekman, 2012). They divided these factors into personal (perceived competence, sincerity) and contextual factors (presence of extreme threat and time pressure, organizational learning culture, hierarchical context). They found out that humility was only effective in leadership when the executive was perceived as competent, especially when it came to acknowledging personal limits, faults and mistakes. Perceived competence often depends on external signals of authority which entails that lower-level leaders, younger leaders, and female leaders “may be more reticent to display humility by admitting mistakes and limitations because their competence is more likely to be called into question” (Owens and Hekman, 2012; p. 797). Authenticity is shown to be especially important in order to perceive praise as sincere. Therefore, spotlighting follower strengths and contributions was only positively associated when leaders “provided honest substantive compliments, described true follower strengths, and genuinely appreciated the contributions of others” (Owens and Hekman, 2012; p. 798). The efficiency of modeling teachability depends on three contextual contingency factors. In times of extreme threat and time pressure, modeling teachability is less effective since followers express the need for clearer orders. In an organizational culture that facilitates learning, modeling teachability achieves more success. Interviewees in Owens and Hekman’s (2012) study report many ways how to encourage such a culture (p.800) but this should be investigated more detailed in further research. Hierarchical structures of the organization influence the effectiveness of all three humble behaviors in a way that such behaviors were seen as more serious in strong hierarchical contexts. Further, in their study they found out that in less hierarchical structures humble leadership behavior seems to be less risky and has fewer interpersonal costs since in top-down situations executives are expected to lead their followers. However, when humble leadership is still displayed appears to reveal greater reward in terms of engagement, trust and loyalty of followers.

Owens’ and Hekmans’ (2012) contingency factors can be regarded as moderators that have an influence on the effectiveness of humble leadership behaviors. In this study the focus

lies on identifying situational contingency factors that allow leaders to behave humbly and can rather be regarded as antecedents than as moderators.

2.1.4 Ambidexterity

As previously indicated, quick organizational learning and the ability to adapt to the environment is shown to be a competitive advantage for being a successful organization in times of a turbulent and volatile market environment (Owens, Rowatt & Wilkins, 2012; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). But according to Birkinshaw and Gibson (2004) adaptability alone is not enough. They argue that successful organizations are not only able to quickly adapt to new opportunities, to adjust to volatile markets and to avoid complacency “but they are also good at exploiting the value of their proprietary assets, rolling out existing business models quickly taking the costs out of existing operations” (p. 47), what they call alignment. They believe that organizations that want to be successful in the long run need to be good at both – adaptation *and* alignment. This duality is defined as “ambidexterity”.

Ambidexterity has to be classified along with performance management, which is a daily activity that includes a set of processes and managerial behaviors aimed at defining, measuring, motivating, and developing the desired performance of employees (Kinicki, Jacobson, Peterson & Prussia, 2013). According to the Behavioral Complexity Theory (BCT) (Hooijberg & Quinn, 1992), effective leaders must adjust their behaviour in order to support each employee’s individual role to guarantee their success, ergo effective leaders must lead and manage at the same time. The behavioral complexity of leading employees is that the role has to include both managerial functions as well as leadership functions at the same time.

O’Reilly and Tushman (2004) argue that executives must constantly keep existing products and processes under review and improvement (incremental innovations) in order to be more efficient and to deliver a greater value to customers while they also have to constantly discover new trends (radical innovations). In this context, they refer to a “mental balancing act” (p.74) for executives which is probably one of the toughest of all managerial challenges. During their studies they found out that organizations that were successful at both separate the exploitative from the explorational processes by using different responsible business units in order to allow individual processes, structures, and cultures. They manage these organizational separations by implementing tight links across these units via the senior executive level. Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004) call this a structural ambidexterity while

introducing a new concept of ambidexterity in their article. Organizational researchers have come to recognize that is important to achieve both exploitation and exploration simultaneously. Contextual ambidexterity refers to the behavioral capacity to simultaneously demonstrate alignment and adaptability across an entire business unit. Goshal and Bartlett (1994) suggest that contextual ambidexterity could be achieved by a supportive organization context which can be built by leaders. Meta-capabilities, such as stretch, discipline, support and trust, are essential for alignment and adaptability and must be facilitated by building a carefully selected set of systems and processes. With their qualitative research Goshal and Bartlett found out that besides facilitating a supportive organization context, senior executives play an essential role in encouraging contextual ambidexterity by serving as a good example, modeling the adaptable behavior, and then rewarding and recognizing it. This is in line with Owen's and Hekman's (2012) opinion that humble leaders may foster adaptability since "leaders admitting limitations, modeling teachability, and legitimizing uncertainty may provide the disequilibrium or shock to the system that is needed for an organization to stay in a state of continuous change and foster the unit reflexivity (reflection, planning and adaptation), which is essential for continual unit learning." (Swift & West, 1998) (p. 808). Since humility is often mentioned linked with fostering adaptability, it would be interesting to examine how humble leadership facilitates ambidexterity. Which is why Birkinshaw and Gibson (2004) call for more researches concerning the role of leadership in regard to ambidexterity.

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

In their interview study, Murphy and Ensher (2008) suggested qualitative research methods in order to close the gap between leadership research and practice. They assume qualitative studies to be the most efficient for three reasons: firstly, qualitative research enables the researcher to understand how leadership is exercised in different ways at varying hierarchical levels. Secondly, since leadership is a dynamic process this tool can add depth and richness to research results. These qualities are lacking in the data gathered from mere questionnaires. And least but not last, leadership is often considered as a '*socially constructed role*', therefore, in order to understand the construct based on multiple perspectives, qualitative methods are helpful. Ergo, in this research all of the three reasons were taken into consideration and found to be important. However, this thesis does not only follow scientific interests, but its results can be useful to managers on a practical level.

Nevertheless, the main focus of this thesis lies on the contribution to scientific literature in the field of leadership. Humble leadership as well as the relationship of humble leadership with creative and innovative behavior at individual, group or organizational levels is hardly investigated (Owens & Hekman, 2012). Similarly, the connection between leadership and ambidexterity and its consequences is not explored at all (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004). Hence, this research entails mostly an inductionist approach (Blumberg, Cooper & Schneider, 2008; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009) since it explores newly developed research questions. The goal is to develop a conceptual research model based on collected data for future research. However, this analysis also includes deductive elements and general theoretical constructs from former literature which were used as its basis. Theoretical constructs such as the three dimensions of Humble Leadership identified by Owens and Hekman (2012) were applied. The interviews display a moderate level of structure and the answers will be interpreted reflecting the interviewees', in this case the leaders' subjective impressions of their real life outside the interview situation. Therefore, according to King's threefold classification of qualitative interview types (2004), this approach can be classified as a realistic qualitative approach. According to Chell (2004) the critical incident technique (CIT) has been developed for organizational analysis and is appropriate for a phenomenological approach. This technique and how it is used will be explained in more detail in paragraph 3.3.1.

3.2 Participants

The participants of this study are 20 male executives between the age of 26 and 40 from different working environments, such as software engineering, online marketing, sales, operations, product management, quality assurance, design, as well as human resources. The leaders who were interviewed come from varying hierarchical levels (from team leaders, senior managers, heads and founders as well as co-founders to managing directors and CEO's) who all have the managerial responsibility for at least three employees. They all acquired leadership experience since more than one year. On average they are $\mu=31$ years old and have $\mu=4$ years and 6 months direct managerial responsibility for $\mu=9$ employees. Although their range of tasks differs considerably, they share the commonality that they all are working or have worked until recently in the start-up e-commerce sector in Berlin, which makes this sample branch specific.

The selection of participants has been made based on a purposive non-probability sampling. As mentioned before, the e-commerce sector has been chosen for two reasons: on the one hand because of its accessibility and on the other hand because it is a rapidly growing, volatile and relatively new market, in which employees are forced to be creative and innovative in order to stay competitive. And because these participants all work within the start-up scene, they must support their respective organization in an early phase, when creativity and innovation are crucial in order to differentiate their firm from others. They all declared that their followers have to be creative and innovative on a regular or daily basis. Most participants indicated their followers to be creative in terms of process innovation. Due to the fact that they work and support companies in relatively early stages, unforeseen problems can always show up for which they need to find creative solutions.

3.3 Data Collection

Before the actual data collection of 20 semi-structured interviews with managers started, several steps had to be completed: first an Interview guideline was designed (Appendix 1), which will be further described and explained in paragraph 3.3.1. In the second step this guideline was reviewed by this thesis' first supervisor. After accommodating and integrating the feedback it was sent to a Head of HR within the e-commerce branch who reviewed it a second time. Respondents had been recruited through social software platforms such as Xing and LinkedIn. Matching candidates were defined by searching companies within the start-up

branch. Familiar means in this context that all companies were consulted by the same business incubator. Potential respondents were contacted via the message function and appointments with respondents were organized. All interviews have been conducted in a timeframe of 1 month. Before starting the interview, participants were informed about all circumstances of the interview. These were also explained within the informed consent (Appendix 2) which had to be signed before they could participate in the study. This will serve as a security for the respondent as well as for the interviewer. The interviews started with an introduction of some underlying theoretical concepts of Humble Leadership. Since the interviewer of this study is interested in the participants' views on the approach, the interview was designed based on the critical incident technique, a method designed by Flanagan in 1954, in order to keep bias on a low level. The duration of the interviews lay between 30 and 60 minutes and all were recorded electronically and later transcribed by the interviewer. During the interviews notes were taken and also transcribed in the form of memos in order to enhance reliability and credibility of the analysis (Kenealy, 2004). After the third interview, the interviewer reflected on the interview guideline and made a small adjustment which will be explained more detailed in the next section.

3.3.1 Instrument

The interview can be divided into three broad sections of questions. The first one is about the demographical background of the interviewees. The second section entails questions concerning behaviors in humble leadership and contingency factors that facilitate or interfere with humble behaviors. Further, it focuses on the relation between humble leadership and the employees' creativity and innovativeness. The last section is about finding out which role humble leadership plays with regards to ambidexterity.

The interview guideline was designed based on the critical incident technique (Appendix 1). The critical incident technique is a procedure for collecting observed incidents that are significant and meet a special criterion (Flanagan, 1954). In the reported situation, this special criterion has to be obvious with all its consequences to the observer. According to Chell (2004), this technique has been developed for organizational analysis and appropriate for a phenomenological approach. Flanagan (1954), however, pursued to fulfill a realistic approach with this method, as does this study. Since the interview questions show a moderate level of structure they leave enough space to reflect the interviewees' subjective impressions, attitudes and orientation of their real life in a situation in which a particular criterion has

shown up. The critical incident technique has to imply the following six aspects in order to be effective (Chell, 2004):

1. introducing the CIT method and getting the interview under way
2. focusing the theme and giving an account of oneself as researcher to the respondent
3. controlling the interview, by probing the incidents and clarifying one's understanding
4. concluding the interview
5. taking care of ethical issues
6. analyzing the data

Following these six aspects the interviews were conducted. As you can see in Appendix 1, questions like “Können sie mir eine Situation nennen und erläutern, in der Sie sich ‘humble’ beziehungsweise ‘bescheiden’ verhalten haben gegenüber ihren Mitarbeitern? *(Nehmen Sie sich etwas Zeit, um ein gutes Beispiel zu finden. Wenn es mehrere gibt wählen sie das, das am wenigsten weit zurückliegt)*“ – in English: “Can you describe a situation in which you behaved very ‘humble’ towards your followers? *(You can take your time to find a good example. When there are multiple examples, then choose the most recent, please)*” were asked in order to find a personal incident of humble behavior that the interviewee can remember. By asking follow up questions, answers concerning concrete behaviors were specified, for example: “Welches Verhalten haben Sie genau gezeigt? Was haben Sie genau gemacht – bitte beschreiben Sie mit mehr Detail. Was waren die Bedingungen oder welche Faktoren haben Sie besonders motiviert, sich humble/bescheiden zu verhalten?“ – in English “Which specific behavior did you show? What did you do exactly – please describe in more detail! Which contingency factor played a role that motivated you to behave humbly?” In case respondents showed difficulties in responding to these questions the interviewer referred to the three humble behaviors that were identified by Owens & Hekman (2012) which were explained in former sections of this study (§1.1; §2.1.1). Further, the opposite was asked - meaning that the Interviewer asked for incidents in which respondents did not behave humbly at all. Again, follow-up questions were asked concerning concrete behaviors. As stated above, a small adjustment of the guideline was made after the third interview. Interviewees seemed to be irritated by the word ‘ambidexterity’. Therefore, when introducing the theoretical concept of ambidexterity in the last part of the interview, the word was no longer used, and was replaced by an explanation describing the two different processes within ambidexterity.

Objectivity of results was increased by analyzing a comprehensive set of incidents from which a classification system could be deduced afterwards (Chell, 2004; Flanagan,

1954). As previously mentioned, this research comprises an analysis of 20 semi-structured interviews. How this analysis and the classification system were derived is explained in the next paragraph.

3.4 Data Coding & Analysis

In a first step, the interviews were transcribed so that a written report of all interviews was available. Demographical information about each person was recorded in a chart in order to be coherent and easy to inspect. After that, the data was analyzed guided by the Grounded Theory and Template Analysis Technique.

According to King (2004), Template Analysis is a more flexible technique which uses fewer specified procedures. This brings the advantage that researchers are permitted to tailor it in a way that it fits their own requirements (King, 2004). The hierarchical coding procedure in Template Analysis is noteworthy, since it allows researchers to analyze the data at “varying levels of specificity” (King, 2004; p. 258). The process of coding entails three concepts: 1) It begins with forming an initial template by using at least a few pre-defined codes. In this research these codes will be derived from former literature regarding Humble Leadership. Predefined codes were principally based on Owens & Hekman who made a start in exploring the behaviors, contingencies, mechanisms and outcomes of Humble Leadership. These codes will be more specifically introduced in chapter 4. 2) After that the template will be revised – meaning that quotations from the transcripts which are important for answering the research questions will be identified and dedicated to the appropriate code. During this process, the initial code will be modified 3) in order to achieve the end version.

The aim of Grounded Theory is to understand which concepts play a role in the relevant field the researcher wishes to understand (Lämsäsalmi, Peiro & Kivimäki, 2004). By adding Grounded Theory analysis the researcher is given the possibility “to discover the theory implicit in the data” (Kenealy, 2012; p. 408). Especially when it comes to the analysis of how humble leadership may influence ambidexterity, Grounded Theory makes sense since it is not at all explored and, therefore, requires an inductive approach (Lämsäsalmi et al., 2004). All Interviews were coded based on Strauss’ and Corbin’s (1998) procedure. In this procedure open coding is applied, where data units are described by labels which reflect the data’s meaning which is subsequently aggregated in categories. In the second step of axial coding, relationships between these categories are identified. Constant comparison of both, within interviews and between interviews, allows to identify similarities and differences

between categories. When differences are found, the researcher investigates possible underlying reasons. In the last step, the selective coding, categories are integrated in order to produce a theory. In this stage a central core category will be identified to which categories from former stages are related. During the interviews it is recognizable that a theoretical saturation has been reached, since respondents do not tell anything groundbreaking new meaning that concepts obtain a well-developed and verified stage (Lämsäsalmi et al., 2004).

According to Corbin and Strauss (2008) it is important in qualitative research to ensure a high degree of credibility. Credibility is reached when “findings are trustworthy and believable in that they reflect participants’, researchers’, and readers’ experiences with a phenomenon” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 302). Some techniques were used to strengthen credibility in this research. First, the researcher showed a prolonged engagement in the start-up e-commerce branch during five months internship within the HR Department. Profound insights into this branch will help to understand the underlying meaning of the respondents’ answers. Further, during the analysis and theory development phase, a participant’s words were used, meaning ‘*in vivo*’ codes and actual quotations from respondents will be presented in paragraph 4 of this thesis. Besides providing detailed data descriptions and transcriptions, short and reflective memos about conspicuities were written during the interviews and will be provided in the Appendix as well. Irregular feedback sessions occurred with this thesis’ first supervisor in order to discuss findings and the analyzing processes. Additionally, two participants checked their interview evaluations in order to enhance the reliability. The participants agreed with the researcher’s interpretations. The researcher participated in academic seminars about qualitative research within the field of creativity and leadership for the purpose of developing expert knowledge in the respective field. In the following paragraph the findings will be presented and subsequently discussed.

4. Results

All interviews were coded as described in paragraph 3.4. Subsequent to the first coding round, 600 Codes were reduced to approximately 200 codes to keep track of those which were directly and obviously associated with the research questions. On the next page in table 2 identified core categories, categories and labels will be presented. This table is followed by a model (Figure 2) which shows the underlying connections between categories and themes. In the following sections detailed results of the analyses are presented. First the critical incidents for both, humble and non-humble behaviors in leadership situations will be presented in general in paragraph 4.1. Secondly, in order to answer the three research questions findings will be presented and discussed in paragraphs 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4.

Overall, respondents confirmed that due to the fast moving internet e-commerce branch, creativity and innovativeness of employees is indispensable in order to stay competitive. Although the interviewees are working in very different contexts they reported that nearly everyone in the departments is confronted with and asked to be creative as well as to be innovative – especially in form of process innovation. Due to the fact that they work and support companies in relatively early stages, unforeseen problems can always show up for which they need to find creative solutions. Eighteen respondents stated that processes always need to get better and more efficient than those from competitors. Two respondents talked about process as well as product-innovations within the department. Software and system engineers, web designers and quality assurance leaders, which are all departments with a highly technical background, were said to be confronted with and obliged to convert technology innovations (e.g. new soft- and hardware systems). Regarding ambidexterity, three interviewees reported that incremental innovation had to be separated from radical innovation in form of structural ambidexterity. They employ small units or small teams that only focus on finding radical ideas. All others described to have a contextual ambidexterity but do not consciously focus on both. However, everyone approved both processes to be important – albeit the fact that the degree of the innovation depends on the project, the phase the project is in, the age of the department or the company, and the complexity of processes as well as of the organization. According to interviewees, incremental innovations occur more often and therefore call for a bigger focus even though they are not part of a conscious process. Incremental innovations are seen as more predictable, safer and nearly risk-free, with a manageable horizon. Radical innovations were explained to be oriented towards the market

and therefore happen less frequently since incremental innovations can also be introduced by the company itself.

Core Categories	Categories	Labels
1) Humble Leadership Behaviors	Executives admitting mistakes & weaknesses	“For me personally it is not possible to know everything alone.”
	Executives spotlighting followers as experts	“I do not see myself as an expert. I hire good people to make the job. I see myself as a coordinator.” (No 15) “There are two kinds of careers – the expert career and the management career. I am following the management career.”
	Executives serving as a role model of learning for followers	“I always ask my experts to teach me things I do not understand.” “I explain what mistakes we did in former projects and ask for ideas for a problem’s solution.”
2) Situational Contingency Factors	Type of Decision	Long-term vs short-term decisions Internal vs external decisions
	Follower Traits	Competence Autonomy Time disposition Entrepreneurial thinking
	Leader Traits	Competence Time disposition Private situation
	Company Environment	Branch Hierarchical structure Age distribution Company culture/principles Task type
3) Outcomes	Motivators	Motivation Trust Ownership feeling Variety of tasks Mindset for learning
	Creativity	“Since we are a very performance driven company it is always important to be creative in order to be better than competitors.” (No 11)
	Incremental Innovation	“Incremental innovation is detected by employees themselves during the daily business.” (No 20)
	Radical Innovation	“For radical innovation you need to disrupt the system.” (No 5)

Table 2. Overview of Coding Procedure

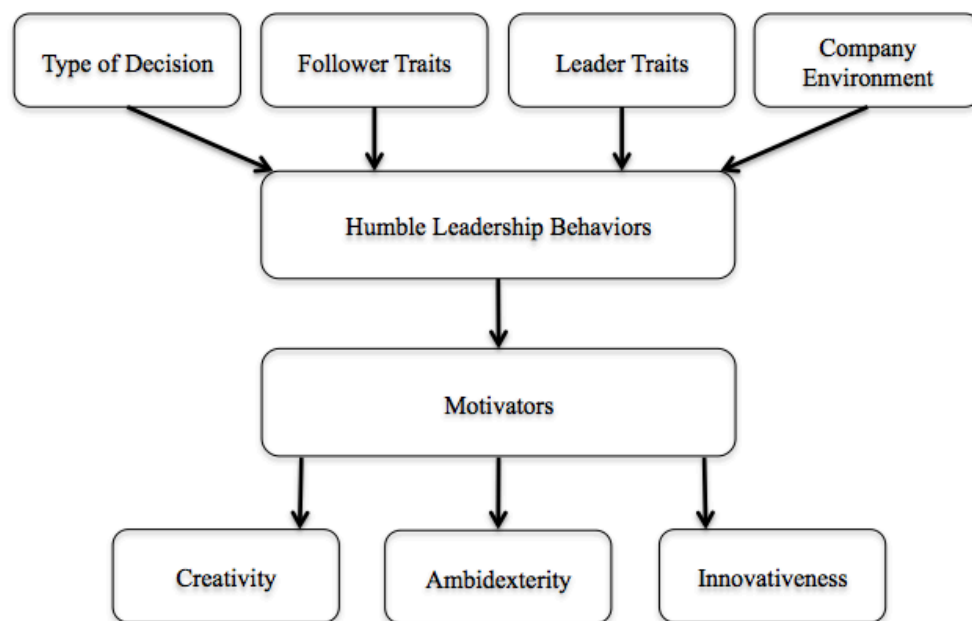


Figure 2. Full general model of this study

4.1 Critical Incidents for humble and non-humble behaviors in leadership situations

The Critical Incident Technique was used in order to collect incidents that were significant and meet a special criterion – in this case situations in which leaders show humble behaviors and situations in which they show non-humble behaviors. These had to be obvious to the observer with all their consequences. Especially when it comes to incidents during situations in which leaders did not perform humbly at all, one can detect strong similarities. Leaders explain to not behave humbly when employees do not work diligently and accurately. Written and unwritten rules exist in every company that have to be followed by employees – otherwise leaders are forced to become more authoritative in order to enforce certain limits. But not only rules have to be adhered but also decisions that had been made and had been delegated for execution must be accepted. When such decisions are ignored leaders adjust their subsequent behaviors towards employees in a more authoritative direction. In some cases, employees are not the sole reason why leaders behave in a more authoritative way. When projects do not turn out the expected way, leaders are in demand to react and sometimes have to restart at an earlier point so that it will eventually reach its main goals again. Projects can lose their right course due to an employee's poor decisions but also due to external circumstances like shifts of markets or a changed in customer target group etc. Under

such circumstances leaders defined their not-humble but rather authoritative actions as reducing their employees' creativity and innovativeness by strongly controlling their working tasks. Consequently, leaders are more strongly involved in projects and in the operative daily businesses. Further, they do not leave as much space for discussions, make decisions themselves and delegate them top-down afterwards. Two of the leaders described that in such situations they "get louder" (Interview No 3 & 9) – especially when followers ignore decisions or do not work diligently on a willful and conscious basis.

"If a project runs against the wall and you really need to save it quite fast. Then you have to say to your employees 'you now have to do this, do that!'. But the team will understand in that moment. Since then you have to be strict and say 'I will take the lead now and you just have to do what I say to get it right quickly. And actually it does not hurt you, because after that it's over'." (Interview No 6)

All in all, leaders reported to behave humble in situations or projects where employees were asked to be creative as well as innovative. In situations where employees had to execute tasks and work on operative levels in order to achieve predefined targets leaders do not behave humbly. Creativity itself is not asked when leaders decide to behave in a more authoritative way. Although leaders described that in such situations the disposition to undertake creative action is reduced.

„It is definitely less creative. But at least they will fulfill the execution. There is quite a difference if you check progress every day, if you look what has been done and what needs to be done. We can see clearly then, the execution is much better, but the creativity is less. I mean, it is simply not the creative Facebook campaign..." (Interview No 9)

Similarities in incidents that favor humble behavior are more difficult to define. In interviews, leaders often talked about meetings or weekly stand-ups where they openly discuss their own weaknesses or problems within the company and admit their employees' strengths. During these meetings employees were asked to engage in discussions and contribute with their expert knowledge. Leaders see themselves more as moderators of these meetings rather than as a speaker.

In the next paragraph (4.2) specific humble behaviors by leaders will be presented that were perceived as important by followers during a creative and innovative process.

4.2 Humble behaviors perceived as important for the employees' creative and innovative action

Leaders see themselves as coordinators who are aware of the bigger picture. They do not define themselves as experts. When expert knowledge or a creative approach to solving a problem are needed during a project, they rely on their employees. In order to achieve an efficient level of involvement of these employees, leaders explained that a high degree of transparency is essential to enable employees to find creative and innovative solutions. Transparency means the open and collective discussing of formerly made mistakes and problems. As already mentioned before, weaknesses and problems are addressed in special meetings. Employees – or in this case experts, are being asked to propose solutions when needed. Leaders serve as moderator during meetings and help to find democratic decisions. Thereby, leaders communicate with their employees on an equal level. They always try to learn from experts and to show that lifelong learning is possible. To which extent this is connected to the employees' creativity and innovativeness is graphically shown in Figure 3. Potential relationships will be defined in the next paragraphs.

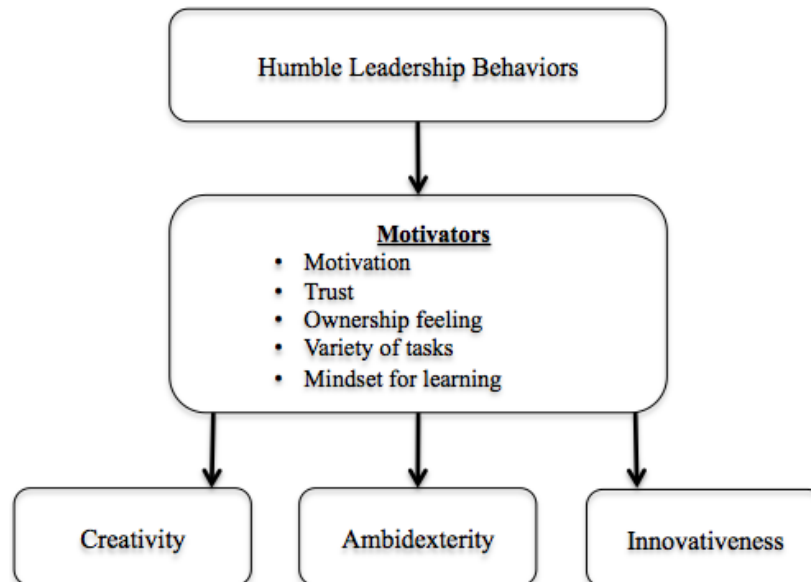


Figure 3. How humble leadership behaviors impact the employees' creativity and innovativeness

4.2.1 Executives admitting mistakes and weaknesses

Interviewees agreed that mistakes that are obvious to everyone must be admitted. Otherwise leaders can lose their followers' respect and trust, which can have fatal consequences for the companies' success in the long run. Admitting mistakes has not only positive effects on organizational success, but – to say it in an interviewee's words – a “cover your ass effect” for leaders on a personal level since it encourages authenticity amongst leaders and their employees' trust in them. Simultaneously, trust in employers may be an important factor concerning their creativity and innovativeness. Trust may motivate employees to contribute their own ideas. Further, by admitting limitations and weaknesses, leaders can create a certain error culture within the working environment where no one is afraid of making mistakes. Subsequently, employees have the courage to put up with their mistakes with bravery by uttering unconventional and sometimes strange ideas.

“[...] At this point, this shows the employee that you have overslept trends and I would assume that they get motivated accordingly, and they probably dare more likely to express their funny or sometimes strange ideas because you have nothing to lose.” (Interview No 11)

Some interviewees see a connection between said error culture and room for inquiry and new things (processes, strategies, approaches, etc.). According to several interviewees, leaders then are open minded about propositions and new things since they do not know it better and must rely on their employees or experts. Nevertheless, some interviewees remarked that leaders need to balance how many mistakes and how much weaknesses they admit openly without losing their employees' respect and trust.

“I am trying to establish a culture in which we can be wrong and where we are allowed to be wrong. And I try to set an example for that by saying that I made a bad decision. When you set an example then they will do it the same way. The fear to admit mistakes does not exist in our company. That is why we always get new and creative ideas on how you can solve problems differently.” (Interview No 15)

4.2.2 Executives spotlighting followers as experts

Leaders do not see themselves as experts. They serve as an entity that is in charge of the big picture and take the position of a moderator during meetings. Since they are no experts themselves they rely on their employees' expert knowledge. Many interviewees stated that leaders need to spotlight an expert's skills in order to achieve their followers' efficient involvement in form of creative and innovative problem solving. Some interview responses

expressed the belief that acknowledging followers' strengths can have positive effects on three things: motivation, trust, and a feeling of ownership.

According to leaders, the higher the positive reinforcement of an employee's skills, the higher the motivation. Subsequently, organizational success can profit by a higher motivation of employees inciting them to give their best for the purpose of the organization. However, some of the interviewees explained that since they are no experts themselves, it is difficult to estimate quality of their followers' performance.

"I have seven employees who report to me directly and they are better in their area of expertise than I would ever be. This is clear to me, that is clear to them. In such a technical area where both creativity and innovativeness is required, I can have ideas but I can never implement them on an operational level." (Interview No 11)

Trust can have a positive effect in two ways: on the one hand, through acknowledging your followers' strengths, they can have trust in themselves which might lead, again, to higher motivation to give their best. Experts feel assured in their area of expertise and tend eventually to explore new areas and find creative and innovative solutions as well. In addition, the leaders trust in their followers is described to have a similar effect, since followers get a feeling of being valued, hence, feel well and secure so that their motivation ascends, which might subsequently lead to a higher organizational success in form of creativity and innovativeness of employees.

"So, I moderate the topic, by saying, 'watch out! We have the following problem. I am not convinced with this topic, and you've probably already much more idea about it than I will ever have. Since the case belongs to your area of responsibility it would be great if you could look at it and evaluate what is subsequently the best thing for the company!'. [...] But I do not say explicitly 'I'm stupid. I have no idea'. But I suggest, that I do not have neither the time and knowledge [...] Therefore, he knows, that he has the responsibility and the duty to solve this task with care.'" (Interview No 10)

Leaders are no experts and need to trust their employees; hence they delegate responsibility for the area of expertise to respective employees. Experts have decision-making power to a certain degree that allows them to give their professional opinion on which decisions are best for the organization's purposes. Through a high degree of responsibility, experts develop a strong feeling of ownership. Ownership means that they have a direct influence on their area of expertise's success, and therefore, they have an intrinsic motivation to give their best in order to make a great job. Subsequently, this can have a positive effect on creativity and innovativeness in a way that they will try to find this kind of problem solutions.

"I think if you do this selectively and not always then your employees appreciate the value, firstly because they notice you trust them, secondly, you detect their competences, and thirdly, they got

involved in making important decisions. And I think that motivates them subsequently.“ (Interview No 10)

4.2.3 Executives serving as a role model of learning for followers

Due to the fact that leaders are often no experts themselves there are always things they could, want and need to learn. Several interviewees described that, as far as their time allows it, they are trying to broaden their knowledge. They actively search and ask for explanations and information from experts. According to the interviewees, these questions have two subsequent effects on their employees' feelings: safety and self-confidence. First, they feel reassured in their line of work, since through questioning leaders confirm that they trust in their work. Self-confidence grows because experts see that they have more competence than their executives in their area of expertise. Safety and self-confidence can lead to more creativity and innovativeness amongst employees.

However, leaders also passively learn during meetings, this time through the exchange with experts. One executive talked about offering management trainings himself. He explained that by offering these trainings, a mindset for learning and development is established within the company. He offers the time and resources so that his employees can develop management skills. Within this training, this executive emphasizes the importance to invite to everyday learning. Participants in this training mostly have managerial responsibility themselves who in turn should establish this mindset in their various teams. Intellectual curiosity enhances an employee's creative and innovative problem solving behaviors which can subsequently translate into organizational success.

“I think this is one of the essential questions, that I ask my employees: ‚Does it make sense? Do we wanna do it like that or differently?’. The possibility to give them more space for creativity and innovation... For example, I always tell them to keep me up to date on what they do, but I don't necessarily have to be the one who's making the final decision.” (Interview No 11, 2013)

However, leaders need to control and balance creativity and innovativeness in a way that the daily business' efficiency does not suffer. According to many interviewees, too much development can put the organizational success at risk.

4.3 Humbleness and Ambidexterity

As mentioned before, the interviewees agreed that both radical and incremental innovations are necessary for a company in order to be and to stay successful. However, most of them said to have a clear focus on incremental innovation since this entails the optimization of the daily business. Two interviewees believe that radical innovation does not emerge intrinsically from employees but requires an external disruption, for example a market shift or ideas and decisions coming from the upper management, etc. According to the interviewees, employees can develop radical innovation by being provided with sufficient resources such as time, a certain budget and the freedom to operate. In order to foster radical innovation, some of the leaders define tasks in a very rough, openly defined manner and proactively ask for unconventional idea solutions, whereas tasks, which require an incremental innovative solution, were more specifically defined. In either case, a definition of tasks is necessary but the degree of specification differs within the formulation of tasks.

Three interviewees were convinced that a separation of both processes, radical and incremental innovation, is required in order to reach outcomes with the desired quality. Therefore, two companies have a department that is clearly separated from all others, in which employees only address the development of radically new processes, technologies, products, etc. Some leaders ask their employees to address radical solution findings only during off-peak times in order to not distract and endanger the firm's daily business.

During interviews it became clear that a connection between humble leadership behaviors and the execution of ambidexterity is hard to detect and to explain for the interviewees. Some of them had trouble understanding the concept of ambidexterity. Only after multiple explanations and definitions, the interviewees understood the concept. They felt that the concept was difficult to grasp since they had not consciously reflected on these two processes before – unlike those leaders who actively separated both processes from each other in the past. They deliberately thought of it and could formulate opinions with regards to the connection between humble leadership behaviors and ambidexterity.

As mentioned before, according to respondents, admitting mistakes and weaknesses can have a positive effect on motivation, trust, a feeling of ownership and a variety of tasks, which subsequently translates into more incremental and radical innovative behavior. By enhancing these outcomes through humble leadership behaviors, employees have a stake in doing a good job and expedite their field of work and expertise. Besides, leaders are no experts themselves. They define milestones together with employees in order to improve

everybody's performances. Defining milestones serves as a point of orientation for incremental innovation.

“Well, I think as a leader you can measure the incremental part according to milestones. By saying you have to do at least a certain number of tests.” (No 16)

Further, spotlighting followers as experts is described to have a similar effect as admitting mistakes and weaknesses since employees bear responsibility for their field of expertise in such way that they can have a direct influence on changes and subsequent organizational success. The third humble leader behavior determines and enhances a mindset for learning within a company. Leaders as well as employees will be more open for new developments within the company which fosters both incremental and radical innovation. Changes do not provoke fear but are seen as challenges, where the making of mistakes does not have fatal negative consequences. Employees do not fear changes since they have gotten used to them and are considerate about correcting faults and mistakes. Radical changes and developments within the company must be communicated as something positive by outlining subsequent advantages.

In summary it can be said, that most interviewees consider the second humble leadership behavior (spotlighting followers as experts) as the strongest influence on the effectiveness of executing ambidexterity, closely followed by the third (serving as a role model of learning). However, admitting mistakes and weaknesses is presumed to have the weakest influence on ambidexterity. But it has to be taken into consideration that this ranking was mostly based on assumptions and not on experience since it was difficult for many interviewees to define a specific incident.

4.4 Situational Contingency Factors allowing leaders to behave humbly

As discussed in former sections, Owens and Hekman (2012) made a start in identifying contingencies that influence the effectiveness of humble leadership behavior within their research (Owens & Hekman, 2012). They divided these factors into personal (perceived competence, sincerity) and contextual (presence of extreme threat and time pressure, organizational learning culture, hierarchical context) factors which can be regarded as moderators. Throughout the study, four broad factors of contingencies could be defined, which allow leaders to behave humbly and can be regarded as antecedents of humble leadership behaviors. Whether leaders behave humbly or not is influenced by these factors: type of decision, follower and leader traits, and, generally speaking, factors within the

company environment. Figure 4 summarizes the findings graphically and will be discussed more detailed in the following section.

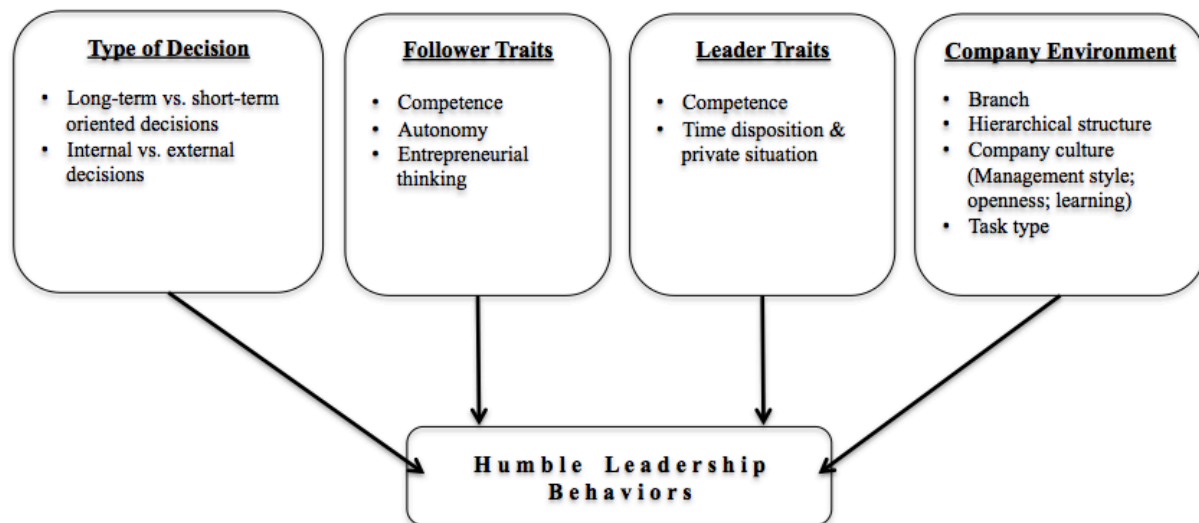


Figure 4. Contingency factors that play a role in humble leadership behaviors

4.4.1 Type of Decision

The interviewees described that they show different manifestations of humble leadership behaviors dependent on the alignment of decisions. Decisions that influence processes in the long run were communicated in a more humble way since they needed to be well considered. Therefore, different factors had to be carefully attended to – unlike decisions that are short-term oriented. Those were decided quicker without discussing every factor in conjunction with employees. Further, decisions that had to be made internally were mostly discussed democratically with employees. With external parties the decision making process does not follow a democratic process.

“Under these circumstances, if I had to and it if it weren’t primarily about long-term decisions or about my own employees but about externally employed people, I would in most cases give clear orders.” (No 4)

Several interviewees explained to achieve better negotiation outcomes with external parties when behaving more authoritarian.

“Especially with external services! Very rarely humble. Because I think you can get better negotiation results.” (No 16)

4.4.2 Follower Traits

“You have to include the factor, that someone has to be able to work autonomously in order to take responsibility. There are people who can’t do that. Who therefore need clear orders and guidelines. In these cases it’s of course hard to behave humbly. You spend yourself a lot of time interviewing people and being present during the hiring process, in order to assure this. [...] It is important to place people in a way that each team within the firm is able to develop its own entrepreneurship. So that each team can work in a corporal way. That’s what I try to achieve through hiring.” (No 15)

Follower traits influence the manifestation of humble behaviors of leaders. High degrees of competence and autonomy determine humble behaviors since leaders identify their employees as experts who can delegate responsibility within their area of expertise. When employees are competent, or nearly experts, leaders need to admit these employees’ strengths and sometimes need to admit their own mistakes and weaknesses. Weaknesses that are obvious need to be admitted in order to perceive leaders as genuine and authentic. High degrees of entrepreneurial thinking have a similar effect. When leaders notice that employees think and work on behalf of the company, they will identify their strengths and expertises and will subsequently assign them with more responsibility.

4.4.3 Leader Traits

According to the interviewees, beside follower traits, leader traits also play a role, whether leaders behave humbly or not. Not only the follower’s competence but also the leader’s competence is important. When their competence in a specific field of work is low, which means that a lack of knowledge is obvious, leaders have to admit these weaknesses in order to profit from their followers’ impetus and capabilities. How much leader’s want to learn and, therefore, in how far they serve as a role model for learning depends on the degree of their lack of knowledge. Several interviewees described that they ask experts for explanations regarding areas they do not understand or do not know. This means, that the dependence on expert knowledge is growing in areas where high degrees of competence are indispensable.

“I mean at the end of the day it is always appropriate when you do not have certain skills. And there is usually always someone in the company who can do it better.” (No 3)

Time disposition of leaders has influence whether leaders spotlighting followers’ strengths as well as whether they serve as role-model for lifelong learning.

“We also have the contingency factor of lack of time and I would call.... Sometimes you do not have the specialized knowledge on certain topics and have not the time to acquire them.” (No 2)

As is shown in the former quote, leaders do not have enough time to acquire expert knowledge; therefore they depend on their followers to represent the role of an expert. Besides, when leaders do have more time they can dedicate more time to learning and to communicating to others that learning is important. The interviewees reported that in turbulent times the focus rather lies on getting the daily business done so that sparse time remains for development and learning. Two of the interviewees explained that their private situation does play a role in so far that it influences their time disposition. In turbulent times, learning is seen as an additional specification which has to be acquired outside their work time. Two interviewees believe that when you have a family and children there is not so much time left or free capacity for extra learning. In these cases, the priority is not their career but their family. Therefore, they need experts to complement their leadership skills to fill the gaps that are caused through the leader's weaknesses.

"I used to be at work for 13 hours a day in order to learn everything myself, to be able to always give accurate answers. But you can't do that forever. You grow up, become older and I have a wife and two children at home, so work has to be over at 7 pm." (No 1)

4.4.4 Company Environment

Company Environment is a very brought term and can include numerous factors. The interviewees listed some company environmental factors that determine whether leaders behave humbly or not: the branch, the hierarchical structure, the age distribution, the task type and the company's culture and principles. One of the most important factors is *branch*. As already stated before, Owens and Hekman believe that in highly dynamic and volatile business environments with complex and diverse structures within the organizations, it is merely impossible for leaders to know everything and lead alone at the top (Owens & Hekman, 2012; Longenecker et al., 2006).

"But this is also due to the branch itself; since within the e-commerce-Branch, everything can change extremely fast because it's always in motion. And if you believe that it's possible to always know everything yourself, it is quite surely even more fatal in this branch." (No 11)

Therefore, leaders are asked to consider their followers as equal and valuable cooperation partners that could complement their leadership skills.

With regards to hierarchical structures, the interviewees argued differently. Some of them believe that in flat hierarchical structures, barriers to communicate weaknesses and mistakes are lower since communicating on an equal level happens on a regular basis. They

gave different answers concerning the direction of humbleness. Some interviewees explain to not behave humbly when they talk to their own leaders and behave humbly when talking to followers. However, some of them explained to also behave humbly toward their own leaders.

Several of the interviewees name *task type* as a factor that can play a role in whether the leaders undertake humble behaviors or not. In a working situation that is project-related you can easily be a role-model for learning by simply calling attention to old mistakes made in former projects. Leaders describe to always question and evaluate projects concerning what could have been done better, what had gone wrong and what had gone well. In new projects it is important to have these evaluations in mind and to look forward in order to make it better than the last time. Leaders promote this process by always pointing out and reminding followers of the importance of development and optimization.

“Because of the project work I can always refer again to how we did it last time, but also what may not have been a good idea in one way or another and thus press my team to think about how we can do it differently his time.” (No 1)

Last but not least, the company’s culture is an important situational contingency factor supporting and hindering leaders to behave humbly. In this context, the term *company cultures* refers to management, respectively to a certain leadership style, to openness, and to learning. When other managers also behave humbly it is much easier to show the same behaviors since the appreciation of such behaviors is a given fact. Otherwise managers may regard humble behaviors as weak and a losing of control over their staff. Openness implies how transparency is lived inside the organization. High transparency often comprises openly dealing with mistakes as well. In the opinion of many interviewees, an open culture entails an open communication concerning mistakes and weaknesses on an organizational level as well as on an individual level which involves a certain error culture.

“In those companies where a certain openness and no clear structures exist, the departments are competing with each other. So I believe this to be problematic, when the other leaders aren’t humble, then it is hard to stay humble yourself.” (No 4)

According to the interviewees, a learning culture is an important factor since it determines how many resources in terms of for instance time and capacity is accepted for learning and development. A learning culture predicts how much effort leaders bring up when it comes to serving as a role model for learning.

5. Discussion

This research was done with the purpose of discovering more about humble leadership behaviors and contingencies displayed as antecedents of humble behaviors that finally lead to the employee's creativity and innovativeness. The study's findings do provide information on answering the study's basic propositions, that were formulated at the beginning of it.

The fact that the interviewees themselves explained that they behave humbly when creativity and innovation are in demand and that they do not behave humbly when creativity and innovation are not asked for, speaks for an influence of humble leadership on creativity and innovation. The interviewed leaders explained to see their role as moderators or coordinators who guide their employees in the right direction. They do not identify themselves as leaders per se. One of the interviewees regarded humble behavior as a weakness and two other interviewees said it might be the case that others can easily mistake it to be weakness. However, 17 out of 20 interviewees see humble leadership behavior not as a weakness but more as a strength and as a method to balance and delegate working tasks. This confirms the assumption of Vera and Rodriguez (2004) and others (Morris et al., 2005) that the trend is shifting towards more acceptance for humility in leadership.

When it comes to the creativity and innovativeness of employees, all three humble behaviors defined by Owens and Hekman (2012) were confirmed to play a role. The interviewees described this as a non-direct relationship, since there are some motivating factors that can be regarded as mediators which stand in between. These mediators should be tested quantitatively in order to make clear statements about the underlying relationship. The reported motivating factors can be compared to findings from former literature so that similarities can be detected to former identified concepts. A variety of tasks, for example, is comparable to one factor of Amabile's and colleagues' (1996) KEYS scale, which is a questionnaire scale to assess work environment factors that are beneficial for and detrimental to creativity. Challenging work which implies tasks that provide autonomy and challenge is one factor that motivates employees to be creative. Similarly, Shalley et al. (2004) identified task complexity as a contextual characteristic that influences the creative behavior of employees. In this study, the concept *variety of tasks* was defined as influencing leaders' humble behaviors and subsequently is described to be influencing the creativeness and innovativeness of employees. Several interviewees described that through delegation and autonomy a variety of tasks can accrue which motivates employees to be more creative and innovative. An ownership feeling is another factor that shows similarities to former identified

concepts from Amabile and colleagues (1996), Unsworth and Clegg (2010), and De Jong and Den Hartog (2007). According to them, *freedom* (Amabile et al., 1996), *autonomy* (Unsworth & Clegg, 2010), and *delegation* (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2007) are said to be positively connected with creative and innovative behaviors of employees. A feeling of ownership implies delegating certain areas to experts so that they feel responsible for this area which subsequently may translate into creativity and innovativeness amongst employees, since they can personally influence the success of their area of expertise. Further, Unsworth's and Cleggs' (2010) concept of the cultural support of creativity shows similarities to the concept of mindset for learning defined in this study. The cultural support of creativity means to leave a certain space for discovering new things and to experiment with these new things. According to some interviewees, a mindset for learning accrues from admitting mistakes and serving as a role-model for learning, whereas the former may still lead to an error culture where learning is inevitable, while the latter conveys the comprehension why learning is important. Both lead to more creative behavior since employees are not afraid of making mistakes anymore and instead strive to acquire new knowledge. Admitting one's own mistakes and spotlighting your followers strengths has an influence on their trusting you, which can subsequently translate into more creative and innovative behavior. Trust means an employee's trust in himself and his strengths and his trust towards his leaders, since both are honest regarding their competences. Shalley's, Zou's, and Oldham's (2004) psychological safety concept is very similar. In an environment in which employees believe that others will respond positively when they speak up, report problems or propose new ideas, they consequently display more creative behavior.

As stated multiple times before, Owens and Hekman (2012) identified contingencies that influence the effectiveness of humble leadership behavior which can be regarded as moderators. This study however focuses on situational contingency factors which can rather be regarded as antecedents that allow leaders to behave humbly. Still overlaps exist, such as in *perceived competence* and *sincerity*. Regarding *sincerity*: This overlap has been acknowledged by two interviewees but it was not considered in the course of this analysis, since it cannot be spoken of *theoretical saturation* (Saunders, 2009; Länssalmi, Peiro & Kivimäki, 2004) within this finding. In this study competence was identified in two different ways: the followers' competence and the leaders' competence. Owens and Hekman (2012) refer to leaders' competence in such way that humility was only effective in leadership when the executive was perceived as competent especially when it comes to acknowledging personal limits, faults, and mistakes. Perceived competence often depends on an external

signal of authority which entails that lower-level leaders, younger leaders, and female leaders “may be more reticent to display humility by admitting mistakes and limitations because their competence is more likely to be called into question” (Owens and Hekman, 2012; p. 797). The interviewees explained that a lack in competence persuades a leader to show all three humble behaviors. However, they also depict that they should a balance has to be achieved in order not to lose their employees’ respect and to stay in full control of the organization. Owens and Hekman (2012) identified an organizational learning culture and the hierarchical context as contextual contingency factors. In an organizational culture that facilitates learning, modeling teachability achieves more success. The interviewees of this study explained to serve as a role-model for learning when the firm’s culture welcomes such a behavior by contributing the necessary resources. What kind of resources these can be should be investigated in further research. Concerning hierarchical structures Owens and Hekman (2012) found out that they have influence on the effectiveness of all three humble behaviors in a way that such behaviors were seen as more critical in strong hierarchical contexts. Moreover, they concluded that in less hierarchical structures humble leadership behavior seems to be less risky and comes at less interpersonal cost since in top-down situations executives are expected to lead their followers. However, when humble leadership is still displayed, it appears to achieve greater rewards in terms of the followers’ engagement, trust and loyalty. In this study, many interviewees made varying assumptions so that further research should focus more closely on that topic. Overall, the interviewees named lots of situational contingency factors which should be investigated in more detail in further studies.

During the interviews it became clear that a connection between humble leadership behaviors and the execution of ambidexterity is hard to detect and to explain for interviewees. As said before, some of them had trouble to understand the concept of ambidexterity. Therefore it is difficult to make assumptions about the influence of humble leadership behaviors on ambidexterity. However, spotlighting followers as experts and admitting mistakes has been stated to have a positive influence on ambidexterity since employees bear responsibility for their field of expertise in a way that allows them to have direct influence on changes and subsequent on organizational success. The third humble leadership behavior determines and enhances a mindset for learning within a company. Leaders as well as employees will be more open for new developments within the company, which again fosters both incremental and radical innovation. This goes in line with Goshal and Bartlett (1994), who suggest that contextual ambidexterity can be achieved by a supportive organizational context, which can only be built by leaders. With their qualitative research they found out that

besides facilitating a supportive organization context, senior executives play a special role in encouraging contextual ambidexterity by serving as a good example, by modeling the adaptable behavior, and by then rewarding and recognizing it. This fact agrees with Owen's and Hekman's (2012) belief that humble leaders may foster adaptability since "leaders admitting limitations, modeling teachability, and legitimizing uncertainty may provide the disequilibrium or shock to the system needed for an organization to stay in continuous change state and foster the unit reflexivity (reflection, planning and adaptation) needed for continual unit learning." (Swift & West, 1998) (p. 808). More research is needed in regard to how a leader's behaviors influence ambidexterity in a positive as well as in a negative way.

5.1 Strengths & Limitations

Although qualitative research is not best suited to make a statement about prevalence and generalizability (Lee, 1999) it is useful for analytical elaboration for future theory building. Since humble leadership has merely been investigated and no particular theories have been suggested, especially with regard to the employees' creativity and innovativeness, qualitative research in form of interviews is an approach to make first suggestions for the development of a theory.

But of course this study has its limitations. All participants were male which created a clear bias for the study. Especially in leadership theory differences between men and women have been found to exist. Women in leadership positions are still a minority and sometimes they need to prove their authority towards employees more than their male counterparts. It would have been interesting whether women do not show humble behavior as often as men do, because they have to maintain their employees' respect. Further, all interviewees are working within the e-commerce start-up branch which may have influenced their opinions and behaviors and certainly forbids a generalization of these findings. The answers rely on self-reports of executives. Their responses may be influenced by a desire to appear successful and caring. All answers were analyzed anonymously in order to prevent answers from being adjusted to a socially desired standard. However, it is impossible to determine the degree to which this was successful and that the answers reflect the professional reality. To overcome these problems, the replication of an interview in diverse settings, using diverse participants, and by diverse researchers is necessary. The followers' perspectives and opinions have not been considered. It would be useful to validate the leaders' statements and the degree to which they match their followers' perceptions of their leading style in order to enhance the

reliability and the credibility of this study. During interviews it became clear that a connection between humble leadership behaviors and the execution of ambidexterity is hard to detect and to explain for the interviewees. Some of them had trouble understanding the concept of ambidexterity. Only after multiple explanations and definitions, the interviewees understood the concept. They felt that the concept was difficult to grasp since they had not consciously reflected on these two processes before. Therefore clear conclusion concerning the connection between humble leadership and ambidexterity are difficult to draw.

5.2 Practical Implications

This research represents another step in promoting the understanding of leadership in connection with the creativity and the innovativeness of affected employees. As well as these theoretical contributions, these findings also have a number of potential practical implications: the creativity and innovativeness of employees can be enhanced by changing the employees' general work motivation, their trust, by supporting a feeling of ownership, a variety of tasks, and by establishing a mindset through more humble leadership behaviors. Especially when it comes to fostering more stepwise or incremental innovations, humble leadership behaviors are supposed to be beneficial. The information obtained with this study is useful to both organizations and individual managers interested in improving their employees' creativity and innovativeness in these dynamic and turbulent times. This analysis shows how a leadership style like humble leadership is related to organizational outcome variables such as creativity and innovation on an individual level. The study furthermore describes which circumstances may facilitate or prevent that managers behave humbly and it will give practical advice on how this can be done. Executives themselves could pick up these suggestions in order to enhance their firm's organizational performance in terms of creativity and innovation. Therefore, this research contributes to the science of leadership development, training and selection.

5.3 Further Research is needed

In the former section limitations of the current study have been discussed. These limitations offer an agenda for future research which will be presented in the following paragraph:

As stated before this study merely relied on the self-report of twenty leaders, describing their own behavior. Future studies should include a broader perspective by

incorporating the perceptions of followers in order to validate their leaders' statements. Further, a broader perspective should include different branches since this study focused on the e-commerce start-up branch alone. Perhaps leadership behaviors differ in other sectors. Some interviewees already suggested for instance that in large economical industries, where a hierarchical structure is much more executed, leaders might not show humble behaviors as often as they would in smaller companies. Although a qualitative technique was judged to suit the research purpose best, a quantitative follow-up survey would be useful to find out which of the identified leader behaviors do indeed have the proposed connection with the employees' creative and innovative behavior. Besides, quantitative research would be helpful to reveal which leadership behavior has the strongest influence and which the weakest. Scales to measure humble leadership behaviors must be developed. With the help of the present study a wide range of contingency factors that have an influence on leaders' humble behaviors could be defined, but which factors are the most relevant has not yet been analyzed. Future quantitative research may transform the provided list into a more limited number of factors and hence give an indication as to which factors have a stronger influence than others. Since leadership is shown to have an influence on the employees' creativity and innovativeness future research should also try to address how humble leaders can adapt to and even shape the environmental and organizational settings in such a way that the context optimally stimulates the employees' respective behavior. Although quantitative research could generate new and interesting results, no causal relations can be derived. It would therefore be interesting to know whether relationships are also causally determined. In order to analyze this, a study using a longitudinal design should be conducted. Another important hypothesis to test would be which other leadership behaviors executives show besides humble behaviors. Do charismatic leaders often behave humble? Or were humble leaders considered as charismatic?

6. Quotation from Nelson Mandela (2)

“As I have said, the first thing is to be honest with yourself. You can never have an impact on society if you have not changed yourself... Great peacemakers are all people of integrity, of honesty, but humility.”

(Nelson Mandela, year unknown)

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Appendix

Appendix I: Interview Guideline

Ich untersuche einen neuen Führungsstil, “Humble Leadership” - übersetzt “bescheidene Führung”. Humble/Bescheidene Führungskräfte zeigen drei Verhaltensweisen: 1) sie geben ihre eigenen Schwächen und Fehler zu 2) nehmen die Stärken ihrer Mitarbeiter wahr und erkennen diese auch an und 3) zeigen ihren Mitarbeitern dass Lernen und die ständige eigene Entwicklung wichtig und möglich ist. Desweiteren geht es mir dabei auch darum, welche Rolle dieser Führungsstil für Kreativität und innovatives Verhalten der Mitarbeiter spielt. Ich differenziere zwischen diesen zwei Konzepten, da man, kurz gesagt, bei Kreativität von der Ideenentwicklung (für z.B. neue Produkte, Technologien, Arbeitsprozesse oder Serviceangebote) und bei Innovation von der tatsächlichen Umsetzung und Anwendung dieser Ideen spricht.

1. *Demografische Faktoren:* Männlich/Weiblich; Wie alt?; Welche Position?; Wie lange in der Position?; Welche Hauptaufgaben?; Wie lange schon Führungsverantwortung?; Wie viele Mitarbeiter im Team/Abteilung?; Welche Form/Art von Kreativität und/oder Innovation ist bei ihnen im Team/ in der Abteilung gefragt?
2. Können sie mir eine Situation nennen und erläutern, in der Sie sich “humble” bzw “bescheiden” verhalten haben gegenüber ihren Mitarbeitern? *(Nehmen Sie sich etwas Zeit, um ein gutes Beispiel zu finden. Wenn es mehrere gibt wählen sie das, das am wenigsten weit zurückliegt)* Um welche Situation oder welches Projekt handelte es sich? Welches Verhalten haben Sie genau gezeigt? Was haben Sie genau gemacht – bitte beschreiben Sie mit mehr Detail? *(auf die 3 Verhaltensweisen von humble Leadership eingehen)* Was waren die Bedingungen oder welche Faktoren haben Sie besonders motiviert sich humble/bescheiden zu verhalten? Welche Rolle spielte Zeitdruck in diesem Beispiel (z.B. war dieser hoch oder niedrig? Wie haben Sie ihr Führungsverhalten womöglich aufgrund des Zeitdrucks angepasst, d.h. welche Verhaltensweisen haben Sie evtl. mehr oder weniger gezeigt)?
3. Wie sah es in diesem Beispiel mit dem Verhalten Ihrer Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeiter aus, insbesondere mit ihrem kreativen und innovativen Verhalten? (Wie haben Sie dann ihr Führungsverhalten angepasst?) Können Sie die Kreativität

und/oder Innovativität ihrer Mitarbeiter in dieser Situation genauer beschreiben? (Haben ihre Mitarbeiter damals nützliches und/oder neue Ideen entwickelt und/oder angewendet?)

4. Können Sie mir auch ein Beispiel nennen, wann sie weniger humble/bescheiden waren und was die Bedingungen in dem Moment waren? (*Nehmen Sie sich wieder etwas Zeit, um ein passendes Beispiel auszuwählen!*) Um welche Situation oder welches Projekt handelte es sich. Wie haben Sie sich stattdessen verhalten? Was waren die Bedingungen, die Sie daran gehindert haben, sich humble/bescheiden zu verhalten? Welches Verhalten haben ihre Mitarbeiter gezeigt? Welche Rolle spielte Zeitdruck in diesem Beispiel (z.B. war dieser hoch oder niedrig? Wie haben Sie ihr Führungsverhalten womöglich aufgrund des Zeitdrucks angepasst, d.h. welche Verhaltensweisen haben Sie evtl. mehr oder weniger gezeigt)?
5. Haben ihre Mitarbeiter kreatives und/oder innovatives Verhalten gezeigt? (Wie haben Sie dann ihr Führungsverhalten angepasst?) Können Sie die Kreativität und/oder Innovativität ihrer Mitarbeiter in dieser Situation genauer beschreiben? (Haben ihre Mitarbeiter damals nützliches und/oder neue Ideen entwickelt und/oder angewendet?).
6. Wie verhalten Sie sich grundsätzlich? Wie sieht ihr Führungsverhalten abgesehen von diesen Beispielen aus? Äußern Sie häufig humble/bescheidenes Führungsverhalten und warum? Oder ist es eine Ausnahme? Wenn Sie sich humble/bescheiden ihren Mitarbeitern gegenüber verhalten welche anderen Führungsverhaltensweisen haben Sie zusätzlich gezeigt?
7. Unter welchen Bedingungen zeigen Sie mehr humble/bescheidenes Führungsverhalten und wann erachten Sie humble/bescheidenes Führungsverhalten als sinnvoll? Inwiefern kann ein solches bescheidenes Führungsverhalten sinnvoll sein? Was glauben sie hat dieses Verhalten für Auswirkungen auf ihre Mitarbeiter insbesondere wenn es darum geht Kreativität und/oder Innovativität der Mitarbeiter zu fördern?

In der Innovationsmanagementforschung wird häufig von "Ambidexterität" gesprochen. Dies beinhaltet, dass zweierlei Dinge innerhalb einer Abteilung/eines Teams beachtet werden: 1) Zum einen bestehende Prozesse zu optimieren und schrittweise weiter zu entwickeln. 2) Und

zum anderen empfänglich für ganze neue Entwicklungen zu sein, indem man sie in seiner Umwelt wahrnimmt und sich ihnen anpasst oder auch selbst aktiv auf den Markt einwirkt indem man radikal neue Entwicklungen umsetzt und in den Markt einführt. Innerhalb einer Abteilung können beide Dinge in dem Maße umgesetzt werden, sodass Mitarbeiter einer Abteilung/eines Teams sowohl mit dem einen Prozess als auch mit dem anderen Prozess betraut werden.

8. Können sie mir ein Beispiel nennen wobei Ambidexterität hilfreich für Kreativität und Innovativität war? *(Nehmen Sie sich wieder etwas Zeit, um ein passendes Beispiel auszuwählen!)* Denken Sie, dass eine Ambidexterität hilfreich für Kreativität und oder Innovativität sein könnte? Gibt es bei ihnen Ambidexterität? Finden sie beide Prozesse gleichermaßen wichtig? Können sie mir ein Beispiel nennen, wie sie als Führungskraft innerhalb ihrer Abteilung/ihrer Teams Einfluss auf Ambidexterität genommen haben? Was haben Sie als Führungskraft genau gemacht? Oder könnten sie sich vorstellen wie sie darauf Einfluss nehmen könnten?
9. (Glauben Sie, dass ihr eigenes humble/bescheidenes Führungsverhalten Ambidexterität gefördert hat?) Auf welcher Dimension besonders? Könnten Sie mir erzählen, was sie glauben, wie sich ein humble/bescheidener Führungsstil auf Ambidexterität auswirken könnte? Wie könnte sich das Eingestehen und Zugeben von eigenen Fehlern und Schwächen auf die Ambidexterität des Teams auswirken? Inwiefern könnte sich die Anerkennung von Stärken der Mitarbeiter auf eine Ambidexterität im Team auswirken? Wie könnte das Vorleben von Lehrbarkeit Einfluss auf Ambidexterität im Team nehmen?
10. Haben Sie noch weitere Anregungen oder Dinge, die ihnen zu diesem Thema einfallen und durch die Fragen des Interviews nicht abgedeckt wurden?

Appendix II: Informed Consent**Lieber Teilnehmer, Liebe Teilnehmerin,**

Vielen Dank für das Interesse und ihre Mithilfe in dieser Studie. Im Rahmen meiner Masterthesis interessiere ich mich für das Thema “Führungsstile” und dessen Einfluss auf Kreativität und Innovativität von Mitarbeitern. Dabei spezialisiere ich mich auf einen neuen und bisher relativ unerforschten Führungsstil “Humble Leadership” – übersetzt “bescheidener Führungsstil”. Bitte lesen Sie folgende Einverständniserklärung sorgfältig durch und bestätigen Sie mit ihrer Unterschrift die Teilnahme und ihr Einverständnis an dieser Studie.

Einverständniserklärung

Ich erkläre mich dazu bereit, im Rahmen des genannten Forschungsprojektes an einem Interview teilzunehmen. Das Interview wird ca 30-60 min dauern und wird von Frau Anna Overath durchgeführt. Ich kann das Interview jederzeit abbrechen oder Antworten auf einzelne Fragen verweigern ohne Gründe für meine Entscheidung zu nennen. Das Interview wird elektronisch aufgezeichnet, sodass es im Anschluss verschriftlicht und analysiert werden kann. Meine Antworten werden vertraulich behandelt und im Forschungsberichten anonymisiert; es kann daher nicht auf meine Person rückgeschlossen werden.

Bitte geben Sie unten ihre E-mail Adresse an, falls sie in ein paar Monaten eine Kurzdarstellung der Ergebnisse erhalten möchten. Bei Fragen können Sie mich kontaktieren unter: a.s.overath@googlemail.com oder 0177 / 796 21 63

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Appendix III: Overview of leader behaviours according to De Jong & Den Hartog

Behaviour	Consists of	Relates to	
		Creativity	Innovation
1 Innovative role-modelling	Being an example of innovative behavior, exploring opportunities, generating ideas, championing and putting efforts in development	X	X
2 Intellectual stimulation	Teasing subordinates directly to come up with ideas and to evaluate current practices	X	
3 Stimulating knowledge diffusion	Stimulating open and transparent communication, introducing supportive communication structures like informal work meetings	X	
4 Providing vision	Communicating an explicit vision on the role and preferred types of innovation, providing directions for future activities	X	X
5 Consulting	Checking with people before initiating changes that may affect them, incorporating their ideas and suggestions in decisions	X	X
6 Delegating	Giving subordinates sufficient autonomy to determine relatively independently how to do a job	X	X
7 Support for innovation	Acting friendly to innovative employees, being patient and helpful, listening, looking out for someone's interests if problems arise	X	X
8 Organizing feedback	Ensuring feedback on concepts and first trials, providing feedback to employees, asking customers for their opinion		X
9 Recognition	Showing appreciation for innovative performances	X	X
10 Rewards	Providing financial/material rewards for innovative performances		X
11 Providing resources	Providing time and money to implement ideas		X
12 Monitoring	Ensuring effectiveness and efficiency, checking-up on people, stressing tried and tested routines (negative relationship)	X	X
13 Task Assignment	Providing employees with challenging tasks, make allowance for employees' commitment when assigning tasks	X	