



# Revisiting Theory Y: Exploring the impact of positive leader assumptions on leadership for intrinsic motivation in followers

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Anne Lise Due

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for intrinsic motivation in followers

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## **ABSTRACT**

Intrinsic motivation is a powerful but often underutilised resource in today's workplace. Organisations may therefore miss out on a key contributor to creativity, productivity, and profitability, while employees miss out on a source of meaning, fulfilment, and well-being in their work. Leaders play an important role in influencing employee motivation. Although previous research has produced a wealth of knowledge about how to promote intrinsic motivation, it appears that few leaders fully translate this knowledge into practice. It is therefore timely to revisit McGregor's (1960/2006) Theory Y, which proposes that having positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour can influence leaders to engage in practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers. This study explores the lived experience of twelve Norwegian top leaders to understand how having positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour can help leaders promote intrinsic motivation in followers. The methodology is interpretative phenomenological analysis. The findings support that the informants have positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour, and that they translate these assumptions into practice by engaging in an extensive range of practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers. Additionally, this study identifies a set of mediating personal convictions that help explain whether and to what extent leaders translate their assumptions into practice. This study contributes to understanding of McGregor's theory in two ways. Firstly, it proposes an intermediate step in the process of translating leader assumptions into leader practices, and identifies five personal convictions involved in this step. Secondly, it proposes a model that further explains the role of these personal convictions in determining whether and to what extent leader assumptions are translated into leader practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers. The study thereby advances our understanding of the relationship between Theory Y assumptions and Theory Y practices.



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

More than 60 years ago, when he was working as a consultant with American businesses, Douglas McGregor made an observation. He noticed that most of the managers he worked with did not lead in a way that supported the motivation of their employees. Instead, he found that many of these managers were practising leadership in ways that harmed their followers' motivation by relying on the use of control and extrinsic rewards (Cutcher-Gershenfeld 2006, McGregor 1957/2006, 1960/2006, 1966, 1967).

As a psychology professor, McGregor was familiar with Maslow's (1943, 1954) motivational theory, and he was surprised that these managers did not apply Maslow's principles in their work (McGregor 1957/2006, 1960/2006, 1967). Instead, McGregor found that these managers were relying on principles that were much closer aligned to the principles of scientific management as devised by Frederick Winslow Taylor (1911) several decades earlier (Cutcher-Gershenfeld 2006, McGregor 1957/2006, 1960/2006).

McGregor believed that these managers would be better served by applying the newer principles of Maslow's motivational theory in their leadership practice. He therefore devised his own theory (McGregor 1957/2006, 1960/2006), where he posited that Theory X assumptions would lead to Theory X leadership, inspired by the principles of scientific management, and where Theory Y assumptions would lead to Theory Y leadership, inspired by Maslow's motivational theory. According to McGregor's theory, leaders with Theory X assumptions would practise Theory X leadership, which was harmful to follower motivation, and leaders with Theory Y assumptions would practise Theory Y leadership, which involved promoting intrinsic motivation in followers<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> McGregor does not use the term "intrinsic motivation." I choose to use this term because McGregor (1960/2006) does state that Theory Y management involves promoting self-actualisation in followers, and self-actualisation can be seen as a form of intrinsic motivation (Waterman 1990). That McGregor's Theory Y management involves promoting intrinsic motivation is also supported by McGregor's (1967, p. 126) suggestion that this management approach is associated with the use of "intrinsic rewards."

Today, we know more about how to promote intrinsic motivation in organisations than at the time when McGregor launched his theory. Part of the reason for this is that a whole range of theories related to intrinsic motivation have been developed that can be seen as building on Maslow's legacy. These theories include self-determination theory (Deci 1971, Deci & Ryan 1985, 2000, Ryan & Deci 2000, 2017), flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 1990, 2003), personal expressiveness (Waterman 1990), and thriving (Carver 1998, Spreitzer et al. 2005). These newer theories offer valuable insights into how intrinsic motivation can be promoted.

The recent decades have also seen the development of several new leadership theories that can be seen to follow in the footsteps of McGregor's (1960/2006) Theory Y. Like McGregor's theory, these new leadership theories are conducive to promoting intrinsic motivation in followers. They include servant leadership (Greenleaf 1970, 1977, Van Dierendonck 2011), empowering leadership (Conger & Kanungo 1988, Spreitzer 1995, Zhang & Bartol 2010), authentic leadership (Luthans & Avolio 2003, Avolio et al. 2004), ethical leadership (Brown et al. 2005), and transformational leadership (Burns 1978/2000, Bass 1985, Bass & Riggio 2006).

However, despite all this new knowledge about how organisational leaders can promote intrinsic motivation in followers, the level of intrinsic motivation in organisations remains low. According to a survey by Gallup (2016), only 13% of employees worldwide are fully engaged at work. This suggests that the knowledge that has been accumulated about how to promote intrinsic motivation in followers has not been (sufficiently) translated into practice. Since leaders can be an important influence on the intrinsic motivation of followers (Amabile 1998, Gumusluoglu & Ilsev 2009), this suggests that it is worth improving our understanding of how organisational leaders can be helped to do more to promote intrinsic motivation in their followers.

Although McGregor's theory is a household name in the management literature (Bedeian & Wren 2001), the role of leader assumptions is an aspect of his theory that has received little research attention (Cutcher-Gershenfeld 2006). We therefore lack understanding of a central element in McGregor's theory. If leader



assumptions are a key influence on leader practices, as McGregor suggested, a revisit could reveal ways to boost intrinsic motivation in today's workplace.

## **1.1 Background for my interest in the topic**

My interest in a positive view of people springs from my experience as a volunteer in a humanitarian organisation. When I first joined the organisation as a youth, I participated in the organisation's introductory training courses and was impressed by the positive environment I experienced there. I felt that there was an emphasis on motivation and encouragement both in the way the training courses were conducted and in the way people in the organisation interacted with each other. Being part of such an environment had a positive effect on me; it made me feel motivated and creative, and I learned a lot.

I later participated in the organisation's training programme for instructors, and discovered that the programme was based on a positive view of people (Norwegian: "et positivt menneskesyn"). This was a revelation to me, because in my mind it explained what lay behind the positive environment I experienced in the organisation.

The positive view of people that was conveyed in the organisation's training programme involved emphasising the good things people did. This meant that when giving feedback to others, we would look for what people did well, and help them develop their strengths further. People's weaknesses would not be ignored, but we would spend more time talking about their strengths than about how they could improve their weaknesses. The reasoning behind this approach was that it would contribute to a positive learning environment and support their motivation.

The developers of the organisation's training programme explained that the positive view of people was based on the organisation's values. In my understanding, the two most relevant organisational values were humanitarianism and volunteerism. Humanitarianism is one of the organisation's fundamental values, and it can be interpreted as having the intention of treating others well. In line with this, a culture which emphasises people's strengths is likely to create

more positive experiences for the members of the organisation than a culture which emphasises people's weaknesses or lets their strengths go unnoticed. The other organisational value which is likely to have been an influence is volunteerism. Because it is a voluntary organisation, it places great emphasis on promoting the motivation of its members. Giving feedback in a way that emphasises people's strengths is likely to enhance not only people's well-being, but also their motivation.

In retrospect, I have thought about how these values spread in the organisation. I was part of a local branch of the organisation. In this branch, we had a group of instructors who had been trained in the organisation's instructor programme, and thus in these principles. This group of instructors conducted the training courses for all new members who joined our local branch. They were also active as some of the most experienced members in the daily work of the organisation, and therefore acted as role models. In addition, several held leadership positions in the organisation. I therefore believe that these instructors were an important reason why the principles spread out in my local branch. I believe that these instructors in many ways "set the tone" for how we communicated with each other in the organisation, and for which things we paid more attention to and which things we paid less attention to.

## **1.2 The role of underlying leader assumptions in leadership**

In his theory, McGregor (1960/2006) suggested that leaders hold underlying assumptions about human nature and human behaviour that influence how they practise leadership. These underlying assumptions can either help or hinder leaders in promoting intrinsic motivation in their followers. McGregor described how two alternative sets of leader assumptions about human nature and human behaviour can lead to two different types of leadership, which he labelled Theory X and Theory Y.

McGregor's (1960/2006) Theory X and Y has been recognised as one of the most significant theories within the field of management. For example, his book *The Human Side of Enterprise* ranks as number four on Bedeian and Wren's (2001) list of the most influential management books of the twentieth century as voted

by the Academy of Management Fellows group. Bedeian and Wren point out that the books that made this list had a profound impact on the field of management when they were first published, and that their ideas continue to be central in current management thought. The impact of McGregor's ideas on the field of management has also been recognised by Time Magazine, which includes *The Human Side of Enterprise* in its list of "25 books that changed the way we think about management" (Time Magazine). A further indication of the lasting relevance of McGregor's work is that his book is considered a classic (Cutcher-Gershenfeld 2006); it has been reprinted numerous times since it was first published in 1960, and has received more than 20,000 citations in Google Scholar, of which nearly 8,000 were made during the last decade.

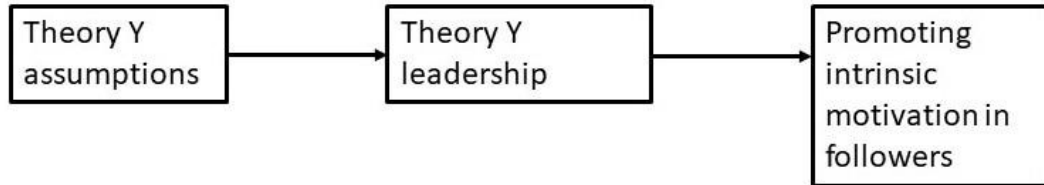
According to McGregor's theory, Theory X leadership is based on the assumption that people do not really want to work, and that they therefore need to be controlled or paid with extrinsic rewards to make an effort at work. As a consequence of this assumption, Theory X leadership relies on the use of control and extrinsic motivation to get followers to do their jobs. In contrast, Theory Y leadership is based on the assumption that people are naturally motivated to do their best at work if they are given the opportunity to do so. McGregor's theory posits that this assumption leads to a leadership style that is based mainly on methods of influence that are non-controlling, in order to support people's intrinsic motivation. For this reason, McGregor's theory assumes that Theory Y leadership promotes intrinsic motivation in followers, while Theory X leadership thwarts the intrinsic motivation of followers.

Figure 1.1 illustrates McGregor's thesis that having Theory Y assumptions will influence leaders to practise Theory Y leadership, which involves promoting intrinsic motivation in followers.

McGregor (1960/2006) developed his Theory Y assumptions and leadership in response to the principles and practices of scientific management (Taylor 1911), which he observed to be still widespread in business at his time. He labelled these assumptions and practices Theory X. Theory X leadership is based on the transactional assumption that employees exchange their labour for money. This assumes that while they are at work, employees need to work towards achieving the goals of the organisation. Their personal goals are not considered important

**FIGURE 1.1**

**Theory Y assumptions as an influence on Theory Y leadership, which promotes intrinsic motivation in followers**



in the workplace, and it is assumed that these will be pursued outside the work situation. As a consequence of this view, intrinsic motivation is not emphasised in Theory X leadership. Instead, the Theory X leader emphasises extrinsic means to get workers to do their jobs. In particular, this involves relying on the use of control.

In contrast, Theory Y leadership is based on the principles of self-control and integration. By self-control, McGregor means that Theory Y leaders emphasise follower autonomy. Integration involves looking for ways of letting followers pursue their own goals while also working towards the goals of the organisation. In particular, McGregor emphasises that integration between follower and organisational goals should involve helping followers grow and develop while doing their jobs. Theory Y leadership is thus based on the assumption that followers should be supported in finding meaning and satisfaction in the work situation. This contrasts with Theory X leadership, which assumes that followers need to seek satisfaction and meaning outside the work situation.

McGregor's theory is arguably useful because it addresses how leaders can promote intrinsic motivation in followers. The theory also posits that leaders can either promote or thwart intrinsic motivation in followers, depending on the leader's assumptions about human nature and human behaviour. Another important aspect of McGregor's theory is the suggestion that the leader's underlying assumptions about human nature and human behaviour can influence leader behaviour and practice.

McGregor's (1960/2006) theory has exerted significant influence within the field of leadership, and several more recent leadership theories continue to build on many of McGregor's ideas. Examples of more recent leadership theories that share similarities with McGregor's theory include servant leadership (Greenleaf 1970, 1977, Van Dierendonck 2011), empowering leadership (Conger & Kanungo 1988, Spreitzer 1995, Zhang & Bartol 2010), authentic leadership (Luthans & Avolio 2003, Avolio et al. 2004), ethical leadership (Brown et al. 2005), and transformational leadership (Burns 1978/2000, Bass 1985, Bass & Riggio 2006).

These leadership theories all have in common with McGregor's (1960/2006) theory that they are based on the two principles of promoting growth in followers and working towards achieving the goals of the organisation (Giolito 2015). In this way, these theories can be said to combine an ethical concern for the interests of the followers with a concern for the effectiveness of the organisation.

Of all these leadership theories that carry on McGregor's (1960/2006) legacy, transformational leadership (Burns 1978/2000, Bass 1985, Bass & Riggio 2006) is the most significant at present. While the other more recent theories started to receive increased research attention after the turn of the century, transformational leadership has been the dominant leadership theory in research and practice during the past 30 years (Şahin et al. 2017, p. 105). It has therefore been subjected to more empirical scrutiny and refinement than the other theories. Of particular relevance to the present study, there have also been some empirical studies (Pastor & Mayo 2008, Şahin et al. 2017) that have established a positive relationship between McGregor's Theory Y assumptions and transformational leadership behaviour. These studies suggest that Theory Y assumptions can be seen as antecedents of transformational leadership behaviour.

Transformational leadership theory can therefore be helpful for this study by increasing our understanding of McGregor's ideas about the connections between leader assumptions about human nature and human behaviour and how leaders can promote intrinsic motivation in followers.

### **1.3 Theory Y and theories of intrinsic motivation**

McGregor (1960/2006) was inspired by Maslow's (1943, 1954) motivational theory and his concept of self-actualisation when he developed his Theory Y leadership theory (Alden 2012, Burke 2011, Carson 2005, Stephens & Heil 1998). Maslow's motivational theory describes how human beings have an inner tendency towards growth, which he calls the tendency towards self-actualisation. Maslow's theory also specifies that people have five sets of lower and higher needs that need to be supported for people to move towards self-actualisation. According to Waterman (1990), self-actualisation (Maslow 1943, 1954, 1965/1998, 1968, 1971) can be seen as a comprehensive form of intrinsic motivation. This indicates that McGregor's (1960/2006) Theory Y leadership not only promotes intrinsic motivation in followers, but it also promotes their movement towards self-actualisation.

Several more recent concepts relating to intrinsic motivation can be said to build on Maslow's (1943, 1954, 1965/1998, 1968, 1971) legacy and extend our understanding of intrinsic motivation. These concepts can add to our understanding of McGregor's (1960/2006) theory and how leaders can promote intrinsic motivation in followers. These concepts are flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 1990), thriving (Carver 1998; Spreitzer et al. 2005), personal expressiveness (Waterman 1990), and intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan 1985, Ryan & Deci 2017). Each of these concepts is related to or describes different aspects and degrees of intrinsic motivation. Together, these concepts suggest that intrinsic motivation may vary in strength, duration, and depth. Since intrinsic motivation appears to be more valuable the more extensively it is experienced, leaders should aim to promote as extensive intrinsic motivation as possible in their followers.

Of the constructs presented above, self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan 1985, Ryan & Deci 2017) and its construct of intrinsic motivation is particularly useful in understanding how leaders can promote intrinsic motivation in followers. One reason for this is that self-determination theory postulates that human beings have three basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The theory stipulates that fulfilling these needs promotes intrinsic motivation,

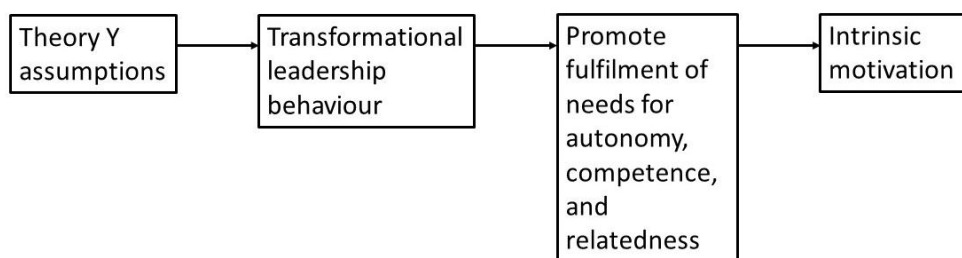
whereas thwarting the needs harms intrinsic motivation. This suggests that the more leaders support the fulfilment of these three needs in followers, the more intrinsically motivated the followers are likely to be.

Self-determination theory is also useful because it can add understanding to how Theory Y assumptions (McGregor 1960/2006) and transformational leadership (Burns 1978/2000, Bass 1985, Bass & Riggio 2006) can promote intrinsic motivation in followers. For example, empirical studies show that transformational leadership can promote fulfilment of the three basic psychological needs in followers (Deci et al. 2017, Hetland et al. 2011, 2015, Kovjanic et al. 2012), and thereby promote their intrinsic motivation (Charbonneau et al. 2001, Conchie 2013, Graves et al. 2013, Shin & Zhou 2003, Wang & Gagné 2013).

Together, these theories suggest that positive leader assumptions about human nature and human behaviour can influence leaders to promote intrinsic motivation in followers. Figure 1.2 illustrates this relationship. The figure shows that McGregor's (1960/2006) theory can be combined in a model with transformational leadership theory (Burns 1978/2000, Bass 1985, Bass & Riggio 2006) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan 1985, Ryan & Deci 2017). This model shows how having Theory Y assumptions can influence leaders to engage in transformational leadership behaviours. These behaviours can support fulfilment of the three needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which can promote intrinsic motivation as posited by self-determination theory.

**FIGURE 1.2**

**Preliminary model of how positive leader assumptions about human nature and human behaviour can influence leaders to promote intrinsic motivation in followers**



This can be seen as a preliminary model of how positive leader assumptions about human nature and human behaviour can influence leaders to promote intrinsic motivation in followers. This model has some support in the literature, which will be explained below.

Firstly, it reflects McGregor's (1960/2006) theory which posits that Theory Y assumptions influence leaders to engage in Theory Y leadership behaviours.

Secondly, Theory Y leadership behaviours (McGregor 1960/2006) have been replaced by transformational leadership behaviours (Burns 1978/2000, Bass 1985, Bass & Riggio 2006) in the model since transformational leadership can be seen as a newer and improved version of Theory Y leadership, and because there is some empirical support for Theory Y assumptions as predictors of transformational leadership behaviour (Pastor & Mayo 2008, Şahin et al. 2017).

Thirdly, there is theoretical and empirical support in the literature for a connection between transformational leadership behaviour and support of the three needs posited by self-determination theory (Deci et al. 2017, Gagné et al. 2022, Hetland et al. 2011, 2015, Kovjanic et al. 2012).

Fourth, there is empirical support in the self-determination theory literature for a connection between needs fulfilment and intrinsic motivation (Conchie 2013, Graves et al. 2013, Shin & Zhou 2003, Wang & Gagné 2013).

#### **1.4 Overall aim of this study and methodology**

We have seen in the above that McGregor (1960/2006) posited that leader assumptions can influence leader practices. In addition, he proposed that a particular set of positive leader assumptions about human nature and human behaviour, which he named Theory Y, would influence leaders to practise leadership that promotes intrinsic motivation in followers.



*The overall purpose of this study is to explore how having positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour can help leaders promote intrinsic motivation in followers.*

The specific research questions that guide this study will be presented at the end of Chapter 2.

The research approach of this study is interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA, Smith et al. 2009). IPA is a flexible approach to qualitative research that is concerned with exploring the lived experience, sense-making, and reflections of participants (Smith et al., p. 3). This approach lends itself well to the purpose of this study, which is to explore the lived experience of a group of leaders and the assumptions they hold about human nature and human behaviour, and about how to promote intrinsic motivation in their followers.

The informants in this study are all experienced leaders who have practised leadership at a high level for at least a decade, most of them for longer. They are Norwegian nationals.

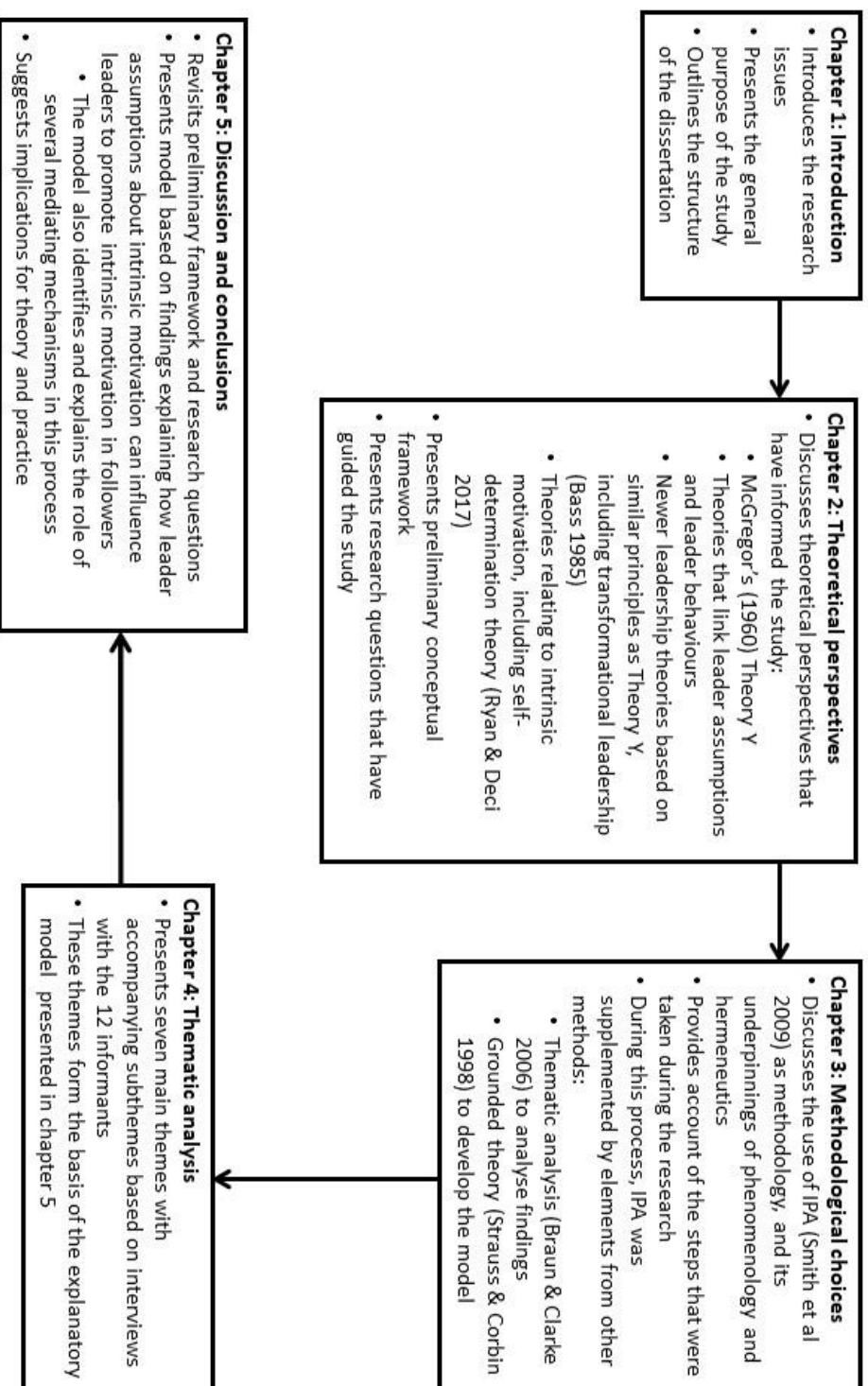
This study contributes to theory building by positing a number of propositions about how leader attitudes can influence the degree of effort leaders invest in promoting intrinsic motivation in their followers. In doing so, the study contributes to knowledge about how leader attitudes can influence leader behaviour.

The study also contributes to theory building by developing a model based on the empirical findings that explains the relationship between leader assumptions about human nature and human behaviour and leader practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers.

## **1.5 The structure of the thesis**

This section provides a brief outline of the structure of the dissertation and of the contents of the next chapters. The outline is illustrated in Figure 1.3.

**FIGURE 1.3: Overview of the chapters in the dissertation**



Chapter 1, the present chapter, introduces the research issues, presents the general aim of the study, and outlines the dissertation.

Chapter 2 reviews theoretical perspectives that inform this study.

The chapter first discusses McGregor's (1960/2006) theory, which posits that leaders with Theory Y assumptions will practise Theory Y leadership, and that this form of leadership practice involves promoting intrinsic motivation in followers. The other theoretical perspectives that are discussed in this chapter all help shed light on McGregor's theory, and can be said to build on his legacy to different extents.

Secondly, the chapter discusses a group of theoretical perspectives that address the link between leader assumptions and leader behaviours, and how leader assumptions can influence leader behaviours.

Thirdly, the chapter discusses several newer leadership theories and how these theories are based on similar principles as Theory Y leadership. Particular emphasis is placed on transformational leadership (Burns 1978/2000, Bass 1985, Bass & Riggio 2006), which is the most prominent of these newer leadership theories.

Fourth, the chapter discusses several concepts relating to intrinsic motivation. The reason for this is that these concepts can help understand how leaders can promote intrinsic motivation in the workplace.

These theoretical perspectives are then combined into a preliminary conceptual framework that informs the study, and finally, the chapter presents the research questions that guide the study.

Chapter 3 provides an account of the methodological choices that were made during the study. This includes discussing the role of the main methodology, IPA (Smith et al. 2009), and its underpinnings of phenomenology and hermeneutics.

The chapter also gives an account of the steps that were taken during the stages of preparation, conducting interviews, analysis, and presenting the findings.

Chapter 4 presents the seven main themes with accompanying subthemes that were developed during the thematic analysis. The thematic analysis was based on interviews with the twelve participants in the study. The main themes form the basis of the explanatory model that is developed in the discussion chapter.

Finally, Chapter 5 presents a model based on the findings of this study. The model explains how leader assumptions about intrinsic motivation can influence leaders to promote intrinsic motivation in followers. The model also identifies several mediating mechanisms in this process. The chapter concludes by discussing implications of the findings for theory and practice.

## 2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

### 2.1 The influence of leader assumptions on leader behaviours

A key element of McGregor's (1960/2006) theory is that leader assumptions influence leader behaviour. He states:

Behind every managerial decision or action are assumptions about human nature and human behavior. (McGregor 1960/2006, p. 45).

The relationship between leader assumptions and leader behaviour in McGregor's theory can be illustrated in the following way:

Leader assumptions/  
attitudes                      ----->                      Leader behaviours/  
practices

McGregor does not offer much explanation of *how* leader assumptions influence leader behaviour. In fact, we do not yet have much understanding of the process through which leader assumptions influence leader behaviour in his theory. One reason for this is that there has been little focus on the role of underlying assumptions in research on McGregor's theory and in leadership theory in general (Cutcher-Gershenfeld 2006).

Rather than explaining directly the process through which leader assumptions influence leader behaviour, the logic of McGregor's theory rests on contrasting how two different sets of leader assumptions lead to different leader practices. He labels these sets of leader assumptions Theory X and Theory Y.

The Theory X assumptions consist of beliefs about people as generally unwilling to work and do their best unless they are compelled to do so by extrinsic means. McGregor defines the Theory X assumptions in the following way:

1. The average human being has an inherent dislike of work and will avoid it if he can.

2. Because of this human characteristic of dislike of work, most people must be coerced, controlled, directed, threatened with punishment to get them to put forth adequate effort toward the achievement of organizational objectives.
  3. The average human being prefers to be directed, wishes to avoid responsibility, has relatively little ambition, wants security above all.
- (McGregor 1960/2006, pp. 45-47)

He contrasts the Theory X assumptions with the assumptions of Theory Y, which consist of beliefs about people as intrinsically motivated to do their best if they are given the opportunity to do so. McGregor (1960/2006) defines the Theory Y assumptions as follows:

1. The expenditure of physical and mental effort in work is as natural as play or rest. The average human being does not inherently dislike work. Depending upon controllable conditions, work may be a source of satisfaction (and will be voluntarily performed) or a source of punishment (and will be avoided if possible).
  2. External control and the threat of punishment are not the only means for bringing about effort toward organizational objectives. Man will exercise self-direction and self-control in the service of objectives to which he is committed.
  3. Commitment to objectives is a function of the rewards associated with their achievement. The most significant of such rewards, e.g., the satisfaction of ego and self-actualization needs, can be direct products of effort directed toward organizational objectives.
  4. The average human being learns, under proper conditions, not only to accept but to seek responsibility. Avoidance of responsibility, lack of ambition, and emphasis on security are generally consequences of experience, not inherent human characteristics.
  5. The capacity to exercise a relatively high degree of imagination, ingenuity, and creativity in the solution of organizational problems is widely, not narrowly, distributed in the population.
  6. Under the conditions of modern industrial life, the intellectual potentialities of the average human being are only partially utilized.
- (McGregor 1960/2006, pp. 65-66).

McGregor argues that these contrasting Theory X and Y assumptions lead to different leader practices. On one hand, he argues that leaders who hold Theory X assumptions, and believe that people need extrinsic incentives to do their work, will base their leadership practice on the use of control. On the other hand, McGregor argues that leaders who hold Theory Y assumptions, and believe that people are naturally motivated under the right conditions, will base their leadership practice on creating conditions that will facilitate the intrinsic motivation of followers. This means that whereas Theory X leadership is based mainly on the use of control to influence followers, Theory Y leadership is based mainly on other, non-controlling, means of influencing followers.

McGregor also argues that Theory X assumptions have a limiting effect on leader practices. He states:

Management is severely hampered today in its attempts to innovate with respect to the human side of enterprise by the inadequacy of conventional organization theory. Based on invalid and limiting assumptions about human behavior, this theory blinds us to many possibilities for invention, just as the physical science theory of a half century ago prevented even the perception of the possibility of radar space travel. (McGregor pp. 328-329)

McGregor thus claims that Theory X assumptions have a limiting effect on leader practices because they do not acknowledge the full potential in human beings under good conditions. He argues that these limiting assumptions have as a consequence that leaders do not invest sufficient effort into facilitating the needs of followers.

He contrasts this with the Theory Y assumptions, which he maintains are more in line with a newer and more accurate understanding of human nature and human behaviour. Rather than having a limiting effect on leader practice, McGregor argues that the more optimistic Theory Y assumptions give leaders something to strive for, which will make them make more effort to facilitate the needs and performance of their employees. He states:

Once management becomes truly persuaded that it is seriously underestimating the potential represented by its human resources (...) it will invest the time, money, and effort not only to develop improved applications of such ideas as have been discussed in these pages, but to invent more effective ones. (McGregor 1960/2006, p. 329).

By illustrating how Theory X assumptions lead to Theory X leadership, and how Theory Y assumptions lead to Theory Y leadership, McGregor implies that different leader assumptions lead to different leader practices, and that this must mean that leader assumptions influence leader practices.

Although McGregor (1960/2006) does not provide a detailed explanation of the process through which leader assumptions influence leader practices, his argument seems to be based on the premise that practices follow logically from assumptions. McGregor appears to assume that leaders will act in accordance with their assumptions about followers, and he also appears to assume that there is a high degree of correspondence between the leader's assumptions and practice. He stipulates that leaders either have Theory X assumptions and practise Theory X leadership, or that they have Theory Y assumptions and practise Theory Y leadership.

McGregor (1960/2006, p. 9-10) does however make the point that managers who state that they have Theory Y assumptions often do not act in accordance with these principles. He explains this apparent inconsistency by arguing that the assumptions of Theory X are still deeply ingrained and widespread among managers. This means that many managers who say they have Theory Y assumptions, still unconsciously retain many of the assumptions of Theory X. McGregor thus appears to assume that there must be correspondence between a leader's assumptions and practices. And he uses the role of unconscious leader assumptions to explain how leaders with apparent Theory Y assumptions do not always act in accordance with these principles.

Later in this dissertation I will argue for another possible explanation for why leaders who state that they have assumptions similar to Theory Y do not necessarily always act or make decisions in line with these assumptions. I suggest that such leaders may actually have Theory Y assumptions, but that they



for different reasons are unable to translate their assumptions (sufficiently) into practice. There could be many reasons why a leader with Theory Y assumptions is unable to translate these assumptions into practice. Such reasons could include a lack of awareness in the everyday work situation, insufficient time or resources, or competing external pressures.

In real life there is also a possibility that leader assumptions are not always translated into practice, or that leaders may vary in the degree to which they translate their assumptions into practice. These are issues that are hardly addressed by McGregor's theory. Nevertheless, it is important to understand why leader assumptions are not necessarily translated into practice, and why the degree to which they do varies. We therefore need a better understanding of the process where leader assumptions influence leader behaviours, and of factors that can impact this process.

### **2.1.1 A strong moral element in McGregor's theory**

There is a strong moral element in McGregor's (1960/2006) theory. According to Cutcher-Gershenfeld (2006, pp. xlv-xlvi), McGregor has a "deeply moral and humanistic orientation." This is consistent with the argument of Jacobs (2004, p. 293), who highlights the "critical moral core" of McGregor's thinking. Jacobs points out that McGregor's concern with realising human potential in the organisation is a moral one. This concern involves a belief that managers should enhance fulfilment, personal growth, and creativity in their followers. Jacobs argues that these ideas form part of McGregor's profound concern with the need for humanisation of the workplace and thereby better treatment of employees; a concern which is deeply embedded in McGregor's writings.

McGregor draws parallels to the ethical obligations of other professions which exert power over other human beings when he makes his case for a moral dimension in management. He argues that managers exert considerable power over their employees and that this power can easily be abused to manipulate or exploit the employees (McGregor 1960/2006, pp. 14-16). He therefore believes that managers have a moral responsibility for treating their followers ethically. He points out that other professions with similar influence over the lives of

others, like doctors or teachers, often adhere to strict ethical standards. McGregor insists that managers should take equal measures to treat their followers ethically.

McGregor's (1960/2006) work can also be seen as an argument against the principles of Theory X, which he sees as unethical. It should be pointed out that Theory X is based on the principles of scientific management (Taylor 1911). According to McGregor, these principles were still dominating in most American workplaces in his time, and in his view, they do great damage to the well-being and performance of employees. He states:

The conditions imposed by conventional organization theory and by the approach of scientific management for the past half century have tied men to limited jobs which do not utilize their capabilities, have discouraged the acceptance of responsibility, have encouraged passivity, have eliminated meaning from work. (McGregor 1957/2006, p. 352).

McGregor is thus claiming that the principles of Theory X have many negative effects on people in organisations. He believes that the limiting and controlling effects of Theory X management prevent people from using their abilities, promote passivity rather than active participation, prevent people from taking responsibility, and make work less meaningful. McGregor's work can thus also be seen as an argument that the principles of Theory X have an unnecessarily limiting effect on people in organisations, and that they are therefore unethical.

## **2.2 Research streams linking leader assumptions and practices**

Several areas of research lend support to leader assumptions as an influence on leadership practice. This includes a small number of studies that have directly investigated Theory Y assumptions as an influence on leadership practice. Moreover, research on the Pygmalion effect (Eden 1992) and implicit followership theories (Sy 2010) has also established a link between leader assumptions and leadership practice. In addition, more general research on the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen 1991, Ajzen et al. 2018) can also add support to the link between leader assumptions and leader practice.

### **2.2.1 Theory Y assumptions as antecedents of leadership**

A small number of studies have empirically investigated Theory Y assumptions as antecedents of leadership practice. These studies lend support to Theory Y assumptions as antecedents of both Theory Y leadership and transformational leadership. Studies by Fiman (1973) and Lawter et al. (2015) found a positive relationship between Theory Y assumptions and Theory Y leadership. Similarly, studies by Pastor and Mayo (2008) and Şahin et al. (2017) found a positive relationship between Theory Y assumptions and transformational leadership.

An early empirical study by Fiman (1973) investigated the relationship between Theory Y assumptions, Theory Y behaviours, and worker performance among a group of clerical workers and their supervisors. The study found a positive relationship between Theory Y assumptions and Theory Y behaviours, but not between Theory Y behaviours and worker performance. Fiman suggested that the reason for the lack of correlation between Theory Y behaviours and worker performance could be the fixed nature of clerical work or that the work outputs in the study were difficult to compare. However, Kopelman and Prottas (2013, p. 876) suggest that the mixed result of this study may have discouraged other researchers from pursuing this line of research.

A more recent study by Lawter et al. (2015) made use of scales developed by Kopelman and colleagues (Kopelman et al. 2008, 2010, 2012) to investigate the link between Theory X/Y assumptions, Theory X/Y behaviours, and job performance at both individual and group levels. They based their study on 80 workers and their 21 managers in four companies in the United States. The study found that Theory X/Y behaviour fully mediated the relationship between Theory X/Y assumptions and both individual and group performance, thus providing empirical support for McGregor's theory (Lawter et al. 2015, p. 96).

Another line of research has investigated Theory Y assumptions as antecedents of transformational leadership. Transformational leadership theory (Bass & Riggio 2006) incorporates many of the same principles as Theory Y leadership (McGregor 1960/2006), and the theory has been significantly influenced by

McGregor's work (Antonakis 2001, pp. 52-53, Kopelman et al. 2010, p. 121, Pastor & Mayo 2008, Yukl 1989, p. 279).

Pastor and Mayo (2008) investigated the relationship between Theory X/Y assumptions and transformational leadership. They based their study on self-reports by 76 top managers in Spain's largest companies. Their study found a positive relationship between Theory Y assumptions and transformational leadership behaviours.

Şahin et al. (2017) also investigated the relationship between Theory X/Y assumptions and transformational leadership behaviour. Their sample consisted of 398 workers and 108 managers from educational and manufacturing organisations in Turkey. The managers in the study self-rated their Theory X/Y assumptions, while the workers rated their managers' transformational leadership behaviours. Şahin et al. found that transformational leadership behaviour was positively related to Theory Y assumptions and negatively related to Theory X assumptions. Like Pastor and Mayo (2008), Şahin et al.'s study thus supports Theory Y assumptions as antecedents of transformational leadership.

Together, the above studies support McGregor's thesis that leader assumptions can influence leader behaviours. They also provide empirical support for Theory Y assumptions as antecedents to Theory Y leadership and transformational leadership.

The limited number of empirical studies of Theory Y assumptions as antecedents of leadership practice can be seen as reflecting a common criticism of McGregor's theory, namely that it lacks sufficient empirical validation (Kopelman et al. 2012, Miner 2003, Schein 2011, Strauss 2002). One possible reason for this paucity of research is the difficulty of studying underlying leader assumptions. Another possible reason is the lack of valid measures for Theory X and Theory Y assumptions and behaviours (Kopelman & Prottas 2013). These challenges are likely to have hindered empirical studies in the area.

However, promising developments have emerged to address this issue. In a series of studies, Kopelman and colleagues (2008, 2010, 2012) have developed and validated a set of instruments for measuring Theory X/Y attitudes and

behaviours. These instruments are now openly available, and could therefore make it more feasible for researchers to investigate McGregor's ideas empirically going forward.

### **2.2.2 The Pygmalion effect**

Pygmalion theory (Eden 1992, 2003) offers support to McGregor's (1960/2006) assertion that leader assumptions can influence leader behaviours. Similar to McGregor's theory, Eden's Pygmalion theory describes how positive leader assumptions about followers can influence leaders to engage in positive behaviours. In addition, the Pygmalion effect has also been incorporated in transformational leadership theory (Bass 1985, Bass & Riggio 2006), by positing that high leader expectations of followers are antecedents of transformational leadership behaviour.

The Pygmalion effect (Eden 1992) is a form of self-fulfilling prophecy where leaders who express high expectations of their followers' performance induce better performance in their followers. Eden's (2003) "Pygmalion-at-work model" posits that high leader expectations lead to improved leadership, which boosts the self-efficacy<sup>2</sup> of followers. According to this model, higher follower self-efficacy in turn leads to higher motivation, increased effort, and higher performance (Eden 2003, p. 89).

There are clear parallels between Eden's (1992) Pygmalion effect and McGregor's (1960/2006) Theory Y. Both the Pygmalion effect and McGregor's Theory Y describe processes where positive leader assumptions lead to positive leader behaviours. Eden and McGregor's theories also have in common that positive leader assumptions in both theories have been found to be antecedents of transformational leadership behaviour.

The Pygmalion effect has also been incorporated in transformational leadership theory (Bass 1985, Bass & Riggio 2006), and can be seen as part of the inspirational motivation element of transformational leadership (Eden 1992, p.

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<sup>2</sup> By self-efficacy, Eden means the followers' belief in their ability to do their work (Eden 1992, p. 292).

292). The high expectations specified by Pygmalion theory are incorporated in transformational leadership in the form of the leader's expression of confidence and optimism about follower performance. This is posited to raise follower self-esteem and enthusiasm, and thereby the effort followers put into their work, thus enhancing their performance (Bass 1985). Eden therefore suggests that the Pygmalion effect can help leaders perform more effective transformational leadership by raising their expectations of followers (Eden 1992, p. 293).

The Pygmalion effect has been verified in a large number of empirical studies. For example, meta-analyses by McNatt (2000) and Kierein and Gold (2000) found strong support for the Pygmalion effect in work organisations. However, this research has also been criticised for a lack of variety in research settings, and for being mostly experimental (McNatt 2000, Kierein & Gold 2000). Nevertheless, it is assumed that the Pygmalion effect frequently occurs naturally in work organisations (Whiteley et al. 2012), and researchers have therefore called for more studies of naturally occurring Pygmalion effects (Eden et al. 2000, Kierein & Gold 2000, McNatt 2000).

In summary, research on the Pygmalion effect (Eden 1992, 2003) aligns with McGregor's (1960/2006) thesis that leader assumptions can influence leader behaviours. Its integration in transformational leadership theory also offers support to positive leader assumptions as an influence on leadership practice, and this relationship will be further explored in the next sections.

### **2.2.3 Implicit followership theories**

Sy's (2010) theory of implicit followership theories (IFTs) is another perspective that addresses the influence of leader assumptions on leader behaviours. Sy (2010, p. 74) defines IFTs as personal beliefs that individuals hold about the traits and behaviours of followers. These are "lay" theories that are used as an automatic and spontaneous way of categorising other people. They serve as mental benchmarks for how to judge and respond to people, thereby making everyday decision-making easier (Sy 2010, Whiteley et al. 2012).

Sy (2010) identified six factors that comprise the IFT concept, each consisting of assumptions leaders can hold about followers. He found that these factors can be grouped into positive and negative leader assumptions. Positive IFTs, labelled “follower prototype,” include beliefs in the follower traits of Industry, Enthusiasm, and Good Citizen. Conversely, negative IFTs, labelled “follower antiprototype,” involve beliefs in the follower traits of Incompetence, Conformity, and Insubordination.

Empirical studies have supported the influence of IFTs on leader behaviour, and consequently on follower outcomes. For example, Sy (2010) found that leaders with positive IFTs were more likely to engage in behaviours such as giving followers autonomy, trust, and supporting their needs, leading to positive follower outcomes. He also found that leaders with negative IFTs were more inclined to engage in negative behaviours such as micromanaging, expressing distrust in followers, and not satisfying follower needs, thereby harming follower outcomes.

IFTs have also been linked to the Pygmalion effect (Eden 1992), where leaders with positive IFTs have higher expectations of their followers, and thereby induce higher follower performance. Empirical studies by Whiteley et al. (2012) and Veestraeten et al. (2021) both found support for this relationship, thus endorsing that leader assumptions about followers can influence leader behaviours.

In summary, research on IFTs provides empirical support to the thesis that leader assumptions can influence leader behaviours. Positive IFTs can influence leaders to engage in behaviours that promote intrinsic motivation in followers, aligning with McGregor’s (1960/2006) Theory Y. However, like McGregor’s theory, these studies do not fully explain the process where leader assumptions influence leader behaviours. We still need to understand what the components of this process are, and how they influence whether and to what degree leader assumptions influence leader behaviours.

The next section will discuss an area of research that can help shed light on this process, namely general research on the link between attitudes and behaviours. This includes the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen 1991, Ajzen et al. 2018).

## **2.2.4 General research on the influence of attitudes on behaviour**

Research within social psychology on the link between attitudes and behaviours can also offer insights that are relevant to McGregor's (1960/2006) thesis that leader assumptions can influence leader behaviours. In fact, an early pioneer within this area of research, Gordon Allport, was a colleague of McGregor. Allport's ideas about how attitudes exert "a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related" (Allport 1935, p. 820), are likely to have influenced McGregor's theory.

Today, there is wide agreement in the research community that attitudes can influence behaviours (Guyer & Fabrigar 2015). This is confirmed by several meta-analyses, which have found substantial correlation between attitudes and behaviours (Kim & Hunter 1993, Eckes & Six 1994, Kraus 1995, Wallace et al. 2005, Glasman & Albarracín 2006).

An influential theory within this area of research is Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen 1991, Ajzen et al. 2018). This theory can offer valuable insights into the relationship between leader assumptions and leader behaviours in McGregor's theory. The next sections will discuss Ajzen's theory and its relationship to McGregor's idea that leader assumptions about human nature and human behaviour can influence leader behaviour.

### **The theory of planned behaviour**

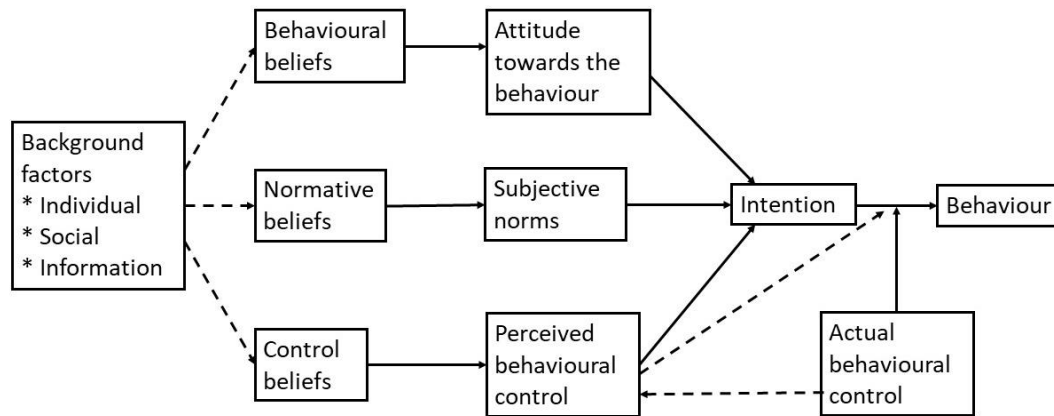
The theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen 1991, Ajzen et al. 2018) outlines how a set of beliefs, attitudes, norms, and perceived behavioural control can influence intentions and behaviour. The model is displayed in Figure 2.1.

In this model, behaviour is a direct consequence of one's intention to engage in the behaviour. Three factors influence this intention: attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. These factors, in turn, are outcomes of behavioural, normative, and control beliefs. The model also



**FIGURE 2.1**

**The theory of planned behaviour (After Ajzen et al. 2018, p. 141)**



identifies several individual, social, and informational background factors that can influence these beliefs (Ajzen 2018, p. 54).

The model consists of the following constructs (Ajzen et al. 2018, pp. 50-54):

- *Behavioural beliefs*: refer to assumptions about likely outcomes of the behaviour, either positive or negative, which shape attitude towards the behaviour.
- *Attitude towards the behaviour*: refers to assumptions about the favourability of engaging in the behaviour, which can vary in degree from positive to negative.
- *Normative beliefs*: refer to assumptions about whether respected others such as friends, family, or colleagues are likely to approve or disapprove of the behaviour, which leads to perceived social pressure, or subjective norms.
- *Subjective norms*: refer to perceived social pressure to engage in the behaviour or not. This pressure can be seen as either positive or negative.
- *Control beliefs*: refer to assumptions about whether one has the necessary skills and resources to carry out the behaviour, influencing perceived behavioural control.
- *Perceived behavioural control*: refers to assumptions about how easy or difficult engaging in the behaviour is likely to be. This corresponds with

the concept of self-efficacy (Bandura 1977). The construct also reflects a person's previous experience with the behaviour and anticipated obstacles that may be faced.

The model posits that attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control influence the strength of one's intention to engage in the behaviour.

- *Intention*: refers to the decision to perform the behaviour, including how much effort one is willing and planning to invest in the behaviour. This intention influences behaviour.
- *Behaviour*: refers to the likelihood that one will engage in the behaviour.

The model also includes two additional elements: background factors and actual control.

- *Background factors*: these include various individual, social, and informational variables that can influence one's beliefs, including personality, education, values, and more.
- *Actual control*: although this concept is not precisely defined in the model, it moderates the relationship between intention and behaviour. Because of this ambiguity, perceived behavioural control acts as a proxy for this construct, which is indicated by the dotted lines on the right-hand side of the model.

The next section considers how the theory of planned behaviour can add understanding to the relationship between leader assumptions and leader practices in McGregor's (1960/2006) theory.

### **Integrating the theory of planned behaviour with McGregor's theory**

In his theory, McGregor (1960/2006) argues that leader assumptions influence leader practices. More specifically, he argues that Theory Y assumptions lead to Theory Y practices. However, the nature and components of this influencing process remain underexplored, and we therefore need a better understanding of

this process. In this regard, the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen 1991, Ajzen et al. 2018) can offer a valuable perspective that can improve our understanding of McGregor's theory.

The theory of planned behaviour posits that intention is a key influence on behaviour, and identifies several constructs that can influence this intention. By identifying these constructs and explaining their role in influencing behaviour, the theory can offer fresh insights into the relationship between leader assumptions and leader practices in McGregor's theory.

The constructs *behavioural beliefs* and *attitude towards the behaviour* refer to one's considerations about the extent to which the behaviour will have positive or negative outcomes (Ajzen 1991, Ajzen et al. 2018). The more positive these considerations are, the stronger the intention to engage in the behaviour, and the more likely one is to engage in the behaviour. Applied to this study, this suggests that the more leaders believe that promoting intrinsic motivation will have positive outcomes, the more likely they are to invest effort in this behaviour.

The constructs *control beliefs* and *perceived behavioural control* can also help explain how leaders with Theory Y assumptions translate these into practice. These constructs refer to the perceived difficulty of performing the behaviour, and also reflect previous experience with engaging in the behaviour. The theory of planned behaviour posits that those who believe they have the necessary skills and resources to perform the behaviour are likely to have stronger intention to engage in the behaviour. For this study, this suggests that leaders with successful experiences with promoting intrinsic motivation in followers will have stronger intentions and more likelihood of engaging in such practices.

The constructs *normative beliefs* and *social norms* appear to be less relevant to McGregor's study, since McGregor's theory refers to the leader's own assumptions, rather than to the assumptions of others. Nevertheless, these constructs could still impact behaviours in this study. These constructs suggest that the extent to which respected others value a behaviour can influence engagement in the behaviour. In the context of this study, this could mean that people the leaders hold in high regard, such as members of their boards, could see promoting intrinsic motivation as less important than other activities. This

could have a negative effect on the leaders' intentions and efforts to promote intrinsic motivation. Conversely, leaders who have high regard of the views and experiences of their followers could be influenced to invest more effort in promoting their intrinsic motivation.

Another construct that could be relevant to this study is *background factors*. These factors can influence leader beliefs, and thereby also attitudes, norms, perceived behavioural control, intention, and behaviour. Ajzen et al. (2018) suggest a large number of such background factors that could influence behaviour, and point out that which of these background factors are relevant varies in different situations and contexts. Factors that could be of relevance in this study include personality, personal values, experience, education, professional background, culture, training, knowledge, field, and situation. These background factors could influence whether, how, and to what degree leaders want to apply Theory Y principles in their leadership practice.

In summary, the theory of planned behaviour can improve our understanding of McGregor's theory by addressing the existing gap in comprehending the process through which leader assumptions influence leader practices. It identifies elements that may help explain this process, including perceptions about possible behaviour outcomes, others' valuation of the behaviour, and perceived ability to carry out the behaviour. Moreover, the theory specifies that these perceptions shape the person's intention to engage in the behaviour. Additionally, it suggests several background factors that may influence this process. Together, these elements can increase our insight into how leader assumptions influence leader practices in McGregor's theory.

However, while the theory of planned behaviour offers valuable insights, it does not fully explain the process through which Theory Y assumptions translate into Theory Y practices in McGregor's theory. The reason for this is that the beliefs and attitudes in the theory of planned behaviour all point directly to the behaviour in question. In contrast, there is less direct correspondence between the assumptions and practices in McGregor's theory. The Theory Y assumptions consist of multifaceted elements, including beliefs about people and their motivations, underpinned by moral concerns for the well-being of followers.

These many-sided Theory Y assumptions do not directly correspond with the Theory Y practices, which McGregor outlines as general principles such as promoting integration, self-control, growth, and intrinsic motivation in followers. This difference suggests that the association between leader assumptions and leader practices in McGregor's theory may not be as straightforward as the connection between attitudes and behaviour in the theory of planned behaviour.

### **2.3 Theory Y and newer leadership theories that build on its legacy**

This section will present key principles of McGregor's (1960/2006) Theory Y leadership theory, and some more recent leadership theories that are based on similar principles. McGregor pointed out that his Theory Y was not a finished leadership theory, and welcomed developments of his theory based on new knowledge of human nature and motivation. In line with this, several newer leadership theories can be seen as building on McGregor's theory (Gardner & Schermerhorn 2004, Giolito 2015, Sorensen & Minahan 2011). These newer leadership theories include servant leadership (Greenleaf 1970, 1977, Van Dierendonck 2011), empowering leadership (Conger & Kanungo 1988, Spreitzer 1995, Zhang & Bartol 2010), authentic leadership (Luthans & Avolio 2003, Avolio et al. 2004), ethical leadership (Brown et al. 2005), and transformational leadership (Burns 1978/2000, Bass 1985, Bass & Riggio 2006). These theories share with McGregor's theory that they are based on the principles of promoting growth in followers and working towards achieving the goals of the organisation (Giolito 2015). They can therefore be said to combine an ethical concern for the interests of the followers with a concern for the productivity of the organisation. In this way, these newer leadership theories can be seen as being either implicitly or explicitly based on the principles of Theory Y (Giolito 2015).

#### **2.3.1 Theory Y leadership principles**

McGregor described Theory Y leadership as a process consisting mainly of "creating opportunities, releasing potential, removing obstacles, encouraging growth, providing guidance" (McGregor 1957/2006, p. 352). He outlined Theory

Y leadership as being based on the principles of self-control, integration, promoting growth, and treating followers ethically:

*The principle of self-control* is based on a view of employees as active agents who need freedom to grow, self-actualise and take pleasure in their work. As a consequence, Theory Y leadership seeks to promote the self-control of followers by supporting their autonomy and involving them in decision-making.

*The principle of integration* involves seeking ways for followers to pursue their own goals, such as the need for growth and development, while also working towards the goals of the organisation (McGregor 1960/2006). This also involves building commitment to organisational goals, as McGregor (1967) argues that employees who are committed to the organisation's goals will use more self-control, act more responsibly, and be more creative.

*The principle of promoting growth* can be seen as supporting the human tendency towards self-actualisation as posited by Maslow (1954). In Maslow's view, this is a fundamental tendency towards growth, health, creativity, and realising one's potential, as well as to becoming a fully functioning person (Maslow 1971, p. 55).

*The principle of treating followers ethically* is based on the idea that managers have considerable power over their employees, and that they therefore have a moral responsibility for not abusing this power by exploiting or manipulating their employees (McGregor 1960/2006). Another ethical aspect of Theory Y leadership is that it assumes that promoting growth and intrinsic motivation is not only in the best interest of the organisation, but also fulfilling for employees.

Similar principles can be recognised in the newer leadership theories of servant, empowering, authentic, ethical, and transformational leadership presented below.

### **2.3.2 Servant leadership**

Servant leadership theory was first introduced by Robert Greenleaf in the 1970s (Greenleaf 1970, 1977). This leadership form involves wanting to be of service

to others (Greenleaf 1970), and emphasises the needs and personal growth of followers (Van Dierendonck 2011, p. 1229). The theory is based on the premise that by first developing and promoting well-being in followers, the fulfilment of organisational goals will follow (Hoch et al. 2018, p. 507). Servant leaders can be characterised by the following qualities: empowering and developing people, humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, providing direction, and stewardship (Van Dierendonck 2011, pp. 1232-1234).

Servant leadership has several principles in common with Theory Y leadership. For example, both servant leadership and Theory Y leadership are concerned with supporting the needs and growth of followers.

However, the two theories also differ in how they prioritise supporting the needs of followers relative to supporting the goals of the organisation. Servant leadership prioritises the needs of the followers above the goals of the organisation, with the belief that supporting follower needs will ultimately lead to fulfilling organisational goals. In contrast, McGregor's Theory Y leadership seeks to integrate the goals of the followers with the needs of the organisation, giving them equal priority.

In spite of this difference, both theories share a sense of optimism in this regard, as they assume that it is possible to find ways where both followers and organisations can have their goals met. Such alignment may not always be achievable in the real world.

### **2.3.3 Empowering leadership**

The study of empowering leadership began to gain interest around the 1990s, and has roots in the areas of employee empowerment (Conger & Kanungo 1988, Thomas & Velthouse 1990, Spreitzer 1995), participatory management (Argyris 1957, Likert 1961, McGregor 1960), and industrial democracy (Follett 1924, 1940). Empowering leadership is an approach that involves sharing authority with employees with the aim to foster their motivation and commitment to their work (Thomas & Velthouse 1990, Zhang & Bartol 2010). Empowering leadership is posited to promote psychological empowerment in followers

(Zhang & Bartol 2010). Psychological empowerment is a psychological state which is made up of the four cognitions of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Spreitzer 1995).

Zhang and Bartol (2010) define empowering leadership as:

the process of implementing conditions that enable sharing power with an employee by delineating the significance of the employee's job, providing greater decision-making autonomy, expressing confidence in the employee's capabilities, and removing hindrances to performance. (Zhang and Bartol 2010, p. 109)

This definition suggests that there are four dimensions of empowering leadership. Zhang and Bartol (2010) base these dimensions on the work of Ahearne et al. (2005) and the dimensions also correspond with the components of psychological empowerment as identified by Spreitzer (1995). These components are (1) *promoting a sense of meaning*, which involves helping followers see how their work contributes to the goals of the organisation, (2) *enabling participation in decision-making*, which involves giving followers authority to decide how to do their work, (3) *expressing confidence in the followers' performance*, which involves conveying to the followers that the leader believes in their competence, and (4) *removing bureaucratic constraints*, which involves giving the followers more control of their work situation, and thereby a sense of having an impact (Zhang & Bartol 2010, p. 110).

There are several similarities between empowering leadership and Theory Y leadership. Both theories have as a central principle to support the autonomy of followers. McGregor (1960/2006) speaks of supporting the "self-control" of followers, while empowering leadership speaks of supporting the "self-determination" of followers.

Both empowering leadership and Theory Y leadership also aim to support the growth of followers. In empowering leadership this is conveyed through the belief that the leader expresses in the competence of followers. A similar faith in follower competence is also expressed in the Theory Y assumptions which underlie Theory Y leadership.



Another main similarity between the two theories is that they both aim to promote intrinsic motivation in followers. For example, Cheong et al. (2019, p. 34) explain that they see empowering leadership as a way to “enhance internal motivation” in followers. Similarly, McGregor makes it clear that Theory Y leadership promotes self-actualisation in followers, which is a form of intrinsic motivation (Waterman 1990).

### **2.3.4 Authentic leadership**

Luthans and Avolio (2003) were among the first to introduce the concept of authentic leadership. They devised authentic leadership as a style where the leader has high moral standards, and practises leadership where there is “a seamless link between their espoused values, actions, and behaviours” (Luthans & Avolio 2003, p. 242). Walumbwa et al. (2008) expanded on this work and define authentic leadership as:

a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development. (Walumbwa et al. 2008, p. 94)

In this view, authentic leadership has four dimensions, namely: *self-awareness*, which involves having an understanding of how one tends to make sense of the world, of what one’s strengths and weaknesses are, and of how one impacts other people. *Relational transparency*, which refers to presenting oneself honestly to others, sharing information openly, and conveying one’s sincere thoughts and emotions. *Balanced processing*, which involves being open to hear opinions that diverge from one’s own, and considering information objectively before coming to conclusions. And *internalised moral perspective*, which means acting and making decisions that are in line with one’s own beliefs and values (Walumbwa et al. 2008, pp. 95-96).

Authentic leadership theory shares several principles with Theory Y leadership. Both Theory Y leadership and authentic leadership are based on a moral foundation which involves assuming that the leader has a responsibility for treating followers well. In line with this, Walumbwa et al. (2008, p. 94) state: “given the profound impact that leaders exert on the lives of others—for their betterment or harm—it is clear that ethics lie at the very heart of leadership.” This argument is similar to the sentiment expressed by McGregor (1960/2006), as outlined in section 2.1.1 on page 19.

Another principle authentic leadership has in common with Theory Y is the assumption that there is correspondence between leader beliefs and assumptions and leader practices. Walumbwa et al.’s (2008) concepts of self-awareness and relational transparency emphasise that authentic leaders know their own values and beliefs and act in line with these. This is similar to McGregor’s assumption that leaders who have Theory Y assumptions will translate these into practice by practising Theory Y leadership.

Authentic leadership also shares another principle with Theory Y leadership, namely a focus on fostering development in followers. In line with this, Avolio and Gardner (2005, p. 326) state that authentic leaders “seek to develop associates by modeling and supporting self-determination.” This is similar to the Theory Y principles of promoting self-control and growth in followers.

### **2.3.5 Ethical leadership**

Like authentic leadership, ethical leadership gained momentum around the turn of the millennium. Ethical leadership is a form of leadership that is characterised by morally appropriate leader behaviours combined with the furthering of well-being in stakeholders (Banks et al. 2021). Ethical leadership can be defined as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making” (Brown et al. 2005, p. 120).

According to Brown et al. (2005, pp. 120-121), ethical leadership involves modelling behaviour that is of high moral standards. It also involves giving prominence to ethics in the organisation, and doing so in ways that give followers voice in the process of implementing these principles. Furthermore, it involves promoting ethical conduct by setting standards for followers and rewarding ethical behaviours and punishing unethical behaviours. Ethical leaders also hold themselves to high moral standards when making decisions, thereby setting an example for their followers.

Ethical leadership shares several characteristics with Theory Y leadership. As a positive leadership theory (Hoch et al. 2018), ethical leadership appears to be based on positive assumptions about human nature. The theory assumes that followers can be influenced to behave ethically, which can be seen as reflecting an optimistic, hopeful view of human nature. This resonates with the positive assumptions about human nature that underlie Theory Y leadership.

In addition, both Theory Y leadership and ethical leadership involve a concern for the well-being of followers. In line with this, Brown and Treviño (2006) explain that ethical leaders demonstrate care and concern for their followers.

Theory Y leadership and ethical leadership also share an intention of treating followers ethically. However, ethical leadership goes further in its ethical intention. While the ethical concern of Theory Y leadership mainly focuses on how leaders treat their employees, ethical leadership takes this ethical concern beyond the followers to also include stakeholders and society at large. This broader focus gives ethical leadership a wider ethical concern in comparison to Theory Y leadership.

Relatedly, the two theories also differ in their focus in another way. While ethical leadership mainly focuses on how leaders can promote ethical behaviours and decisions in their organisations, Theory Y leadership mainly concentrates on how leaders should act and make decisions that support the followers and their performance. This difference suggests that ethical leadership has a narrower focus when it comes to how leaders should act and make decisions in relation to followers, compared to Theory Y leadership.

### 2.3.6 Transformational leadership

James MacGregor Burns (1978/2000) was one of the first to develop transformational leadership theory. The theory was later extended by Bernard Bass (1985, 1997, Bass & Riggio 2006). Transformational leadership is a leadership approach that seeks to engage the motivation of followers and help them meet their needs (Burns 1978/2000, p. 4). This form of leadership involves inspiring followers to challenge themselves, and helping them develop and grow in the process of reaching mutual goals (Bass & Riggio 2006, p. 3).

Transformational leadership can be contrasted with transactional leadership, where leaders primarily engage in an exchange process where they offer rewards in return for their followers' services (Burns 1978/2000, Bass & Riggio 2006).

Bass (1985, Bass & Riggio 2006) has identified four components of transformational leadership. These components are idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration.

*Idealised influence:* transformational leaders act as role models for their followers. They live by high ethical standards; they emphasise trust, values, and commitment, and instil loyalty in their followers. This aspect of transformational leadership is associated with charisma (Bass 1997, p. 133).

*Inspirational motivation:* transformational leadership involves inspiring and motivating followers. In order to motivate followers, the leader communicates a vision for what they wish to accomplish, sets challenges for the followers, and promotes enthusiasm and team spirit. The leader also promotes meaning (Bass 1997, p. 133)

*Intellectual stimulation:* transformational leaders stimulate their followers' creativity. They encourage their followers to come up with new solutions and ideas, and followers are not criticised for expressing ideas that differ from the leader's views. The leader also encourages followers to question their old assumptions and to look for new perspectives (Bass 1997, p. 133).

*Individualised consideration:* transformational leaders show consideration for the individual needs of their followers. They support the growth and development of their followers by advising, teaching, or coaching them. Transformational leaders give their followers recognition and attention (Bass 1997, p. 133).

In contrast to transformational leadership, transactional leadership can be characterised as “carrot and stick” leadership. This approach to leadership involves offering followers rewards for their services, and disciplining them when their performance is not up to standard (Bass & Riggio 2006, p. 8). Bass has identified three components of transactional leadership. These components are contingent reward, active management by exception, and passive management by exception.

*Contingent reward:* the leader offers followers rewards in exchange for carrying out assignments. These rewards can be either transactional or transformational. Transactional rewards are material, whereas transformational rewards are psychological (Bass & Riggio 2006, p. 8).

*Active management by exception:* management by exception involves disciplining followers who make mistakes or deviate from standards. Active management by exception involves monitoring performance and taking corrective action when deviances occur. It also involves enforcing rules (Bass 1997, p. 134, Bass & Riggio 2006, p. 8).

*Passive management by exception:* the leader only intervenes after problems have occurred or have become serious. The leader needs to be told about problems before taking action (Bass 1997, p. 134, Bass & Riggio 2006, p. 8).

Of the five newer leadership theories presented here, transformational leadership appears to be the most advanced and to add the most additional understanding to McGregor’s (1960/2006) Theory Y. Transformational leadership has been the most researched leadership theory during the past three decades (Şahin et al. 2017, p. 105), whereas the other theories gained prominence more recently, mainly after the turn of the century. In line with this, transformational leadership has more references in Google Scholar (477,000) than the other four leadership theories combined (277,500). Thus, to date, transformational leadership is the

theory that has been most extensively researched and subjected to scrutiny among these five.

Moreover, transformational leadership has been most clearly linked to McGregor's Theory Y in the literature. Several authors highlight the influence of McGregor's work on the development of transformational leadership theory (e.g., Antonakis 2001, Kopelman et al. 2010, Pastor & Mayo 2008, Yukl 1989). Empirical studies have also linked Theory Y assumptions as antecedents of transformational leadership (Pastor & Mayo 2008, Şahin et al. 2017). Additionally, Kovjanic et al. (2013) point out that Theory Y and transformational leadership are based on similar assumptions.

Because transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio 2006) can be seen as a continuation of McGregor's (1960/2006) Theory Y leadership, and because it has been extensively researched, the theory will be used in this study to help examine the ideas of McGregor that leader assumptions about human nature and human behaviour can influence leaders to promote intrinsic motivation in followers. The next section will explain how transformational leadership shares several key principles with McGregor's Theory Y.

### **2.3.7 Transformational leadership and Theory Y**

Transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio 2006) shares several key principles with McGregor's (1960/2006) Theory Y leadership. Both leadership theories have in common that they are based on promoting self-control, growth, integration and relatedness, and intrinsic motivation in followers. In addition, the theories share an ethical concern for followers.

*Promoting self-control:* like Theory Y leadership, transformational leadership involves supporting the autonomy of followers. Both leadership forms rely mainly on non-controlling forms of influence. Transformational leadership promotes autonomy through its element of inspirational motivation, which involves aligning organisational goals with followers' personal goals (Kovjanic et al. 2012, p. 1034). Transformational leadership also encourages active

participation by giving followers freedom in how to perform their jobs and by encouraging them to develop new ideas and solutions (ibid).

*Promoting growth:* like Theory Y leadership, transformational leadership aims to promote the growth of followers (Ryan & Deci 2017, p. 552). This involves encouraging followers to challenge themselves, and to support their development as they work towards achieving the organisation's goals (Bass & Riggio 2006). Transformational leaders also support their followers' growth by showing them individualised consideration.

*Promoting integration and relatedness:* both Theory Y leadership and transformational leadership seek to find ways for followers to work towards their own goals while also pursuing the goals of the organisation. Transformational leadership supports this principle by building commitment towards the organisation's goals, and by seeking to embed challenge, learning opportunities, and inspiration in the work. In addition, transformational leadership encourages relatedness by an emphasis on strengthening bonds between leader and followers and among followers (Kovjanic et al. 2012, p. 1034).

*Promoting intrinsic motivation:* like McGregor's Theory Y leadership, transformational leadership involves promoting intrinsic motivation in followers. This is evidenced by the element of inspirational motivation, and the theory's emphasis on inspiring followers, supporting their needs, and encouraging participation (Bass 1997). That transformational leadership promotes intrinsic motivation is also corroborated by self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci 2017), which posits that people have three basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and that supporting these needs promotes intrinsic motivation. Since transformational leadership involves supporting these three needs, it therefore promotes intrinsic motivation.

*Ethical concern for followers:* transformational leadership shares with McGregor an ethical concern for treating followers well. This is expressed by Burns (1978/2000) in the following way:

Searching always for the moral foundations of leadership, we will consider as truly legitimate only those acts of leaders that serve ultimately

in some way to help release human potentials now locked in ungratified needs and crushed expectations. (Burns 1978/2000, p. 5).

Later, Bass also emphasised a similar ethical sentiment in his version of transformational leadership theory by explaining that he sees it as an ethical endeavour that liberates the human potential of followers and contributes to their wellbeing (Bass & Steidlmeier 1999, p. 211). However, it is worth noting that Bass has been criticised for not including the ethical dimension as a separate element in his theory (Hoch et al. 2018, p. 526).

These similarities between transformational leadership and Theory Y leadership suggest that it is reasonable to believe that findings from empirical studies of transformational leadership can also add understanding to Theory Y leadership, and vice versa. In line with this, the next section will discuss empirical studies that link transformational leadership with the promotion of intrinsic motivation in followers.

### **2.3.8 Transformational leadership and intrinsic motivation**

This section presents empirical evidence that links transformational leadership with the promotion of intrinsic motivation in followers. This empirical evidence consists of studies that support a positive relationship between transformational leadership and satisfaction of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and studies that support a positive relationship between transformational leadership and intrinsic motivation.

Several studies have empirically linked transformational leadership to the fulfilment of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness in followers. According to self-determination theory, fulfilment of these needs fosters intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci 2017). This relationship has been supported by studies by Kovjanic et al. (2012, 2013) and Hetland et al. (2011, 2015).

Kovjanic et al. (2012, 2013) investigated the three needs as mediators in the relationship between transformational leadership and positive follower outcomes. The first study was based on surveys conducted on a sample of 410 German and



442 Swiss employees (Kovjanic et al. 2012). The second study consisted of online experiments with a sample of 190 German-speaking employees (Kovjanic et al. 2013). Both studies found a strong positive relationship between transformational leadership and satisfaction the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Similarly, studies by Hetland et al. (2011, 2015) found a positive relationship between transformational leadership and fulfilment of these psychological needs. Hetland et al.'s studies were based on surveys of a sample of 661 Norwegian employees, and a diary study with a sample of 65 Norwegian knowledge workers. These studies provide support for the role of transformational leadership in promoting intrinsic motivation by supporting needs fulfilment.

Further support for the relationship between transformational leadership and intrinsic motivation is provided by research by Shin and Zhou (2003), Gumusluoglu and Ilsev (2009), and Conchie (2013).

Shin and Zhou (2003) tested intrinsic motivation as a mediator in the relationship between transformational leadership and employee creativity. Their study of 290 R&D employees and supervisors from 46 Korean companies found that transformational leadership was positively related to intrinsic motivation, and that intrinsic motivation partially mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and employee creativity.

Gumusluoglu and Ilsev (2009) developed and tested a model of transformational leadership as an antecedent of creativity and organisational innovation. While intrinsic motivation did not mediate the relationship, the study found a positive relationship between transformational leadership and intrinsic motivation.

Conchie (2013) conducted a study of safety-specific transformational leadership in the UK construction industry. The study found support for a positive relationship between this transformational leadership style and intrinsic motivation.

Together, these studies support a positive relationship between transformational leadership and intrinsic motivation in followers. Because empirical studies have

also found Theory Y assumptions to be antecedents of transformational leadership (Pastor & Mayo 2008, Şahin et al. 2017), these findings add support to the thesis that positive leader assumptions about human nature and human behaviour can influence leaders to promote intrinsic motivation in followers.

## **2.4 Intrinsic motivation theories in line with Theory Y**

Intrinsic motivation is a central element in McGregor's (1960/2006) theory. According to his theory, a leader with Theory Y assumptions will practise Theory Y leadership, which promotes intrinsic motivation, while a leader with Theory X assumptions will practise Theory X leadership, which harms intrinsic motivation. Maslow's (1943, 1954) motivational theory and his concept of self-actualisation were important influences on McGregor's theory. Self-actualisation (Maslow 1943, 1954, 1965/1998, 1968, 1971) can be seen as a comprehensive form of intrinsic motivation (Waterman 1990).

This section will present Maslow's concept of self-actualisation and several later constructs relating to intrinsic motivation that can be seen as building on and extending Maslow's work. The concepts are flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 1990), thriving (Carver 1998, Spreitzer et al. 2005), personal expressiveness (Waterman 1990), and intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan 1985, Ryan & Deci 2017). These concepts can increase our understanding of how leaders can promote or hinder intrinsic motivation in their followers, thereby building on McGregor's theory.

### **2.4.1 Self-actualisation**

Maslow's (1943, 1954) concept of self-actualisation can be seen as an extensive form of intrinsic motivation (Waterman 1990, p. 51), and it refers to the realisation of human potential and the expression of one's true self (Maslow 1968, p. 197). Maslow (1968, p. 25) defines self-actualisation as:

ongoing actualization of potentials, capacities, and talents, as fulfillment of mission (or call, fate, destiny or vocation), as a fuller knowledge of, and

acceptance of, the person's own intrinsic nature, as an increasing trend toward unity, integration, or synergy within the person.

According to Maslow, all human beings have a tendency for growth towards self-actualisation. He posits that this growth tendency involves a movement towards psychological health, and that this growth is accompanied by positive emotions which contribute to the reinforcement of further growth (Maslow 1968, p. 157).

Related to self-actualisation is the concept of peak experience (Maslow 1968). This can be described as the cognitive-affective state of self-actualisation, and Maslow (1971, p. 46) describes this as “transient moments of self-actualization.”

#### **2.4.2 Flow**

The concept of flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 1990) emerged from an interest in studying the subjective experience of engaging in intrinsically motivated activities. Csikszentmihalyi had studied the creative process of artists in the 1960s, which inspired him to investigate activities where people seemed to be fully immersed in the activities themselves rather than in the outcomes or extrinsic rewards (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi 2002).

Flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 1990), or optimal experience, describes a state where a person feels fully immersed in an activity, and may lose track of time and their surroundings. The experience can be described as having a feeling of “being carried away by an outside force, of moving effortlessly with a current of energy, at the moments of highest enjoyment” (Csikszentmihalyi 2003, p 39). The flow experience commonly consists of the following components, which may vary in relative strength and presence: (1) clear goals, (2) receiving immediate feedback, (3) a balance between challenge and skills, (4) deep involvement, (5) focus on the present time, (6) having a feeling of being in control, (7) distortion of the sense of time, and (8) loss of self-awareness (Csikszentmihalyi 2003, pp. 42-56).

Being in the flow state is often a result of engaging in activities that are so challenging that they are at the limits of a person's skills, but not so challenging

that they are too difficult. This means that the person is “operating at full capacity” (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi 2002, p. 90). To experience flow, there needs to be a balance between challenge and skills; the theory posits that if the task is too difficult, it induces anxiety, and if the task is too simple, people are likely to experience boredom.

The study of flow can be seen as a continuation of Maslow’s work on self-actualisation and peak experience (Sawyer 2006, p. 53). In line with this, Waterman (1990, p. 51) points out that in their respective studies of peak experience and flow, Maslow (1968) and Csikszentmihalyi (1975) elicited similar responses from their research participants when they were asked to describe these experiences. According to Waterman (1990, p. 51), flow and peak experience can both be seen as describing the cognitive-affective state of being intrinsically motivated. He also suggests that flow is usually a milder and more commonly experienced version of this state, while peak experience can be seen as a stronger and more rarely experienced form of this state.

### **2.4.3 Personal expressiveness**

Waterman (1990) included a philosophical perspective in his study of intrinsic motivation. He developed the construct “personal expressiveness” to help explain why people experience some activities as more intrinsically motivating than others. Personal expressiveness is based on the philosophical theory of eudaimonism (Norton 1976), which calls on people to identify and live in line with their “true self,” or daimon. Waterman (1990) defines the daimon as “those potentialities of each person, the realisation of which represents the greatest fulfilment in living of which each is capable” (p. 52).

Waterman (1990) defines personal expressiveness as a state where a person experiences one or more of the following:

- (a) an unusually intense involvement in an undertaking, (b) a feeling of special fit or meshing with an activity that is not characteristic of most daily tasks, (c) a feeling of being complete or fulfilled while engaged in

the activity, and (d) an impression that this is what the person was meant to do. (Waterman 1990, p. 47).

According to Waterman (1990), a person will find an activity more personally expressive (intrinsically motivating) the more that person is able to use those talents and skills that are most in line with the person's purposes in living. In this way, Waterman includes the aspect of meaning in his view of intrinsic motivation, an angle which is inspired by Maslow's (1968) theory of self-actualisation. By including the aspect of meaning (or purpose) in his view of intrinsic motivation, Waterman is also addressing why people differ in which activities they find intrinsically motivating.

Waterman (1990, p. 56) suggests that the experience of intrinsic motivation is stronger and more lasting the more a person feels that they are using the skills that are in line with their purpose in life, and the more they feel that they are succeeding in developing these skills and furthering their purpose in life.

According to Waterman (1990, p. 56), the experience of being intrinsically motivated can also be seen as an indicator of growth. He argues that in the short term, it is possible to feel intrinsically motivated without developing one's skills or furthering one's purpose in life. However, if a person engages in the same activity over some time without experiencing progress in the form of enhanced skills or coming closer to achieving one's goals in life, then this is likely to lead to frustration rather than to intrinsic motivation. This means that the state of experiencing intrinsic motivation can be seen as an indicator of growth, at least in the longer term.

This suggests a considerable overlap between the experiences of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan 1985), flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 1990), and thriving (Spreitzer et al. 2005). While thriving must involve both a sense of growth and energy (Spreitzer & Porath 2014), the experiences of flow and intrinsic motivation can in the short term involve only a sense of energy and not growth. However, in the long term, according to Waterman (1990), the experiences of intrinsic motivation and flow must also involve growth. This suggests that thriving can be seen as a more complete indicator of intrinsic motivation than the other two constructs.

Waterman (1990, p. 57) describes how the feeling of intrinsic motivation can vary from mild to more complete as an outcome of how much a person feels that they are developing their skills and furthering their purpose in life. In its mildest form, a person may experience fleeting and short moments of intrinsic motivation. A more complete form involves feeling a sense of intrinsic motivation while engaging in a personally expressive activity. This feeling ceases when the activity ends. At its most complete, Waterman argues that a person may feel intrinsic motivation as a more permanent and lasting state that may influence the person's feelings even when engaging in everyday activities that do not involve developing one's skills or furthering one's purpose in life.

#### **2.4.4 Thriving**

The concept of thriving (Carver 1998, Spreitzer et al. 2005) is also included in this discussion because it is closely related to intrinsic motivation. Thriving is defined as a psychological state where people experience a sense of vitality and learning (Spreitzer et al. 2005). Vitality is a positive feeling of being energised, and learning is a sense of acquiring knowledge and skills (ibid). Like flow, thriving involves matching challenges with skills. According to Carver (1998), thriving takes place when people are coping with challenges that are at the outer limits of what they are able to cope with, and it involves functioning at a higher level after meeting the challenges than before.

Spreitzer and Porath (2014) link their concept of thriving with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan 1985, Ryan & Deci 2000). They posit that the three basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness that are central in self-determination theory are antecedents of thriving. This means that furthering the three basic needs also promotes thriving, and that thwarting these needs harms thriving. This view is resonated within self-determination theory, where thriving is also acknowledged as an outcome of supporting people's basic psychological needs (e.g., Deci et al. 2017).

Carver (1998) also links thriving to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan 1985) by arguing that both theories are concerned with factors that promote

growth. He explains that self-determination theory assumes that behaviour can be either controlled or self-determined, and that self-determined behaviour is more likely to lead to growth than controlled behaviour. Carver (1998, p. 262) therefore posits that the situational factors identified by self-determination theory to thwart or promote self-determination are likely to have the same effects on thriving.

Spreitzer and Porath (2014) also link the concept of thriving to Maslow's (1943, 1954) concept of self-actualisation. They argue that since self-actualisation involves growth, thriving can be seen as an indication that a person is growing, and thereby moving in the direction of self-actualisation. However, Spreitzer et al. (2005, p. 539) also differentiate thriving from self-actualisation by arguing that thriving appears to be a far more common experience than self-actualisation. They point out that most people have experienced thriving at work, while Maslow (1965/1998) suggested that only 2% of people were self-actualised. This supports Waterman's (1990) notion that self-actualisation is a more encompassing experience than other forms of intrinsic motivation.

Thriving is also related to flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 1990). Spreitzer et al. (2005, p. 539) argue that both thriving and flow involve experiencing a sense of energy. However, they also point out that unlike thriving, flow does not necessarily involve learning (ibid). Nevertheless, while single episodes of flow may not necessarily involve learning, over time, flow also encourages growth. The reason for this is that the pleasant experience encourages people to persist in and repeat activities where they experience flow, which increases their skills over time (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi 2002, pp. 95-96).

#### **2.4.5 Intrinsic motivation**

Intrinsic motivation is also a central concept within self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan 1985, 2000, Ryan & Deci 2017). Deci and Ryan first began their investigations of intrinsic motivation in the 1970s (Deci 1971, Deci & Ryan 1985, 2000, Ryan & Deci 2000, 2017), and they define intrinsic motivation as "the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise

one's capacities, to explore, and to learn" (Ryan & Deci 2000, p. 70). When intrinsically motivated, people engage in an activity for its own sake.

According to Deci and Ryan (1985), the main reward for engaging in intrinsically motivated behaviours is the experience of being autonomous and of having an effect on one's surroundings. When free from external and internal pressures, individuals seek out situations that are optimally challenging and that will allow them to develop their skills and use their creative abilities (Deci & Ryan 1985). Intrinsic motivation is associated with feelings of pleasure, engagement, and mastery, in addition to a sense of being autonomous and of being the cause of one's actions. Sometimes it leads to flow experiences (Deci & Ryan 1985). Self-determination theory assumes that intrinsic motivation is an innate propensity, and that this propensity can be easily thwarted (Ryan & Deci 2000, p. 70). The theory is therefore concerned with understanding the conditions that can promote or hinder people's intrinsic motivation.

Self-determination theory posits that human beings have three basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness that need to be fulfilled to experience intrinsic motivation, optimal functioning, thriving, and well-being (Deci & Ryan 1985, 2000, Ryan & Deci 2017). If these needs are thwarted, the theory posits that this can harm intrinsic motivation, as well as causing distress, antisocial behaviours, and unhappiness.

Within self-determination theory, autonomy is referred to as "the need to self-regulate one's experiences and actions," and it involves behaving in ways that are in line with one's "interests and values" (Ryan & Deci 2017, p. 10). The need for competence is defined as the need to experience "effectance and mastery" (Ryan & Deci 2017, p. 11), and the need for relatedness involves the need for social connections, "belonging and feeling significant among others" (Ryan & Deci 2017, p. 11).

Ryan and Deci (2017, p. 257) link their theory to Maslow's (1943, 1954) concept of self-actualisation by suggesting that self-actualisation can be seen as an outcome of the high satisfaction of the three basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness posited by self-determination theory. They explain that they view Maslow's self-actualisation concept as "a description of the



overarching growth and integrative process functioning effectively” (Ryan & Deci 2017, p. 251).

#### **2.4.6 Connecting the intrinsic motivation concepts**

Waterman (1990, p. 51) suggests that the constructs of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan 1985), flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1975), self-actualisation (Maslow 1968, 1971), peak experience (Maslow 1968, 1971), and personal expressiveness (Waterman 1990) can all be seen as forms of intrinsic motivation.

Waterman (1990) proposes that these constructs can be placed along two parallel and interrelated continuums; one continuum describing different degrees and intensities of intrinsic motivation, ranging from the milder and more common construct of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan 1985), to the stronger and more rarely experienced construct of self-actualisation (Maslow 1968). The other continuum describes different degrees and intensities of the cognitive-affective state of being intrinsically motivated. On this scale, he places the experience of Deci and Ryan’s (1985) intrinsic motivation as the mildest and less complete state, and flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1975) as a more complete and involving state, while peak experience (Maslow 1968, 1971) describes the strongest and most complete state of being intrinsically motivated. Waterman then suggests that his own construct of personal expressiveness (Waterman 1990) relates to both these continuums, and that these continuums describe both how activities can vary from being less to more intrinsically motivated or personally expressive.

In addition to the constructs discussed by Waterman, it seems pertinent to include the construct of thriving (Carver, 1998, Spreitzer et al. 2005) to this discussion. Although not the same as intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan 1985, Ryan & Deci 2017), it has been suggested that thriving can be seen as an indication of moving towards self-actualisation (Spreitzer & Porath 2014), and that thriving is nurtured by the same three basic nutrients as Ryan and Deci’s (2017) intrinsic motivation. It can therefore be justified to place the state of thriving along the lower end of the cognitive-affective state continuum of intrinsic motivation, since it seems to share many characteristics with the states of being intrinsically motivated (Deci & Ryan 1985, Ryan & Deci 2017) and of being in flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1975).

Of these constructs, self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan 1985, Ryan & Deci 2017) and its construct of intrinsic motivation seem to offer the greatest explanatory power for McGregor's (1960/2006) theory. The reason for this is that self-determination theory is the most widely researched and developed theory of these, and that this theory has incorporated many of the elements that characterise the other constructs.

#### **2.4.7 Linking self-determination theory to McGregor's theory**

Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan 1985, Ryan & Deci 2017) and its construct of intrinsic motivation can increase our understanding of McGregor's (1960/2006) theory in several ways.

Self-determination theory adds to our understanding of the effects of Theory X/Y leadership by positing that people have three basic psychological needs that can either be supported or thwarted. According to the theory, supporting these needs promotes intrinsic motivation, while hindering the needs harms intrinsic motivation. By positing these needs, self-determination theory can therefore help explain why Theory Y leadership promotes intrinsic motivation, and why Theory X leadership harms intrinsic motivation. This is the case because Theory Y leadership relies on autonomy-supportive means of influence, while Theory X leadership relies on the use of control as its main form of influence. According to self-determination theory, autonomy-supportive influence promotes the three basic needs and thereby also intrinsic motivation, while controlling influence harms the basic needs and thereby also intrinsic motivation.

Self-determination theory can also offer support to McGregor's theory because it has been subjected to extensive empirical testing in a wide variety of contexts (Gagné & Deci 2005, Ryan & Deci 2017). The lack of empirical foundation for McGregor's theory is one of the main criticisms against it. Self-determination theory can therefore add value and credibility to McGregor's theory in the cases where it can support the mechanisms and relationship proposed by McGregor.

In addition, self-determination theory can add support to McGregor's theory in a further way. According to Ryan and Deci's (2017) logic, the more the three basic needs are furthered, the more intrinsically motivated people are likely to be, and the more the three basic needs are hindered, the less intrinsically motivated people are likely to be. In this way, self-determination theory lends support to the importance of understanding how leader assumptions about human nature and human behaviour can influence leader behaviours that promote intrinsic motivation in followers. In fact, in line with McGregor's theory, such leader assumptions could be an important factor that influences whether leaders put in sufficient or insufficient effort to promote the three needs and intrinsic motivation in their followers. That only 13% of employees worldwide are fully engaged at work (Gallup 2016), indicates that most leaders do far too little to promote intrinsic motivation in the workplace. It is therefore important to identify and understand factors that can influence leaders to increase their efforts to promote intrinsic motivation in the workplace.

The above theories suggest that intrinsic motivation can vary in intensity from mild and limited to strong and more complete. Since intrinsic motivation is a desirable state, it can be assumed that higher and stronger levels of intrinsic motivation are likely to be more beneficial and therefore more desirable than lower levels. It is therefore of interest in this study to ask: how can positive leader assumptions about human nature and human behaviour help leaders promote stronger, more complete experiences of intrinsic motivation in followers, rather than milder, less complete experiences?

## **2.5 Preliminary framework and research questions**

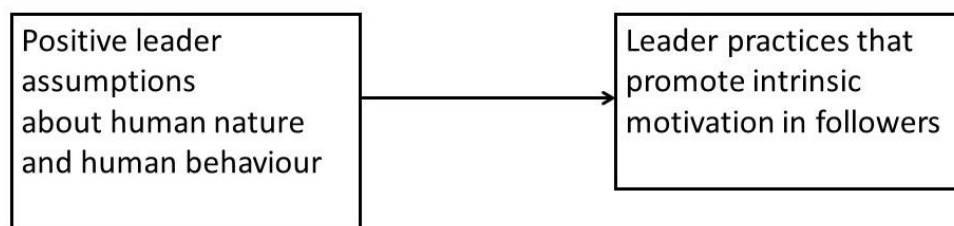
In this theory chapter we have seen that McGregor's (1960/2006) theory posits that positive leader assumptions about human nature and human behaviour can influence leaders to practise leadership that promotes intrinsic motivation in followers. We have seen that empirical studies within Theory Y leadership (Fiman 1973, Lawter et al. 2015), transformational leadership (Pastor & Mayo 2008, Şahin et al. 2017), the Pygmalion effect (Eden 1992), implicit followership theories (Sy 2010, Veestraeten et al. 2021, Whiteley et al. 2012), and the attitude-

behaviour link (Guyer & Fabrigar 2015), lend support to the idea that leader assumptions can influence leader practices.

We have also seen that a small number of empirical studies have linked Theory Y assumptions (McGregor 1960/2006) as antecedents to Theory Y leadership (Fiman 1973, Lawter et al. 2015), and transformational leadership (Pastor & Mayo 2008, Şahin et al. 2017). Since both Theory Y leadership and transformational leadership involve promoting intrinsic motivation in followers, these findings lend support to the thesis that positive leader assumptions about human nature and human behaviour can help leaders promote intrinsic motivation in followers. This relationship is illustrated in Figure 2.2:

**FIGURE 2.2**

**Positive leader assumptions about human nature and human behaviour as an influence on leader practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers**



However, the number of these studies remains low, and therefore more studies are needed to fully understand the relationship between leader assumptions about human nature and human behaviour and leader practices that promote intrinsic motivation in McGregor's theory.

In addition, we have seen that while several theories address the role of leader assumptions as an influence on leader practices, they do not fully explain the process through which these assumptions exert their influence on leader practices. This is the case for Pygmalion theory (Eden 1992), implicit followership theories (Sy 2010), as well as McGregor's (1960/2006) Theory Y.

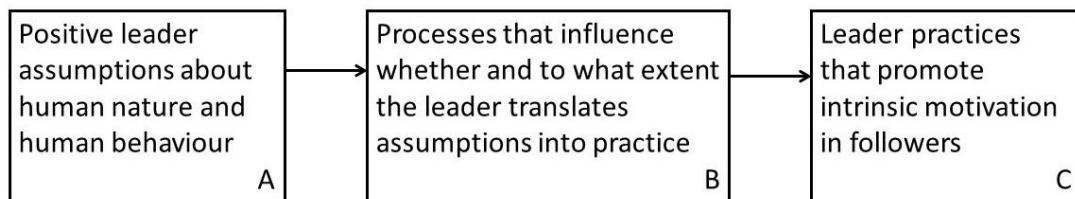
This study explores the lived experience of twelve leaders who practise leadership based on a positive view of people. The study explores their assumptions about human nature and human behaviour, how these assumptions influence their leader practice, and the leader practices they engage in to promote intrinsic motivation in their followers.

The following research aim guides this study:

**How can having positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour help leaders promote intrinsic motivation in followers?**

The areas of interest of this study are illustrated in the preliminary framework in Figure 2.3 below.

**FIGURE 2.3**  
**Preliminary framework**



The preliminary framework illustrates how this study seeks to address the relationship between leader assumptions about human nature and human behaviour (box A) and leader practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers (box C), which was illustrated in Figure 2.2. By adding box B, the figure illustrates that this study also seeks to increase our understanding of the process through which leader assumptions influence these leader practices.

*Box A, positive leader assumptions about human nature and human behaviour:* refers to the view of people that underlies the leadership of the leaders in this study. This interest is formulated in the following research question:

**RQ1: What can it mean for leaders to have positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour?**

*Box B, processes that influence whether and to what extent the leader translates assumptions into practice:* can be seen as a nearly empty box in McGregor's (1960/2006) theory, because McGregor does not provide much explanation of the process where leader assumptions influence leader practices. The study is therefore addressing a gap, or incompleteness (Locke & Golden-Biddle 1997), in McGregor's theory. Since leader assumptions are a central element in McGregor's theory, it is necessary to understand exactly how they exert their influence on leader practices. An improved understanding of this process and its components can therefore improve the explanatory power of McGregor's theory.

To identify and understand the components of the process where leader assumptions about human nature and human behaviour influence leader practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers, the following research question is formulated:

**RQ2: How can leaders' positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour influence how they practise leadership to promote intrinsic motivation in followers? What are some of the components of this influencing process?**

*Box C, leader practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers:* refers to how the leaders in this study think about promoting intrinsic motivation in their followers. This is formulated in the following sub-question:

**RQ3: How can leaders with positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour promote intrinsic motivation in followers?**

We have seen in the theory chapter that theories relating to intrinsic motivation, including self-actualisation (Maslow 1943, 1954), flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 1990), personal expressiveness (Waterman 1990), thriving (Carver 1998, Spreitzer et al. 2005), and intrinsic motivation (self-determination theory, Deci & Ryan 1985, Ryan & Deci 2017), suggest that intrinsic motivation can vary in strength, depth, and duration. Since intrinsic motivation is highly beneficial, it is

of interest in this study to seek understanding about how leader assumptions about human nature and human behaviour can influence leaders to promote intrinsic motivation that is as comprehensive as possible. This means intrinsic motivation that is as strong, deep, and lasting as possible.

According to self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci 2017), human beings have three basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness that need to be fulfilled to promote intrinsic motivation. This suggests that the more leaders support fulfilment of these three needs in followers, the more intrinsic motivation they are likely to promote. By exploring the role of leader assumptions about human nature and human behaviour as an influence on such leader practices, this study can add to our understanding of how to increase employee motivation in organisations.

We have also seen that like Theory Y leadership, transformational leadership (Burns 1978/2000, Bass 1985, Bass & Riggio 2006) involves promoting intrinsic motivation in followers. In line with this, empirical studies have found transformational leadership to be positively related to intrinsic motivation (Kovjanic et al. 2012, 2013, Hetland et al. 2011, 2015) and to supporting the three psychological needs posited by self-determination theory (Shin & Zhou 2003, Gumusluoglu & Ilsev 2009, Conchie 2013). Since Theory Y assumptions have been found to be antecedents of transformational leadership, (Pastor & Mayo 2008, Şahin et al. 2017), this suggests that this study could also add to our understanding of how having positive leader assumptions about human nature and human behaviour can help leaders practise more transformational leadership, and thereby do more to promote intrinsic motivation in followers.





### **3. METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES**

This chapter will present the choice of research methodology. The exploratory nature of the research questions of this study calls for a qualitative approach, and the chosen methodology is interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith et al. 2009). The chapter first discusses IPA and its underpinnings; phenomenology and hermeneutics. It then discusses the choice of data collection, which is interviews. It then discusses the selection of participants, conduct of interviews, and data analysis.

#### **3.1 The choice of qualitative method**

This study explored how having positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour can help leaders promote intrinsic motivation in followers. This type of exploratory, meaning-searching research purpose lends itself to qualitative method, which places central importance on understanding and interpretation (Dalen 2011, p. 17).

The research questions of this study were investigated by exploring the lived experience of 12 Norwegian top leaders from different backgrounds. By concerning itself with the subjective experience and sense-making of the participants, this study also takes a phenomenological approach.

The chosen phenomenological approach of this study is interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith et al. 2009).

#### **3.2 Interpretative phenomenological analysis**

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a flexible approach which is based on hermeneutical phenomenology. It is concerned with exploring the lived experience, sense-making, and reflections of participants (Smith et al. 2009, p. 3). IPA was first used in the field of psychology (Smith 1996), and is now increasingly used in related fields (Smith et al. 2009). The method has recently

been introduced within management research (Cope 2011, Gill 2015, Jayawardena-Willis et al. 2021, Murtagh et al. 2011, Parlak et al. 2021, Wise & Millward 2005) and international management research (Fitzgerald & Howe-Walsh 2008, Lane & Lee 2018, Rehman & Roomi 2012, Zou et al. 2016), and the number of studies is growing (Gill 2014).

IPA is based on phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith et al. 2009). It is phenomenological in the sense that it seeks to examine lived experience from the viewpoint of the participants; hermeneutical in the sense that it sees the study of phenomenology as an interpretative process; and idiographic in the sense of being concerned with the particular by seeking to understand phenomena “from the perspective of particular people, in a particular context” (Smith et al., p. 29), and therefore uses samples that are “small, purposively-selected and carefully-situated” (ibid).

### **3.3 Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is concerned with subjective experience (Thagaard 2013, p. 40), and involves taking an interest in the situation and lifeworld of the participants (Dalen 2011, p. 18). The researcher seeks to understand phenomena from the perspective of the participants, and to describe phenomena as they experience them (Thagaard 2013, p. 40). In IPA, this involves “attempting to capture particular experiences as experienced for particular people.” (Smith et al. 2009, p. 16).

Phenomenology is appropriate for the study of complex topics and meanings. Thagaard (2013, p. 40) argues that phenomenology seeks to understand the deeper meaning of human experiences, and Jacobsen et al. (2010, p. 204) state that phenomenology is suited to the study of multifaceted topics and experiences “because it respects the complexity of the subjects and has the ability to elicit nuanced and detailed descriptions of characteristics of the phenomenon.”

According to a phenomenological approach, the researcher should attempt to “bracket off” their presuppositions consisting of assumptions, theories, and thoughts on the subject in order to be open to what the participant has to say

(Jacobsen et al. 2010, p. 185). However, IPA assumes that it is not possible for researchers to completely ignore their presuppositions (Smith et al. 2009, p. 25). Researchers should therefore do their best to focus on the participants during the study, but they should also reflect on how their presuppositions influence the process (Smith et al. 2009, p. 25).

IPA assumes that experience is only indirectly accessible, since it must be accessed through the sense-making and reflections of participants, and these reflections can only occur in retrospect (Smith et al. 2009, p. 33). IPA also assumes that experiences must be interpreted by both the participant and the researcher. For these reasons IPA assumes that experience cannot be directly reached and therefore sees research that is “experience close” as an ideal to strive for (ibid).

### **3.4 Hermeneutics**

Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation. IPA assumes that phenomenology is hermeneutical because researchers need to use their interpretative skills to bring out and make sense of the phenomena they are studying (Smith et al. 2009, p. 35):

IPA requires a combination of phenomenological and hermeneutic insights. It is phenomenological in attempting to get as close as possible to the personal experience of the participant, but recognizes that this inevitably becomes an interpretative endeavour for both participant and researcher. Without the phenomenology, there would be nothing to interpret; without the hermeneutics, the phenomenon would not be seen. (Smith et al. 2009, p. 37).

Interpretation involves searching for a deeper meaning than what appears on the surface (Dalen 2011, p. 17). The interpretative process can be described as a hermeneutic circle where the search for meaning in a statement or part of a text involves relating it to a larger whole, and by relating the whole to the part in an iterative manner (ibid, p. 18). This is an ongoing process where the researcher’s

understanding evolves as a result of the interactions of the researcher's pre-understanding, the data material, and the theory (Dalen 2011, p. 18).

Smith (2007, p. 6) describes how he as a researcher might move round the hermeneutic circle during the process of interviewing participants and analysing transcripts. At first, he is occupied with his own concerns and preconceptions, before he attempts to bracket this off before interviewing a participant. During the interview he attempts to be open to the experiences of the participant, and after the interview he finds that he has been changed by the experience as he moves back round the hermeneutic circle away from the participant towards his own concerns. He then moves on to focus on the participant again as he works on the interview material and draws on his enriched and changed experience and expertise in the process.

IPA assumes a double hermeneutic where both the participant and researcher engage in interpretation. In this view, the information that the participant shares with the researcher is a result of the participant's sense-making, and this information then needs to be interpreted by the researcher. It is a process where "the participant is trying to make sense of their personal and social world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their personal and social world" (Smith 2004, p. 40).

### **3.5 Pros and cons of IPA as methodology for this study**

The choice of IPA as research methodology for this study has both advantages and disadvantages. Because IPA lends itself to explore meanings and experiences (Smith et al. 2009), I found it a suitable methodology for exploring the topics of this study.

However, the choice of a qualitative methodology such as IPA also sets limits on what kinds of answers this study can produce, since the choice of research methodology influences what kind of answers a study can provide (Smith et al. 2009). For example, qualitative method does not lend itself to study larger samples, to generalise findings to a population, or to estimate correlation among variables. The latter could have been helpful in this study, as it would have been

interesting to investigate issues such as the relationships between leader assumptions about human nature and human behaviour and employee performance, or between leader values reported by leaders and leader values as perceived by employees. This would also have required different samples. Instead of a small, purposive sample, this would have required samples of a larger number of leaders and their employees.

The choice of IPA means that I am not able to investigate the relationships mentioned above. Instead, IPA lends itself to investigate the particular experiences of a small number of purposively selected informants. While the findings cannot be generalised to a larger population, it is still likely that the particular experiences of the informants can provide insights that can be of interest to larger audiences.

An advantage of IPA is that it allows the researcher to capture more of the experiences and views of the participants than quantitative method usually does. One reason for this is that it is based on using a small sample, which offers more room for the views of each participant. The input from each individual is thus not “diluted” by being part of a larger sample, as is usual in quantitative method. Furthermore, the data collection method of semi-structured in-depth interviews also helps capture more of the particular experiences of each participant in comparison to the surveys which are usually associated with quantitative method.

Another advantage of using IPA is that it offers a novel lens through which to study organisational phenomena. In line with this, Gill (2014, p. 118) argues that phenomenology is an underutilised research methodology in organisational studies. This study can therefore be seen as a contribution to increase the diversity in research methodologies applied in organisational studies.

Thagaard (2013, p. 40) points out that since phenomenology is based on exploring the subjective experience of informants, taking this approach involves assuming that reality corresponds with the views of the informants. In contrast, most other approaches would seek to somehow verify the statements of informants. However, in so doing, these other approaches also miss out on some of the richness and depth that phenomenological data can offer. Thus, on the one hand, phenomenology’s acceptance of the informants’ truth can be seen as a

strength because it provides rich data and access to their unique understandings. On the other hand, it can be seen as a weakness in the sense that their stories cannot be verified objectively.

### **3.6 Interviews as a data collection method**

Data collection in this study consisted of semi-structured in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews are one of the preferred methods of data collection in IPA because they “invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first-person account of their experiences” (Smith et al. 2009, p. 56). In-depth interviews are a way for the researcher to pay profound attention to the lived experience of individual participants (ibid), and “facilitate the elicitation of stories, thoughts and feelings about the target phenomenon” (ibid, p. 56). In-depth interviews also offer access to rich data because they give participants the opportunity and time to reflect and elaborate on their ideas, in contrast to more structured data collection approaches where the participants’ opportunities to express themselves are more limited (ibid).

The semi-structured format of the interviews in this study allows dialogue between the researcher and the participant, and it gives the participant the opportunity to “think, speak and be heard” (Smith et al. 2009, p. 57). The dialogue format also allows the researcher to modify questions and ask follow-up questions in response to the replies of the participant (ibid). Smith et al. (2009, p. 58) point out that the interview conversation needs to go beyond the superficial, or else the data derived from the interview will not be rich enough: “Unless one has engaged deeply with the participant and their concerns, unless one has listened attentively and probed in order to learn more about their lifeworld, then the data will be too thin for analysis.” (Smith et al. 2009, p. 58).

### **3.7 Participants**

This section presents the participants and discusses the reasoning behind the selection.

### **3.7.1 Presenting the participants**

The participants in this study are 12 Norwegian top leaders from the public, private, NGO, and sports sectors. Three leaders from each of the four sectors are represented, and they work within the fields of manufacturing, finance, the military, politics, health care, humanitarian organisations, handball, and football. The leaders are in their 50s, 60s, and 70s. Three of the leaders are female and nine are male. They come from different geographical areas of Norway. The participants thus represent a variety of backgrounds from within a Norwegian context.

Although the participants represent a certain variety within the Norwegian context, they were identified based on a purposive approach to participant selection. This means that participants are chosen because they can provide “insight into a particular experience” (Smith et al. 2009, p. 48). I have sought to find experienced and respected top leaders who have produced results over time while treating their followers ethically. Prospective participants were identified through a combination of information from the media and referrals from contacts and other participants in the study. The participants were suggested by leadership experts (4) other informants in this study (2), family and friends (2), and by myself (4). All the suggested participants were public figures either nationally or locally, and I was therefore able to consider background information from the media and other sources before making the selection.

The participants of this study are experienced top leaders who have practised leadership at the highest level for at least ten years. They are Norwegian nationals.

Prospective participants were approached via telephone or email and informed of the general research topic. Of the 13 prospective participants that were contacted, 12 accepted. Two of the participants requested and were given the interview guide in advance.

Table 3.1 shows the 12 participants in this study. I have given them all nicknames that reflect their leadership experience, and which will be used throughout this dissertation.

**TABLE 3.1: List of participants**

Handball coach	Former coach of the national handball team. Female.
Football coach	Former coach of a national league football team. Male.
Football manager	Coach of a national league football team. Male.
General	Former chief of a branch of the Norwegian Armed Forces. Male.
Hospital director	Former director of a regional hospital. Male.
Mayor	Former mayor of a major Norwegian city. Male.
Finance CEO	CEO of a financial organisation. Male.
Factory director	Director of a Norwegian subsidiary of a multinational corporation. Male.
Plant director	Former director of a Norwegian subsidiary of a multinational corporation. Male.
NGO secretary general	Secretary general of an international NGO. Female.
NGO president	President and former secretary general of the Norwegian branch of an international NGO. Male.
INGO president	Former president of an international NGO. Female.

### **3.7.2 Do the informants have a positive view of people?**

Van Manen (1990) recommends that interpretative phenomenology should be based on a “strong” reading of what the informants are saying. By this, he means that what the informants are saying can be read as “recommendations for acting” (Van Manen 1990, p. 170). He uses the example of a study of school principals, and argues that when an informant tells a story from their work as a principal, this informant is in fact saying: “this is what it is like to be a principal,” “this is how a principal is to act” (Van Manen 1990, p. 170). According to this view, the stories of the leaders in this study can be seen as reflections of their beliefs about how leaders should act. By the same token, their statements about their view of people can also be read as recommendations for other leaders.

That a positive view of people can be seen as something to strive for and as a sort of “ideal” for the leaders in this study, does not necessarily mean that they are



able to live by it at all times. Instead, it can function as a set of guiding principles to strive for and to take into consideration when making decisions that affect their followers.

This approach can also be seen as a limitation to this study, since I cannot verify most of their stories. In the same way as if I had asked them to fill out a survey, this method is based on their own reports of their subjective experiences and views.

During the process of interviewing and analysis I ascertained that the leaders in this study have a positive view of people. I based this assertion on their accounts of their views and experiences, and on my interpretations of their stories in accordance with the double hermeneutic of IPA (Smith et al. 2009, p. 80). It is possible to take a critical stance and ask whether it is enough to come to this conclusion based only on the accounts of the participants.

However, Pringle et al. (2011, p. 21) point out that the method of IPA does not take a critical stance towards the statements of participants. Instead, interpretations in IPA are always grounded in the statements of participants, and the purpose of this research is to make sense of their lived experiences. In there lies an assumption that the participants have actually experienced the phenomenon the researcher is trying to make sense of. The implication for this study is that when the participants say that they have a positive view of people, I as the researcher assume that this is true.

IPA does however open up for researchers to take a questioning attitude in their attempts to interpret the participants' stories. As I see it, this questioning stance is first and foremost for the purpose of attempting to make sense of the participant's experience (Smith et al. 2009, p. 35). Since the research process of IPA is thus based on the researcher's attempts at making sense of the lived experience of the participants, Smith et al. (2009, p. 80) make the point that the "claims of an IPA analysis are always tentative and analysis is subjective."

### **3.7.3 A “reasonably homogenous sample”**

Although the IPA method aims at gaining in-depth insight into particular phenomena, it does open up for some diversity in the sample. Smith et al. (2009, p. 3) point out that IPA is based on the use of “reasonably homogenous” samples, and that the level of homogeneity in IPA samples varies depending on the availability of potential informants. The sample of a study where potential informants are rare, may therefore be less homogenous than the sample of a study where the number of potential informants is higher. This means that the inclusion criteria of this study of top leaders from the Norwegian context may be less strict than if for example the study had targeted middle managers from the same context, since top leaders are rarer than middle managers and therefore harder to find.

The IPA method thus offers some justification for including a certain amount of diversity in samples. For example, Smith et al. (2009, p. 49) point out that the level of homogeneity in a study may be lower when it is practically difficult to get hold of participants. Although it is difficult to estimate the number of top leaders in the Norwegian context, it is likely that it would be difficult to get hold of 12 top leaders from the same job context in this country. This suggests that it can be justified to include leaders from different job contexts.

Similar approaches have been taken in previous qualitative studies. For example, in a study that has also inspired this one, Csikszentmihalyi (2003) performed a qualitative study of 39 good American top leaders from 17 different business areas. It is worth noting that the larger American context offers a higher number of potential informants than the Norwegian context, indicating that it can be difficult to find relevant top leaders from within a single domain. Other studies of organisational phenomena within IPA have also included informants from different job contexts.

Several previous IPA studies have used informants with lived experience of a common phenomenon, but who come from different professional backgrounds and sectors. One such example is a study by Fitzgerald and Howe-Walsh (2008) which focused on the phenomenon of self-initiated expatriation in the Cayman

Islands. Although the six participants in this study were all female, they came from three different countries (UK, Philippines, and New Zealand), worked in different sectors (retail, public sector, telecom, recruitment, and utilities), and had different job titles (HR manager, director, manager, vice president of finance, vice president, and internal audit manager).

Another example of an IPA study that has used participants with different professional and industrial backgrounds, was conducted by Murtagh et al. (2011) on the phenomenon of voluntary career change. The 8 informants of this study had in common that they were female, lived in the South East of England, and had the experience of having changed careers during the last three years before the study. However, these informants also came from different professional backgrounds (e.g. biochemist, retail manager, stable hand, academic researcher, civil servant, psychologist, caterer) and sectors (public and private sectors). A third example involves a study by Millward (2006), who investigated the phenomenon of the transition to motherhood. This study selected informants who were pregnant for the first time, working full-time, impending maternity leave, and intending to return to work (p. 319). In combination with this, the informants were intentionally selected from different organisations (education, health, research, retail, finance, insurance) and sectors (public and private). Together, these studies demonstrate that there is room within the purposive sampling of IPA to include participants from different sectors and professional backgrounds.

While the leaders in this study come from different job contexts, they all have in common that they have long experience of practising leadership at a high level in the organisational hierarchy. This suggests that they all share the experience of having practised leadership with high levels of responsibility and decision-making discretion. Their position in the organisational hierarchy also suggests that they have gained deep and extensive experience of practising leadership at different levels during their careers. In line with IPA, the participants have thus been selected “on the basis that they can grant us access to a particular perspective on the phenomena under study. That is, they ‘represent’ a perspective, rather than a population.” (Smith et al. 2009, p. 49).

One possible avenue for making the sample of this study more homogenous could have been to recruit fewer informants. Smaller samples are in fact

recommended by IPA (Smith et al. 2009). A smaller sample would also have allowed me to go into more depth in the analysis of information from each informant. The amount of data in the material could have justified this. However, at the beginning of this study, when I as a novice researcher decided to include 12 informants, I would have felt it as too risky to include for example only 6 informants as the basis for an entire PhD project. I had no way of knowing then how much useable data I would be able to collect from the informants. After having collected data from all the 12 informants in the study, I feel that they each provide interesting and valuable information that I would not want to exclude from the study.

### **3.7.4 The choice of top leaders as informants**

There are several reasons why top leaders were chosen as informants in this study. Since top leaders perform leadership at the highest level, theirs is the category of leadership that impacts the largest number of people in organisations. Top leaders can use this considerable influence to impact the work lives of their followers in both positive and negative ways. I therefore believe it is important to understand how top leaders reflect on exercising such a power over the people they lead. Another reason for focusing on top leaders in this study is that having such a position usually means that they have practised leadership for a substantial length of time. This means that they are likely to have built up a body of interesting leadership experiences to reflect on.

It could be argued that the profession of sports coaching is so different from the other forms of organisational leadership in this study that the sports coaches should not be included. In spite of this, I have decided to include sports coaches in this study because they can add valuable insights into the practice of leadership.

There are several reasons why it can be justified to include sports coaches as informants in a study of top leaders. Firstly, working as a sports coach also involves practising leadership. Sports coaches who are responsible for the national handball team and for football teams in the national league, are therefore practising leadership at the highest levels in their fields, like the other top leaders

in this study. Secondly, the commonalities between the leadership aspect of the sports coaches' work and the work of the other top leaders in this study, are also underlined by the fact that one of the sports coaches has been awarded the same leadership prize as one of the other top leaders in this study (HR Norway's leadership prize); a prize which is considered one of Norway's most prestigious leadership prizes and which was awarded to this sports coach with an emphasis on the transferability of leadership in sports to other areas of work. Thirdly, another indicator of this transferability is that successful sports coaches are sought-after contributors at leadership seminars and conferences in the business, government, and NGO sectors alike. This suggests that practitioners in these other sectors find the leadership experiences of sports coaches relevant to their own work.

### **3.8 Conducting the interviews**

The purpose of the interviews was to explore the participants' assumptions about human nature and human behaviour and their thoughts on promoting intrinsic motivation in followers.

The interviews were semi-structured and lasted approximately 1.5 hours. The shortest interview lasted 50 minutes and the longest interview lasted 2 hours. The interviews were taped, resulting in a total of 13 hours and 40 minutes of recorded material. The interviews were conducted at places selected by the participants. This included their offices, meeting rooms, or homes. A sample interview guide is provided in appendix A.

I had access to secondary sources of information about each participant in advance of the interviews because they are all public figures either nationally or in their local communities. This allowed me to prepare and adjust the interview guide before each interview. A possible objection to this approach is that I did not treat every participant the same. However, I believe it helped me understand each participant better, which is helpful when the focus of study is on the particular experience of the individual.

During the interviews, I sought understanding by focusing on the experiences and reflections of the participants. According to Smith et al. (2009, p. 64), focusing on the experience of the participant helps the researcher bracket off their own preconceptions during the interview. Smith et al. posit that ideally, the researcher's follow-up questions and probes should emanate from the words of the participant, rather than from the preconceptions of the researcher.

According to Smith et al. (2009, p. 58), the interviewer should follow up on the participants' concerns during the interview if these concerns are relevant to the research question. They also note that the interviewer should be liberal when judging whether these concerns are relevant because they may lead to unexpected discoveries. Moreover, being open to the concerns of the participants is also a consequence of seeing them as the "experiential experts[s] on the topic in hand" (ibid, p. 58).

Smith et al. (2009, p. 36) see the process of seeking understanding as a combination of an attitude of empathy and an attitude of questioning. They believe that the researcher should try to understand "what it is like" for the participant and also be questioning about what the participant is saying (Smith et al. 2009, p. 36). In this way, the researcher makes an effort to understand how the participant is experiencing the phenomenon in question, while also seeking understanding of the phenomenon itself.

Smith et al. (2009, p. 65) point out that a certain level of unpredictability is necessary to conduct good in-depth phenomenological interviews because the researcher needs to be open to the experiences of the participant. This is in line with the inductive nature of this kind of research (ibid).

Smith et al. (2009, p. 66) point out that interviews provide only partial information about the experiences and views of the participants. In this view, the information generated from the interviews offers a glimpse into the participants' "attempts to make sense of their experiences" (ibid, p. 66). Therefore, this information should not be seen as "the truth," but as containing meaning which is derived from the experience of the participants (ibid, p. 66).

The semi-structured format of the interviews allowed me to ask follow-up and probing questions. This meant that I could direct the conversation to areas I found relevant and interesting. The flexible format of the interviews also meant that I could be open to the individual experiences and reflections of the participants, and that the participants were able to raise issues that were not originally included in the interview guide. As a result of their input, my understanding of the topic changed over the course of the 12 interviews. This changed understanding influenced my choice of follow-up and probing questions, which means that the last interviews were different from the first.

### **3.9 Analysing the data**

When analysing the data, I used elements from several different methodologies. In addition to IPA (Smith et al. 2009), this included thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), “cutting and sorting” (Ryan and Bernard 2003), and a small element from and Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) grounded theory.

#### **3.9.1 Beginning of analysis: IPA**

I began analysing the data by following the IPA guidelines as provided by Smith et al. (2009). This process consists of the following six steps: (1) getting to know the data, (2) exploratory commenting, (3) developing themes, (4) grouping themes, (5) moving to the next case, and (6) looking for patterns across cases (Smith et al., pp. 82-101).

The first step in this process involved familiarising myself with the data. I did this by transcribing each interview verbatim. The slow and meticulous process of transcribing each word the interviewees were saying was particularly helpful for me, because I noticed that I had not been able to fully catch what they had been saying while conducting the interviews. The reason for this is that since I was new to the interview situation, I paid most of my attention during the interviews to making sure that I was following the interview protocol and that the conversation would keep flowing. The transcription process therefore gave me the opportunity to experience the interviews again, and this time I was able to

pay full attention to what each interviewee was saying. The process of transcribing the interviews resulted in 12 interview transcripts consisting of a total of 125,000 words and 209 pages (A4-sized, 12-point, single spaced).

The second step in Smith et al.'s (2009) guidelines involved exploratory commenting. This process consisted of going through each interview transcript and noting down anything that seemed interesting. According to Smith et al., the purpose of this step is to get a deeper insight into what the interviewees are saying. This was a time-consuming process that resulted in a large amount of text. While I did find that this process helped me familiarise myself further with the data, I also experienced that the amount of extra text that I produced at this stage was excessive.

The third step in Smith et al.'s (2009) process involved developing themes. This was based mainly on my exploratory notes, where similar issues were grouped together, forming a set of preliminary themes for each interview. This could be seen as a summary of the main concerns of each informant relating to my topic.

As prescribed by Smith et al. (2009), I went through this process for each of the 12 interviews. After having analysed each interview in this way, I looked for patterns across cases. This involved attempting to sort through the themes from all the informants in order to make a list of the most important themes for the group as a whole.

For me, this process did not work well. I experienced that the number of themes was overwhelming and difficult to handle in a meaningful way. This may be partly explained by the fact that Smith et al. (2009, p. 106) do suggest that this way of analysing interviews may work best for small samples of 3 to 6 interviews. They also suggest that it may be better to analyse interviews in larger samples together rather than separately.

However, in spite of this setback, I did experience that this process helped me further familiarise myself with the data and improve my understanding of the ideas expressed by each individual informant. It also gave me some initial ideas about how the themes might be connected. Nevertheless, the amount of detail and number of comments meant that it was difficult for me to organise all the



themes in a way that did justice to the whole data set. I therefore made a second attempt at developing themes.

### **3.9.2 Intermediary step: developing preliminary themes**

I should point out that I made a mistake in my second attempt at analysing the data which meant that I could not use it as it was. But this was still a step in the process that helped me develop the final themes in this study. In this intermediary step, I analysed the 12 interviews together, rather than one by one. I went through each interview line by line. My mistake was that rather than cutting out direct quotes from the interviews, I summarised what the informants were saying and entered these summaries in a table that I sorted into preliminary themes and subthemes. I ended up with a preliminary list of themes and subthemes that made a lot of sense to me, but unfortunately these themes were based on my summaries rather than on quotes from the informants.

This step could be seen as a variation of the technique “cutting and sorting” as described by Ryan and Bernard (2003). This technique involves cutting out pieces of the text and organising similar pieces together. I did this with my summary statements. For me, this technique worked well because it was straightforward and easy to use, and did not lead to an overwhelming number of themes and subthemes. My experience is in line with the points made by Ryan and Bernard about the benefits of this technique, which includes that it is versatile and can be used for all types of qualitative data, and that it is therefore also appropriate for novice researchers like myself.

I ended up with a list of preliminary themes that worked well as a starting point for my third attempt at analysing the interview transcripts.

### **3.9.3 Thematic analysis**

Although I now had a list of preliminary themes and subthemes that I felt fit quite well with the data, I lacked a direct link between the quotes of the informants and the themes. I therefore made a third attempt at analysing the

interview transcripts, and this time it was easier because I already had a preliminary list of themes that I could work with.

I performed this thematic analysis by going through each interview transcript line by line. I looked for sections of the text where the informants spoke about any of the preliminary themes, and marked and labelled each of these sections with the relevant theme. After having identified these sections of informant quotes, I copied and pasted them into a table. I started with a table where the quotes were sorted under the preliminary themes, and then sorted the quotes further into subthemes under each theme. This was also a relatively straightforward process, as I already had a list of preliminary subthemes from the previous round of analysis. This process also involved some shuffling around of subthemes to find the best fit with the themes due to overlaps, and renaming of some of the themes to better reflect their contents.

At this stage, I had the following preliminary list of themes<sup>3</sup>:

1. Having a positive view of people
3. Promoting freedom, involvement, and responsibility
4. Promoting development and mastery
5. Promoting connectedness and cooperation
6. Providing direction
7. Disciplining

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<sup>3</sup> For the sake of simplicity, I will only write about the seven final themes that resulted from the analysis. I will use the names and numbers of each theme as they are presented in the findings chapter. The seven themes are:

1. Having a positive view of people
2. Personal convictions that influence whether and to what degree assumptions are translated into practice
3. Promoting freedom, involvement, and responsibility
4. Promoting development and mastery
5. Promoting connectedness and cooperation
6. Providing direction
7. Disciplining

The first part of this discussion will refer to themes 1 and 3-7 only. The reason for this is that theme 2 was developed at a later stage, and will be discussed separately in section 3.9.4.

At the time, my view of the themes was that theme 1 reflected the leaders' underlying assumptions about human nature and human behaviour, and themes 3-7 reflected the leadership practices they engaged in to promote intrinsic motivation in their followers. I believed that theme 1, "having a positive view of people," influenced the leadership practices that were described in themes 3-7, but I felt that this understanding of how the themes were related was not properly reflected in my analysis and in the contents of the themes. I still had the sense that something was missing in my analysis and in the development of the themes.

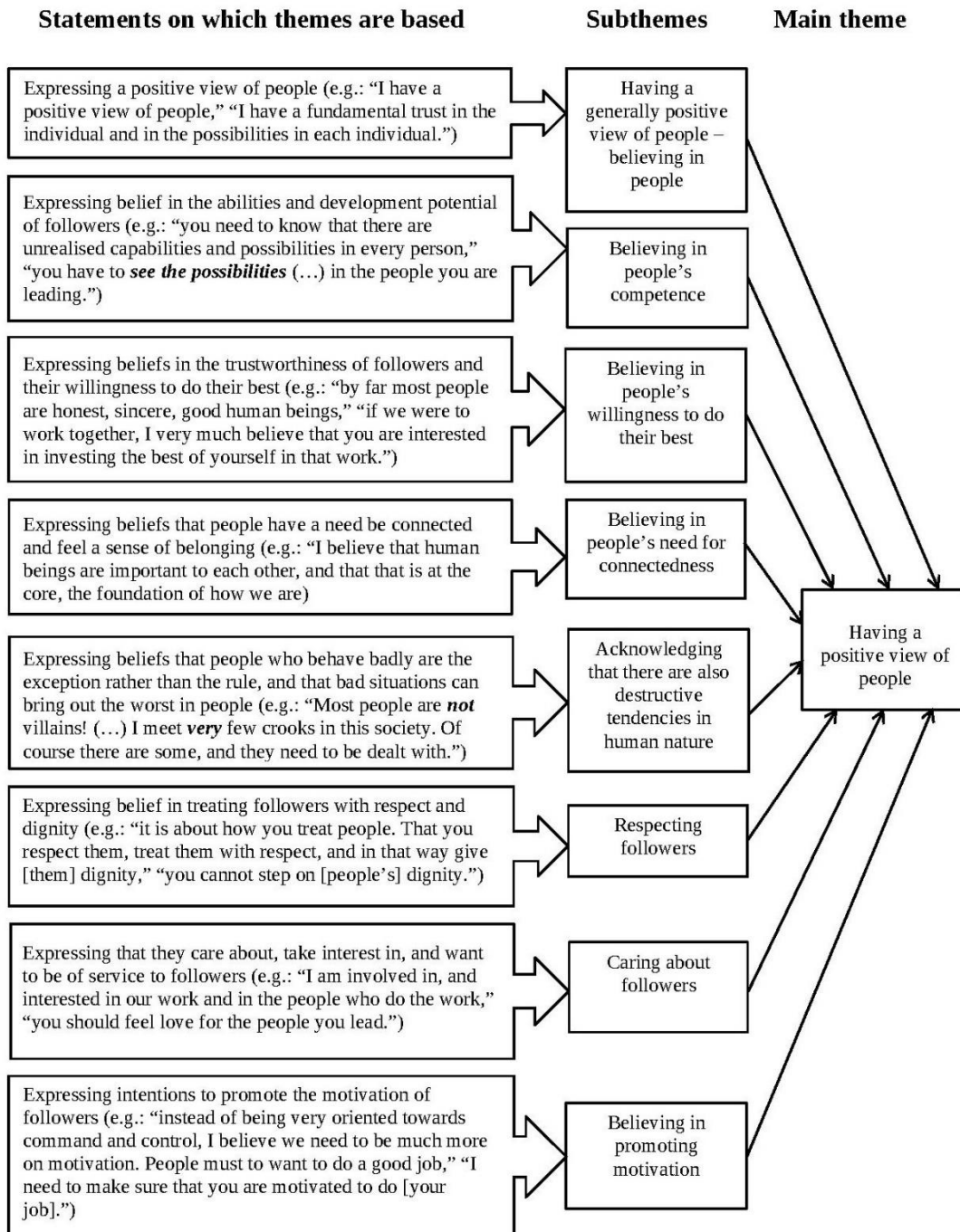
Part of the problem was that I felt that my analysis was too descriptive and not interpretative enough. According to Smith et al. (2009, p. 103), this is a common problem for novice IPA researchers, since IPA analysis can be performed at different levels of depth.

The process of developing the above themes can be classified as thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Their analysis process involves the following steps: (1) familiarisation with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, and (5) defining and naming themes. This is in line with the steps I went through to develop the above themes. To illustrate the process of how the themes were developed, Figure 3.1 provides an example of how theme 1, "having a positive view of people," was developed (adapted from Pratt et al. 2006, p. 241, and Gioia et al. 2013). The figure illustrates how this theme is based on eight subthemes which each are based on quotes by the informants.

Benefits of thematic analysis include that it is flexible and can be combined with many different epistemologies (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 97). For me, this meant that it could be combined with IPA, which had informed the way I asked the questions in my study, and therefore also the data that I collected. Like for "cutting and sorting" (Ryan and Bernard 2003), Braun and Clarke also point out that thematic analysis is simple to use and therefore appropriate for inexperienced researchers. Again, this is in line with my own experience. I found this method to be simple and straightforward, and it helped me develop a large but manageable number of themes and subthemes based on my data.

**FIGURE 3.1**

**Illustration of how theme 1, “having a positive view of people,” was developed (adapted from Pratt et al. 2006, p. 241 and Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton 2013)**



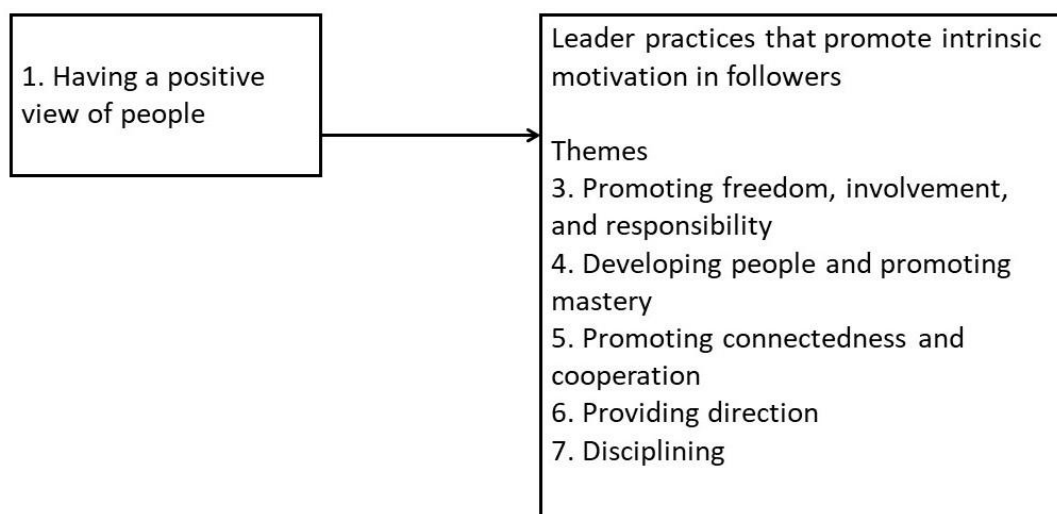
Like all methods, thematic analysis also has some potential disadvantages. Braun and Clarke (2006) make the point that thematic analysis “has limited interpretative power beyond mere description if it is not used within an existing theoretical framework that anchors the analytic claims that are made” (p. 97). This could be part of the explanation for why I felt that my analysis lacked depth. I did not use theory actively in my findings chapter, instead mostly connecting my findings to theory in the discussion chapter. Another disadvantage of thematic analysis is that it can fragment the data. Because a theme-based approach involves dividing up the information provided by each of the participants under separate themes, it means that their views are presented in a more fragmented way than in a person-centered analysis (Thagaard 2013, p. 157). I have nevertheless chosen a theme-based analysis as my approach because it offers the advantage of exploring each theme in more depth (Thagaard 2013, p. 181).

### 3.9.4 Developing theme 2 as a “missing link”

I had now developed six themes (themes 1 and themes 3-7). Figure 3.2 illustrates how I believed these themes were connected at this stage.

**FIGURE 3.2**

**Preliminary overview of how the themes were connected before theme 2**



Theme 1, “having a positive view of people” can be seen as a set of underlying assumptions about the followers, whereas themes 3-7 can be seen as leadership practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers.

At this stage in the analysis, I felt that something was still missing in my understanding of how the themes were related. So far in the analysis, I had used IPA (Smith et al. 2009) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006), and I had found IPA helpful in the process of collecting information and identifying the first six themes. One of the benefits of IPA highlighted in the literature is that it can provide rich data and deep insights into the experiences of informants (Smith et al. 2009, Tuffour 2017). This is in line with my own experience – I found that it helped me unpack what it means for the leaders in this study to have a positive view of people, and I also found that the approach helped me gather rich information about their experiences with promoting intrinsic motivation in followers. However, IPA has also been criticised for lacking standardisation (Tuffour 2017, Giorgi 2010). I can understand this criticism of IPA, because I found it helpful to supplement the methodology with Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis, which offered clear guidance.

Another criticism that has been voiced against IPA is that it is too descriptive and not offering sufficient interpretation (Tuffour 2017, Larkin et al. 2006, Brocki & Wearden 2006). This resonates with my own experience, because I would have liked to get more help from IPA in interpreting my data. I experienced that when using Smith et al.’s (2009) “recipe,” they did not offer me much guidance on how to think about explaining my findings. I therefore felt the need to seek ideas from other methodologies to improve my understanding of how my themes were connected. This search process eventually led to the development of theme 2, which helps explain how theme 1 is related with themes 3-7.

At this point of the study, I felt that my findings consisted of rich data that had been organised into themes, but I did not properly explain how the themes were connected. I had hoped that performing the IPA and thematic analysis processes would result in a deeper understanding of the data, but as I have previously mentioned, I did not succeed in reaching a deep enough level in my analyses to do so.

I therefore started to search for guidelines in different qualitative methodologies on how to make my analysis more interpretative and less descriptive. I was looking for some concrete steps that I could take to do so, but I found that most of these texts were not that explicit about this aspect of qualitative analysis. I finally found inspiration in an idea from Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 22), who assert that theory should “explain and predict” relationships between phenomena. This idea helped me understand what to look for in my material. To me, it meant that I had to look for concepts that could help explain how the findings of my study were connected.

I therefore used a different approach for developing theme 2 than I had done for the other themes. Whereas all the other themes were developed by organising statements from the participants, theme 2 was developed by asking a question to the data.

I decided to use an idea posed by one of my informants as a starting point for my search for leader attitudes that might explain why these leaders translate their view of people into practice by promoting intrinsic motivation in their followers. This informant (the football coach) suggested that there is a common misconception among leaders that promoting intrinsic motivation in followers does not require much work. This contrasts sharply to his own view, which is that promoting intrinsic motivation requires extensive work, and he therefore integrates this work in almost everything he does as a leader. He believes that this is necessary to achieve “deep and lasting” motivation in followers, rather than “shallow” motivation, which he feels is of little value.

For that reason, I decided to search in the data for leader attitudes that could explain why these leaders translated their view of people into practice.

This process resulted in the identification of five leader attitudes that I believe can help explain why some leaders invest more effort in promoting intrinsic motivation than others. These attitudes form the subthemes of theme 2, which I have called “personal convictions that influence whether and to what degree assumptions are translated into practice.”

These attitudes/subthemes are:

- 1) Seeing it as important to promote intrinsic motivation in followers
- 2) Giving high priority to promoting intrinsic motivation in followers
- 3) Choosing to base one's leadership practice on one's view of people
- 4) Being aware in the everyday work situation
- 5) Assuming that promoting intrinsic motivation in followers requires extensive effort

I believe that a leader needs to have high degrees of each of these personal convictions to be able to invest extensive effort in promoting intrinsic motivation in followers.

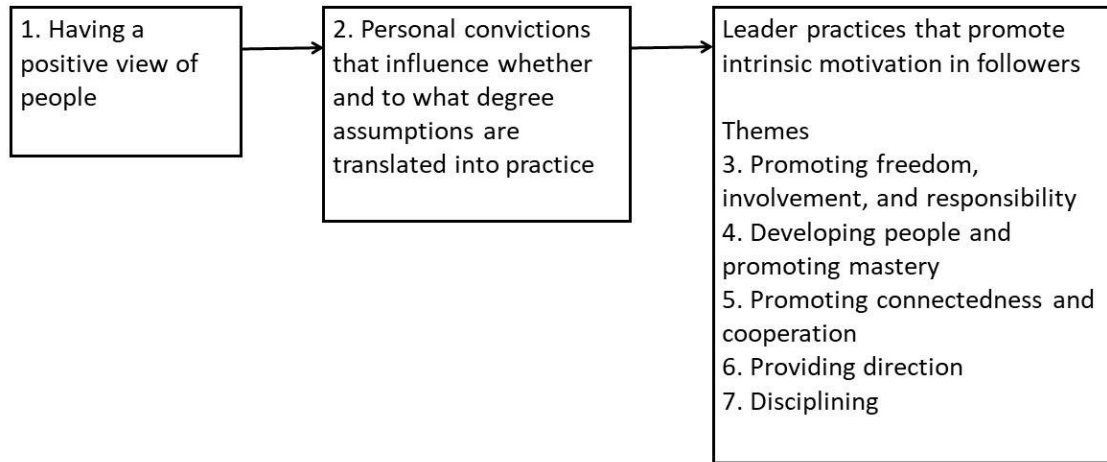
Figure 3.3 illustrates how theme 2 can help explain the relationship between the leader's assumptions about human nature and human behaviour and the leader's practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers. The figure also illustrates how the data analysis of this study has resulted in seven final themes which together can help explain how having positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour can help leaders promote intrinsic motivation in their followers. Box 1 consists of theme 1, "having a positive view of people," which explains what it means for the leaders in this study to have positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour. Box 3 consist of themes 3-7, which provide examples of the many ways in which the leaders in this study promote intrinsic motivation in their followers. These two boxes are connected by box 2, which consists of theme 2. This theme, which is named "personal convictions that influence whether and to what degree assumptions are translated into practice," helps explain the relationship between the leader's assumptions about human nature and human behaviour and leadership practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers.

Using the inspiration from Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory to develop theme 2 as illustrated in this section, has helped me overcome a difficulty I experienced when using IPA (Smith et al. 2009) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006), namely that these two latter methodologies did not offer me sufficient guidance on how to interpret my findings.



**FIGURE 3.3**

**Illustrating how theme 2 fits in with the other themes**



Using Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) idea helped me develop a theme that helps explain how the leaders’ view of people is connected to their leadership practices that promote intrinsic motivation in their followers. While this theme is not as directly based on quotes by the participants as the other themes, each of the subthemes can nevertheless be linked to their quotes.

**3.9.5 The role of theory in this study**

Theory has played an important role in this study. Thagaard (2013, p. 167) explains that the researcher’s understanding is influenced by the theory they have read prior to conducting the research. In this study, theory has informed how I developed the interview guide, how I conducted the interviews, and also how I performed the analysis. I have tried to keep an open mind during the interviews and analysis for what the data have to say, and to be explicit about which theories have influenced the study by describing them in the theory chapter. It is also worth noting that during this process the data have also influenced my understanding of the theory, as described by the hermeneutic circle.

I started with an understanding that was based on the theories described in the theory chapter. This understanding informed the planning and execution of the interviews. When performing the analysis of the interviews, I attempted to put

this understanding aside to focus on the informants' experiences. But my understanding must still have influenced my interpretations and sorting of the findings despite my efforts to put them aside.

My approach to the data analysis can be characterised as a “bottom up”-approach (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 83), where I mainly let the data influence how I divided up the text and developed themes. This inductive approach contrasts with a theoretical or “top down”-approach that is mainly influenced by theory when developing themes (ibid). When using a “bottom up”-approach, the themes are in principle mainly derived from the data (ibid). However, Braun and Clarke point out that the theoretical and epistemological background of the researcher still has a significant influence on this process. It is therefore important to make this background explicit when reporting the research, which I have done in this chapter and in the theory chapter.

Although I let the data influence the thematic analysis in a “bottom up”-approach, some of the resulting seven themes are also clearly influenced by the theoretical perspectives that informed the study. This is the case for themes 1 and 3-5, and I will explicate this influence in the next paragraph. In contrast, themes 2, 6, and 7 have been less influenced by my prior theoretical understanding.

Themes 1 and 3-5 are influenced by several elements from the theoretical perspectives that were presented in the theory chapter. Theme 1, “having a positive view of people,” describes some of the underlying values and assumptions that the leaders in this study hold about people. The question of what assumptions leaders hold about human nature and human behaviour is a central issue in the work of McGregor (1960/2006) on Theories X and Y. Theme 3, “promoting freedom, involvement, and responsibility,” can be related to the concept of autonomy in self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan 1985, 2000, Ryan & Deci 2017). This theme is also related to self-control and participation which are principles of McGregor's (1960/2006) Theory Y leadership. Theme 4, “developing people and promoting mastery,” can be related to the concept of competence in self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan 1985, 2000, Ryan & Deci 2017). Mastery is also described in the theories of flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 1990) and thriving (Carver 1998, Spreitzer et al. 2005, Spreitzer et al. 2010). Finally, theme 5, “promoting connectedness and cooperation,” can be related to

the concept of relatedness in self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan 1985, 2000, Ryan & Deci 2017) and to McGregor's (1960/2006) integration concept.



## 4. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

This chapter presents the empirical findings of this study. The findings are presented in the form of seven themes that were developed based on interviews with the twelve informants of this study. These twelve informants are the handball coach, the football coach, the football manager, the general, the hospital director, the finance CEO, the factory director, the plant director, the NGO secretary general, the NGO president, and the INGO president.

The thematic analysis resulted in the development of seven main themes. Theme 1, “having a positive view of people,” corresponds to Box A in the preliminary framework in Figure 2.3 on page 55. Theme 2, “personal convictions that influence whether and to what degree assumption are translated into practice,” corresponds to Box B in the preliminary framework. The remaining themes 3-7 correspond to Box C in the preliminary framework. These themes are: theme 3, “promoting freedom, involvement, and responsibility;” theme 4, “developing people and promoting mastery;” theme 5, “promoting connectedness and cooperation;” theme 6, “providing direction;” and theme 7, “disciplining.”

An overview of the main themes and their accompanying subthemes is displayed in Table 4.1.

**TABLE 4.1: Main themes and subthemes**

Main themes	Subthemes
1. Having a positive view of people	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Having a generally positive view of people – believing in people</li> <li>2. Believing in people’s competence</li> <li>3. Believing in people’s willingness to do their best</li> <li>4. Believing in people’s need for connectedness</li> <li>5. Acknowledging that there are also destructive tendencies in human nature</li> <li>6. Respecting their followers</li> <li>7. Caring about their followers</li> <li>8. Believing in promoting motivation from within</li> </ol>
2. Personal convictions that influence whether and to what degree assumptions are translated into practice	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Seeing it as important to promote intrinsic motivation in followers</li> <li>2. Giving high priority to promoting intrinsic motivation in followers</li> <li>3. Choosing to base their leadership practice on their view of people</li> <li>4. Being aware in the everyday work situation</li> <li>5. Assuming that promoting intrinsic motivation in followers requires extensive effort</li> </ol>
3. Promoting freedom, involvement, and responsibility	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Giving followers freedom and supporting their independence</li> <li>2. Involving followers in decision-making processes</li> <li>3. Supporting their followers’ freedom of speech</li> <li>4. Giving followers responsibility</li> <li>5. Using authority when necessary</li> </ol>
4. Developing people and promoting mastery	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Developing people</li> <li>2. Promoting mastery</li> <li>3. Building on people’s strengths</li> <li>4. Promoting personal development</li> <li>5. Promoting development that turns into innovation</li> </ol>
5. Promoting connectedness and cooperation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Promoting connectedness</li> <li>2. Preventing fragmentation</li> <li>3. Promoting cooperation</li> <li>4. Sanctioning followers who do not cooperate</li> <li>5. Harmonising interests</li> </ol>
6. Providing direction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Providing a clear direction</li> <li>2. Setting energising goals</li> <li>3. Communicating clear expectations</li> <li>4. Providing boundaries</li> <li>5. Using values to guide behaviour</li> <li>6. Promoting positive energy</li> <li>7. Being in touch with the followers</li> </ol>
7. Disciplining – dealing with suboptimal behaviours	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Giving negative feedback</li> <li>2. Sanctioning followers who break the rules</li> <li>3. Letting people go if they stray too far outside the rules</li> <li>4. Dealing with signs of bullying and harassment</li> <li>5. Dealing with bad leadership</li> <li>6. Being careful so it does not turn into “management by fear”</li> </ol>

#### **4.1 Having a positive view of people (“menneskesyn”)**

All the leaders in this study state that they have a positive view of people. They speak of this as an underlying attitude and approach to the people they are leading which emphasises their positive qualities. This involves a general belief in people, a belief in people’s talents and competence, a belief in people’s loyalty and care, and a belief in people’s need for connectedness. While they believe in the good in people in general, they acknowledge that there are also destructive tendencies in human nature. Furthermore, they speak of respecting and caring about their followers, and about believing in promoting motivation in their followers.

This section will present the following eight subthemes: (1) having a generally positive view of people – believing in people, (2) believing in people’s competence, (3) believing in people’s willingness to do their best, (4) believing in people’s need for connectedness, (5) acknowledging that there are also destructive tendencies in human nature, (6) respecting their followers, (7) caring about their followers, and (8) believing in promoting motivation from within. Table 4.2 shows these subthemes with illustrative quotes.

**TABLE 4.2: Having a positive view of people**

Subtheme	Illustrative quotes
Having a generally positive view of people – believing in people	<p>“I have a very positive [view of people], I say that everybody has a good foot. (...) If only you are able to look for it. And you need to start there.” (football coach)</p> <p>“I have a fundamental faith in the individual and in the possibilities in each individual.” (handball coach)</p> <p>“I believe you need to have a reasonably positive view of people, that is, you need to know that there are unrealised capabilities and possibilities in every person. So I believe it is really important to believe that people can do more than they actually can.” (hospital director)</p>
Believing in people’s competence	<p>“you have to <i>see the possibilities</i> (...) in the people you are leading” (football coach)</p> <p>“each individual employee can do far more than people think. If only they are given the trust and the opportunity.” (mayor)</p> <p>“You need to give people a chance to contribute.” (hospital director)</p> <p>“I am concerned with the individual’s right to use their abilities, use their possibilities, use their knowledge” (INGO president)</p> <p>“the players have a lot of knowledge (...) it is then my responsibility to bring out all that knowledge which is latent in the group.” (football manager)</p> <p>“I have never experienced anyone who doesn’t want to get better. If they are <i>allowed</i>, if they <i>want to</i>, and the latter can be taught by creating platforms of mastery.” (football coach)</p>
Believing in people’s willingness to do their best	<p>“if we were to work together, I very much believe that you are interested in investing the best of yourself in that work.” (handball coach)</p> <p>“By far most people in society are honest and sensible people who work hard every day to make sure their families and children are well. (...) by far most people are honest, sincere, good human beings.” (mayor)</p> <p>“I <i>trust</i> that people do the details and that they do their jobs” (general)</p>
Believing in people’s need for connectedness	<p>“people are social beings, far too many keep to themselves. Bring them out, bring them out and about, get them together.” (mayor)</p>
Acknowledging that there are also destructive tendencies in human nature	<p>“I try to see the positive in every individual. And try to avoid feeling hatred sometimes when one is <i>very</i> provoked. Whether it is a Breivik who has shot and killed lots of people on Utøya or whether it is heads of state who exercise power or whether it is somebody who bullies a classmate and so forth, I at least try to understand why things turned out this way (...) I believe that if we are to move in the right direction, it is important that we manage to have that understanding.” (football manager)</p>
Respecting their followers	<p>“it works in the same way for every person on this earth, we have an innate dignity that can easily be violated, but it can also easily be made to blossom.” (plant director)</p> <p>“being <i>allowed to take part</i> in doing something, that is a fundamental human right that has to do with dignity and the like.” (INGO president)</p>
Caring about their followers	<p>“You need to “teach” leaders at all levels to care about their employees” (hospital director)</p> <p>“you care about people, you are interested in people, you like people, you are near people” (mayor)</p> <p>“I am fond of people. <i>Very</i> fond of people.” (finance CEO)</p> <p>“Viktor Frankl wrote in the book <i>Man’s Search for Meaning</i> (...) that you should feel love for the people you lead. And I think there is something <i>good</i> in that. That you feel <i>goodness</i> for the people surrounding you. (...). Feeling love for the people you are working with means caring.” (football manager)</p>



	“and then of course it has something to do with <i>caring</i> . It is very nice to have the experience that one <i>can</i> be of help sometimes.” (INGO president)
Believing in promoting motivation from within	“I need to make sure that you are motivated to do [your job].” (NGO secretary general) “people must <i>want</i> to do a good job.” (finance CEO) “I do believe people need to enjoy their work (...) you need to be able to motivate your employees.” (general) “[I wish to be] a person who spreads a sense of security and motivation in the group I am working with.” (football manager)

#### 4.1.1 Having a generally positive view of people – believing in people

All the leaders in this study express that they have a positive view of people. This can be seen as a general attitude to their followers that emphasises the good aspects and the possibilities in human nature. For example, the finance CEO states:

I have a positive view of people; an optimistic view of people. (finance CEO)

In his interview, he explains that to him, having a positive view of people involves believing that most people want to do their best if given the opportunity. This belief in people’s good intentions is not unconditional; he adds that it is an “optimistic” view of people. This can be interpreted to mean that he chooses to take a favourable orientation to the people he is working with, and that he is hopeful about their good intentions, but that he does not take this as a given. When he says that he believes most people want the best if given the opportunity, this could also suggest that he as a leader wants to help create conditions that bring out his followers’ best qualities.

Many of the leaders also speak of how a positive view of people involves believing in the possibilities in their followers. One of the leaders who expresses this view is the football manager, who explains that this principle is fundamental to his leadership practice. He says:

we see the positive in each individual and want to develop them from where they are. That is the foundation of our entire philosophy. (football manager)

The football manager's statement that he sees "the positive in each individual," can be interpreted to mean that he makes a deliberate choice to look for the good qualities in each person he works with. When he says that he wants "to develop them from where they are," he signals that he believes that every person he works with has talents and skills that can be developed further. These statements suggest that he thinks highly of his followers' abilities, and that he sees it as his responsibility to help them cultivate them further.

Together, the statements by the leaders in this study suggest that they have a general faith in their followers and in their abilities. This faith is a basis for how they practise leadership. These leaders emphasise the positive qualities in their followers, without denying that there are also negative tendencies in human nature. This positive view of people can be seen as an attitude to the people they are leading that informs their leadership practice.

In addition to expressing a general belief in their followers, the leaders also go into more detail about what it means to them to have a positive view of people. These elements will be discussed in the following sections.

#### **4.1.2 Believing in people's competence**

The leaders express that they believe in their followers' competence. This involves having faith in their followers' abilities and in their potential for development. One aspect of this involves believing that people can do more than meets the eye. In line with this, the NGO president states:

I look for the possibilities and resources in every person. So it is about respecting that there is something good or possibilities in everybody. (...) as a leader (...) [I aim to] take part in liberating and making sure that everybody can be a resource (NGO president)

In the above statement, the NGO president describes how he has an attitude to his followers that involves assuming that they have more capabilities and skills than he is aware of. Like several other leaders in this study, he therefore speaks of

how he tries to look for these hidden skills in his followers so that he can help give his followers opportunities to use them. When followers are able to use more of their skills and competences, they can add more value to the organisation. However, of more interest to this study is that it can also make work more fulfilling for people when they are able to use more of their capabilities. This allows them to be challenged more, develop more, and have more impact on their surroundings.

Several of the leaders also express a strong belief in their followers' potential for development. For example, the handball coach explains that her belief in her followers' development potential has been strengthened with experience. She states:

I believe my most important change [as a coach] has been to be more patient. And curious about each individual player, and increase the *belief* that it is possible to, most things can be learned. Almost anything can be learned. As long as you increase the motivation and the possibility to work on it. (handball coach)

In the above statement, the handball coach says that she believes “almost anything can be learned” when followers are given proper support. She also speaks of how her practical experience working with players has taught her that they are capable of learning more than she initially thought. This increased belief in her followers' development potential has made her more patient. She also implies that this increased patience has made her a better coach and leader, because it has made her less likely to give up when supporting her followers in their efforts to develop their skills.

In summary, this subtheme shows that the leaders in this study believe in their followers' competence. This involves believing that their followers are capable and that they have more abilities than meets the eye. It also means that they look for the talents and skills in the people they work with. Moreover, the leaders speak of how they want to help their followers use and develop their abilities. This issue is further discussed in the theme “developing people and promoting mastery.”

### 4.1.3 Believing in people's willingness to do their best

The leaders express that they believe most people want to do their best at work if they are given the opportunity. They also express a general belief in the trustworthiness of their followers, which involves assuming that most people are honest, and that dishonest people are the exception rather than the rule.

The general is one of the leaders who expresses a belief that most people are honest and have good intentions. He states:

I choose to believe people right until they show me that they lie to me.  
And extremely few...*Actually*, extremely few do. (general)

In his statement, he makes it clear that he chooses to assume that the people he deals with are honest. And he also experiences that by far most people behave in line with his assumption, which is likely to confirm and strengthen his belief in people's trustworthiness.

Many of the leaders also express that they believe most people want to do their best at work if they are given the opportunity. One of these leaders is the factory director, who states:

I believe that by far most people really want to do a proper job, at least until the opposite has been proven. (factory director)

This statement by the factory director appears to refer to how he thinks about his own employees. Elsewhere in his interview, he also speaks of how people must be given the opportunity to do their best. This could mean that he does not assume that people will automatically do their best if they are given an assignment. Instead, he believes that they need to be given proper instructions and follow-up so that they truly understand what is expected of them. In other words, he as a leader must also make an effort to create conditions that enable his followers to do their best.

To sum up, the findings suggest that the leaders in this study believe that most of their followers want to do a good job and have good intentions if the conditions are right. They therefore see it as their responsibility to create conditions in their organisations that help their followers perform their best.

#### **4.1.4 Believing in people's need for connectedness**

Several leaders in this study express that they believe people have a fundamental need to feel connected and like they belong, and that this is something they as leaders must attend to.

In line with this, the INGO president explains that she sees the need for connectedness as an essential human need. She states:

I believe that human beings are important to each other, and that that is at the core, the foundation of how we are...mother and father and children and family and close friends and neighbours and...that is the core itself. People in relation to other people. (INGO president)

A similar sentiment is expressed by the NGO president. He believes people need to feel connected and care about each other to perform their best, and sees it as a leadership responsibility to contribute to such a working environment. He says:

if you do not care about how your colleague is doing, and if you do not care about how you work together, and how the working environment is, then you will not do well. (NGO president)

These leaders share a belief that people have a need to feel like they belong and are connected to each other, and that this is an essential human need that needs to be stimulated for people to function optimally. This belief can help explain why they place such great emphasis on promoting connectedness and cooperation in their followers, as discussed in the theme “promoting connectedness and cooperation.”

#### **4.1.5 Acknowledging that there are also destructive tendencies in human nature**

Several leaders in this study point out that while they believe in the good in people, they also acknowledge that there are negative tendencies in human nature. This means that while they choose to emphasise the positive aspects of their followers, they also recognise that their followers can behave destructively. One of the leaders who speaks of this issue is the mayor, who explains that he believes bad behaviour is the exception and not the rule, and that by far most people have good intentions. He says:

Most people are *not* villains! (...) I meet *very* few crooks in this society. Of course there are some, and they need to be dealt with. (mayor)

His statement suggests that he chooses to believe that most people have good intentions, and that this corresponds with his real-life experience of interacting with people. He also recognises that a smaller number of people do have bad intentions, and that this cannot be ignored. For his leadership practice, this suggests that he bases his dealings with his followers on the assumption that by far most of them have good intentions most of the time, but that he is also prepared to take action when individuals behave in destructive ways.

The finance CEO believes people in general have good intentions, but that there are exceptions. He makes the additional point that bad situations can bring out the worst in people. He states:

I believe that people want the best, if given the opportunity. However, we have all seen demonstrated the brutality in human nature when people are placed in the right situations. But I do have a fundamentally positive view of people. (finance CEO)

The above statement suggests that the finance CEO chooses to emphasise the positive aspects of human nature, but that he also realises that people are capable of behaving destructively. This is a view he shares with several other leaders in this study. These leaders express that although they have a positive view of

people and choose to believe that most people have good intentions, they also acknowledge that this is not the case for all people in all situations. A consequence of this view for their leadership practice is that they take actions that aim to prevent, minimise, or fight such destructive behaviours in their organisations and among their followers. This will be further discussed as part of the themes “providing direction” and “disciplining.”

#### **4.1.6 Respecting their followers**

The leaders speak of having respect for their followers and their dignity. This involves treating their followers with consideration and taking their interests and needs into account when making decisions. It can also be seen as valuing people in their own right and seeing them as ends in themselves, rather than seeing them merely as means to achieving the goals of the organisation.

One of the leaders who speaks of the importance he places on respecting followers is the mayor. He says:

it is about how you treat people. That you respect them, treat them with respect, and in that way give [them] dignity. (mayor)

The mayor’s respect for his followers is reflected in the way he interacts with his followers. He explains that he takes an interest in the people he works with, and makes time to greet, smile, and talk with them to make sure that they feel seen. This is a way of expressing to his followers that he values them and the work they do.

The NGO president also sees it as important to respect his followers and to protect their dignity. He states:

I am genuinely concerned with protecting human worth and equality. (...) that fundamental view of people is something I am willing to fight very, very, very hard for (...) you cannot step on [people’s] dignity. (NGO president)

The NGO president speaks of respecting his followers in terms of protecting their dignity and worth, and emphasises that he sees his followers as equals. For him, seeing followers as equals also involves having expectations of them, and challenging them to contribute with their resources. He makes the point that leaders who do not have any expectations of their followers do not truly respect them. By this, he could mean that not having expectations of followers means not having faith in their abilities, and thus underestimating them and what they are capable of.

Respecting followers can be seen as an underlying value that informs how the leaders practise leadership. It can be seen as holding their followers in high esteem and wanting to treat them with consideration. This enables the leaders to lead in a way that takes into account their followers' needs and interests, and integrate them with the needs of the organisation.

#### **4.1.7 Caring about their followers**

The leaders in this study express that they care about their followers. This can be seen as feeling an emotional connection with their followers, taking an interest in them, and wanting to contribute to their well-being. The leaders emphasise different aspects of this value, including being interested in people, wanting to interact with them, being fond of people, and wanting to be of service to their followers.

Several of the leaders speak of caring about their followers in the sense of being interested in their followers and wanting to interact with them. One of these leaders is the factory director, who states:

I am involved in, and interested in our work and in the people who do the work (factory director)

The factory director explains that he involves himself in the followers and their work by spending much time working closely with them in their daily work. This close involvement with his staff can be seen as an expression of the value he places on them, on the work that they do, and that he enjoys interacting with



them. It can also help him keep familiar with their situation and the issues that they are facing. This can in turn help him make better decisions for his employees, which can signal to them that they and their needs are important to him.

Another aspect of caring about their followers which is highlighted by several of the leaders is having their followers' best interests at heart and wanting to contribute to their well-being. One example of this is the mayor, who explains that the reason he became a politician was that he wanted to do something for others and also because he enjoys seeing people happy. He states:

if you are going to work with people, something like that needs to lie behind it: you are not doing it for yourself; you are doing it for them.  
(mayor)

The mayor's statements suggest that to him, caring about followers involves wanting to be of service to them, and wanting to contribute to their happiness. When he says, "something like that needs to lie behind it," he suggests that these principles inform how he practices leadership. However, he also indicates that he believes *everyone* who works with people should base their practice on similar principles. By that, I think he means that those who work with people (as leaders do) often exercise power over other people. This power can both help and harm these people. He implies that anyone who exercises this type of power over others has a moral responsibility to exercise that power in a way that is in the best interests of the people they work with.

To sum up, all the leaders in this study express that they care about people. For these leaders, this involves feeling a concern for the well-being of their followers. This can help them support their followers' needs. One of the leaders makes the point that employees can easily tell if their leader does not truly care about them. This is likely to impact the followers' well-being. Perhaps more importantly, it is unlikely that a leader who does not take an interest in their followers' well-being will make decisions that are in their best interests, and thereby support their needs.

#### 4.1.8 Believing in promoting motivation from within

The leaders express that they believe in promoting their followers' motivation, and that this motivation must come from within. They explain that instead of leading in a way that relies on control, they want to lead in a way that creates conditions where their followers *want* to do their work. In line with this, the factory director states:

I think that if you are not able to, to a reasonable degree, develop people's *own* drive, people's *own* motivation, people's *own* want, you will never get *top* athletes, top performers. (factory director)

When the factory director emphasises that he wants to develop his followers' "*own* drive," "*own* motivation," and "*own* want," he indicates that he wants to get them to a place where they mostly push themselves forward in their jobs. The emphasis he places on how this must be their *own* motivation, suggests that this motivation must not only come from within, but it must also be strong. The followers could feel such a strong inner motivation because they find the work itself enjoyable, because they find the work meaningful, and/or because they find the goals of the organisation engaging and want to contribute to achieving them. This type of motivation from within means that employees do their work more because they *want to* than because they *have to*.

To build this kind of motivation in their followers, a kind of motivation where the followers "propel" themselves forward, requires a different approach to leadership than one where it is the leader who pushes the followers forward. This is emphasised by the factory director when he speaks of "developing" his followers' intrinsic motivation. This suggests that this kind of motivation needs to be "built," which hints at something that requires deliberate and sustained investment of effort over time. This idea of "building" strong motivation that emanates from within, fits with the other themes in this study, which provide evidence of how the leaders in this study invest extensive effort into practices that are aimed at promoting intrinsic motivation in their followers.

#### **4.1.9 Conclusion - having a positive view of people**

This section has presented the eight subthemes that make up the theme “having a positive view of people.” The subthemes describe how (1) all the leaders in this study express that they have a positive view of people. This can be seen as a general attitude to their followers that emphasises their good qualities and the possibilities in human nature, and which underlies their leadership practice. (2) The leaders express that they believe in their followers’ competence. This involves having faith in their followers’ abilities and in their potential for development. (3) The leaders believe in their followers’ willingness to do their best at work if given the opportunity. (4) Several leaders express that they believe people have a fundamental need to feel connected and like they belong, and that they as leaders must attend to this need. (5) While the leaders choose to emphasise the positive qualities in their followers, they acknowledge that there are also destructive tendencies in human nature. However, they assume that these behaviours are the exception rather than the rule when it comes to their followers. (6) The leaders express that they have respect for their followers. This can be seen as holding them in high regard and wanting to take their needs and interests into consideration. (7) The leaders also express that they care about their followers. This involves taking an interest in them and wanting to contribute to their well-being. Finally, (8) the leaders explain that they want to promote their followers’ motivation, and that this motivation must come from within. The leaders speak of how they want to lead in ways that create conditions where their followers *want* to do their work, rather than feeling that they *have* to. In other words, they want to promote their followers’ intrinsic motivation.

Together, these subthemes make up a set of underlying assumptions, values, and attitudes that the leaders in this study hold about their followers, which I choose to call “a positive view of people” (In Norwegian: “et positivt menneskesyn”). These assumptions, values, and attitudes that the leaders hold about their followers all emphasise the positive aspects and the possibilities in human nature (without denying that there are also negative tendencies in human nature). The leaders also express that they want to facilitate conditions that help bring out these positive qualities in their followers, including intrinsic motivation, which is of special interest in this study. This suggests that the leaders’ view of people can

inform how they practise leadership, and in particular how they promote intrinsic motivation in their followers.

The positive view of people expressed by the leaders in this study is compatible with McGregor's (1960/2006) Theory Y assumptions. The Theory Y assumptions also emphasise the positive qualities in human nature, and assume that people will do their best at work if the conditions are right. It follows in McGregor's theory that a leader with this view will want to lead in a way that seeks to create conditions that help bring out these positive qualities in their followers. In line with this, previous studies have found a positive relationship between Theory Y assumptions and leadership practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers (Fiman 1973, Lawter et al. 2015, Pastor & Mayo 2008, Şahin et al. 2017).

#### **4.2 Personal convictions that influence whether and to what extent assumptions are translated into practice**

This theme identifies several personal convictions that impact whether and to what degree the leaders translate their view of people into practice. This includes seeing it as important to promote intrinsic motivation in followers, prioritising it, choosing to base their leadership practice on their view of people, being aware of this issue in the everyday work situation, and assuming that it requires much effort.

This section presents five subthemes. The subthemes are: (1) seeing it as important to promote intrinsic motivation in followers, (2) giving high priority to promoting intrinsic motivation in followers, (3) choosing to base their leadership practice on their view of people, (4) being aware in the everyday work situation, and (5) assuming that promoting intrinsic motivation in followers requires extensive effort. Table 4.3 shows these subthemes with illustrative quotes.

**TABLE 4.3: Processes that influence whether and to what degree assumptions are translated into practice**

Subtheme	Illustrative quotes
Seeing it as important to promote intrinsic motivation	“[about employee motivation] It means <i>incredibly</i> much.” (mayor)
Prioritise it highly	“I kept what was called an open door. I think a leader should be available. I often say that during the daytime, so many things are happening that you can’t kind of close the door and withdraw. If you need to read big chunky reports, you’ll have to do it at night. You need to keep an open door so that when people come and knock at the door and I don’t have anything I need to do, I will speak with them. And listen to what they have to say.” (hospital director)
Choosing to base one’s leadership practice on one’s view of people	“At the foundation [of how I practise leadership] lie the basic values that I have told you about [in this interview]” (football manager) “you need to have a philosophy, that is to say a set of values, a view of people, and then you need to <i>carry it out</i> in practice.” (football coach)
Awareness in the everyday work situation	“this is an interplay with thousands of details when you are together every day.” (football coach) “I am impatient, which is one of the things I work most on - my patience. (...) There are so many things I want to do, and I want to have it done fast. And the people who are participating need to feel that it happens in a way so that they are part of it. So it’s about holding back the whole way. Waiting...” (mayor)
Assuming that it requires extensive effort	“it took 3-4 years to turn this around.” (handball coach) “Once we have agreed on what we are going to do, I am not anxious about carrying it out. But you need to spend <i>ample</i> time on listening to people and bringing in other points of view. So that we are <i>together</i> in this.” (INGO president)

#### 4.2.1 Seeing it as important to promote intrinsic motivation in followers

The leaders in this study express that they see it as important to promote intrinsic motivation in their followers. In line with this, the plant director states:

the main responsibility of every leader on every level is mainly to develop other people, motivate other people, ignite the spark. That is leadership. (...) Leadership is about getting things done through other people. (plant director)

In the above statement, the plant director makes it clear that he sees it as one of his most important responsibilities to motivate his followers. His use of the metaphor “igniting the spark,” can be seen as suggesting that motivation can be a

powerful force. He combines this with stating that his responsibility as a leader is to get “things done through other people.” This can help explain why he sees it as important to evoke strong motivation in his followers; because it is key to getting his followers to do their work.

The football coach also alludes to intrinsic motivation as a powerful force. He refers to this type of motivation as “inner driving forces,” and emphasises how much importance he places on it by calling it the “engine of the machinery” of his organisation. Like the plant director, he thus sees it as one of his most important responsibilities as a leader to promote intrinsic motivation in his followers.

The importance the leaders in this study place on promoting intrinsic motivation in their followers can help explain why they engage in a large number of practices that are aimed at promoting intrinsic motivation in their followers. These practices are described in themes 3-7.

#### **4.2.2 Giving high priority to promoting intrinsic motivation in followers**

The leaders in this study do not only see promoting intrinsic motivation in followers as important, they also prioritise it above other activities. In the everyday work situation, a leader has many considerations to take into account, and many of these may be seen as important by the leader or by other stakeholders. The promotion of intrinsic motivation can therefore easily be neglected if it is not given high priority. That the leaders in this study engage in practices that promote follower motivation, suggests that they give high priority to this issue.

One example of how the leaders in this study prioritise their followers’ intrinsic motivation is provided by the handball coach. She is also a trained teacher, and draws on this experience to illustrate how she maintains focus on her followers’ needs despite facing competing demands in her work. She explains that teachers can often be too focused on the curriculum, which can make them lose track of the needs of their students. She emphasises that she personally is very focused on

the needs of her followers as a leader. This is consistent with promoting intrinsic motivation in her followers. She states:

Teachers can very easily be tied up to the curriculum, while I suppose I am more genuinely interested in the individual. And learning. Not locked into... (...) in the classroom, it can easily become... going through the same curriculum. (handball coach)

The above statement suggests that both leaders and teachers may see it as important to promote intrinsic motivation in their followers and students. However, both professional groups face competing demands in their work which may take away focus from their followers' motivational needs. This can make it difficult to prioritise intrinsic motivation in their daily work. It is unlikely that they give lower priority to intrinsic motivation because they do not see it as important; instead, the reason is likely to be that they have limited capacity to deal with the many competing demands they are facing.

In contrast, the handball coach points out that she keeps focus on her followers and their needs in her work. In her work as a sports coach, she also faces competing demands that can take away attention from the needs of her followers. Such demands could come from sponsors, the public, or the media. In spite of these pressures, she emphasises that she prioritises to focus on her followers and their needs.

Other leaders in this study also speak about how they give priority to supporting their followers' needs, and how this can also involve giving lower priority to other demands they are facing in their work. Many of these competing demands can also be seen as important by their stakeholders, and giving them lower priority can therefore be met with resistance or criticism. However, by making it a priority to support their followers' needs, these leaders are also making it possible to promote their intrinsic motivation.

### **4.2.3 Choosing to base their leadership practice on their view of people**

Several of the leaders in this study indicate that they deliberately choose to base their leadership practice on their view of people. This means that their view of people informs the way they practise leadership.

One of the leaders who expresses that he chooses to base his leadership practice on his view of people is the finance CEO. This view is exemplified in an episode during our interview, when he asks to change the order of the questions I have planned to ask. Before the interview, I had planned to ask him about his leadership practice before asking about his view of people, because I believed it would be easier to talk about something more concrete first. However, at the beginning of the interview, the finance CEO asks if we can talk about his view of people first, because:

[my view of people is a premise] for how I function as a leader. (finance CEO)

That the finance CEO wants to speak about his view of people before talking about how he practises leadership, can be seen as confirmation that his view of people informs his leadership practice. This also suggests that this relationship is intentional, and that he thus deliberately chooses to let his view of people have practical consequences for how he practises leadership.

Another leader who expresses that her view of people informs her leadership practice is the handball coach. This is suggested by the way she speaks about how her view of people is interlinked with her leadership practice throughout the interview. One example of how she does this is a statement she makes when we are halfway through the interview. I have waited until then before asking her directly about her view of people. In reply to my question, she says:

I suppose I have already said quite a lot about that. Through the way we work (handball coach)



She thus indicates that when she speaks about how she practises leadership, she is also speaking about her view of people. This suggests that she sees her view of people as closely linked with the way she practises leadership, and that her leadership practice can be seen as emanating from her view of people.

To sum up, several leaders in this study state that they see their view of people as a foundation for how they practise leadership. In addition, they also speak of how elements of their view of people are connected to how they practise leadership. For example, they speak of how they believe people have a need for connectedness and belonging, and they also speak about how they translate this principle into practice by promoting connectedness in their followers. They also speak of how they believe in promoting motivation from within in their followers, and all the practices described in themes 3-7 can be seen as promoting intrinsic motivation in their followers. It can therefore be argued that the leaders in this study choose to translate their view of people into practice.

#### **4.2.4 Being aware in the everyday work situation**

The leaders express that the work they do to promote intrinsic motivation in their followers takes place as part of their daily work. To be able to take such actions, leaders must be aware of the issue in their everyday work situation. The more alert leaders are of this issue, the more opportunities they are likely to find both for supporting their followers' intrinsic motivation and for dealing with issues that hinder their followers' intrinsic motivation.

The football coach indicates that he has a high level of awareness of this issue in his work. He explains that he is sometimes asked by firms to come and "motivate them." By that, they mean that they want him to motivate them by holding a speech for them. He explains that he disagrees with this view, because he does not see motivation as something that can be achieved through such "one-off events." Instead, he thinks that to effectively motivate followers, the efforts to do so must be interwoven in the whole operation of the organisation. It must underlie everything they do.

While it may be unrealistic to fully achieve the vision of the football coach, the other leaders in this study also speak of practices that promote intrinsic motivation as part of their everyday work, rather than as one-off events. For example, the factory director also emphasises that he speaks about everyday practices when talking about how he employs his motivational practices in his organisation. He says:

[my] focus has been very much on the people, the technology, and the products. In our daily work (factory director)

The factory director's statement can be interpreted to mean that when he speaks about his leadership practices in the interview, he is referring to his everyday practices. When he says that he is very focused on his followers, this suggests that he is alert to their needs, and is therefore able to discover opportunities to support their motivational needs on an ongoing basis and take action when it is needed.

Themes 3-7 refer to practices that the leaders in this study engage in to promote intrinsic motivation in their followers. These practices are integrated in their daily work, rather than part of one-off events. That the leaders are able to engage in ongoing efforts to promote intrinsic motivation in their followers, suggests that they have awareness of the issue in their everyday work. Without such awareness, the followers' motivational needs can too easily be forgotten and therefore remain unsupported.

#### **4.2.5 Assuming that promoting intrinsic motivation in followers requires extensive effort**

The findings indicate that the leaders in this study assume that promoting intrinsic motivation in followers requires extensive effort. In line with this, the leaders describe how they engage in a large number of practices that promote intrinsic motivation in their followers. The leaders explain that they invest considerable amounts of time, effort, and thought into these practices. They also describe how these efforts are ongoing and integrated into their daily work, rather than organised as one-off events or delegated to others.

The football manager is one of the leaders who speaks of how engaging in such processes can be demanding. He uses the example of involving followers in decision-making processes, and explains that this work requires a great deal of time, effort, and deliberation. He states:

I often say that I think it is misunderstood, because the easiest thing in the world is to create distance. To create distance between people, by not involving them. And to just say; this is how it is going to be, deliver. Period. That is, not running any processes. Because this is quite... this is time consuming, you need to put a lot of work into it, you need to do a lot of thinking, you need to be willing to have the discussions, and so on.  
(football manager)

In the above statement, the football manager suggests that it would have been easier not to involve his followers. A similar point is made by the INGO president, who also emphasises that she does not involve her followers because it is the easiest thing to do. Instead, both she and the football manager choose to invest extra effort in involving their followers because they believe it makes their followers feel included and because they believe it is in their followers' best interest.

All the practices that the leaders describe in themes 3-7 can be seen as promoting intrinsic motivation in their followers. The leaders invest extensive efforts in these practices, and do so as part of their daily work, rather than as one-off events. Their efforts are sustained over time, and they take personal responsibility rather than delegating these efforts to others. This can be seen as demonstrating that these leaders do not take the promotion of intrinsic motivation in their followers lightly.

#### **4.2.6 Conclusion - personal convictions that influence whether and to what degree assumptions are translated into practice**

This section has presented the five subthemes that make up the theme “personal convictions that influence whether and to what degree assumptions are translated

into practice.” The subthemes describe how the leaders in this study (1) see it as an important responsibility to promote intrinsic motivation in their followers. (2) The leaders also give high priority to promoting intrinsic motivation in their followers. This means that among the many competing demands they face in their work, they give precedence to supporting their followers’ motivational needs. Furthermore, (3) they choose to base their leadership practice on their view of people. This means that they have decided to personally use these principles as guidelines for how they act and make decisions in their daily leadership practice. (4) to be able to promote their followers’ intrinsic motivation, the leaders must be aware of this issue in the everyday work situation. This allows them both to discover opportunities to support their followers’ intrinsic motivation and to deal with issues that hinder their followers’ intrinsic motivation. (5) the leaders assume that promoting intrinsic motivation requires much effort. In line with this, the leaders in this study describe how efforts to promote intrinsic motivation in their followers can be numerous, time consuming, demanding, integrated in their daily work, and something they take personal responsibility for.

These subthemes illustrate a set of personal convictions that can help explain why the leaders in this study invest extensive efforts into practices that aim to promote intrinsic motivation in their followers. The subthemes suggest that leaders with a positive view of people, who want to promote intrinsic motivation in their followers, are likely to invest more effort into this the more important they see this, the more highly they prioritise it relatively to other issues they need to deal with in their work, the more actively they choose to base their own leadership practice on this principle, the more awareness of this they have in their everyday work, and the more extensive effort they assume this work requires.

As the title of this theme suggests, these subthemes can help explain whether and to what degree leaders translate their assumptions into practice. This is also relevant for McGregor’s (1960/2006) Theory Y. These personal convictions can provide a link between Theory Y assumptions and Theory Y leadership practices by helping explain why and to what degree leaders with Theory Y assumptions are likely to practise Theory Y leadership or not. This means that these subthemes can help give us a better understanding of the relationship between Theory Y assumptions and Theory Y leadership practices.

### **4.3 Promoting freedom, involvement, and responsibility**

The third main theme that was developed during the analysis is that the leaders believe in giving their followers freedom and responsibility, involving them in decision-making processes, and supporting their independence. Many of the leaders also convey that they practise freedom of speech, which means that followers are welcome to express disagreement or even opposition without being sanctioned. However, this freedom is not without limits, and the leaders also emphasise that they do use authority when they feel that it is needed.

This section presents five subthemes. The subthemes are: (1) giving followers freedom and supporting their independence, (2) involving followers in decision-making processes, (3) supporting their followers' freedom of speech, (4) giving followers responsibility, and (5) using authority when necessary. Table 4.4 shows these subthemes with illustrative quotes.

**TABLE 4.4: Promoting freedom, involvement, and responsibility**

Subtheme	Illustrative quotes
Giving their followers freedom and supporting their independence	<p>“my entire leadership is based on believing in each individual player and on building independence” (handball coach)</p> <p>“[people in my team are] very self-driven (...) within their areas of responsibility” (football manager)</p> <p>“I need to give you [the follower] room to do [the job description].” (NGO secretary general)</p> <p>“the players vary in how much they wish to contribute, so it’s important to <i>respect</i>...some need a little more guidance, others need to be more in charge.” (handball coach)</p> <p>“you have to give people <i>freedom</i>” (general)</p>
Involving followers in decision-making processes	<p>“I have more and more respect for how important it is to involve everybody. So, as a leader, I am of course concerned with the result, but to get good results you need to be concerned with the good process, and you need to build ownership and involvement.” (NGO president)</p> <p>“[rather than being] a coach who <i>gives</i> all the orders, [I] believe much more in teamwork.” (handball coach)</p> <p>“while [I] appreciate that enlightened absolutism is more efficient, I believe in joint decisions and the sense of community that comes with this approach” (INGO president)</p> <p>“I notice that when we have a lot of involvement, people’s motivation and wish to be part of the team environment increases.” (handball coach)</p>
Supporting their followers’ freedom of speech	<p>“I believe it is really important to create a culture (...) where people are allowed to <i>disagree</i>. Where you don’t only have yes-people around you, you need to have no-people around you, too (...) which I believe I managed to do.” (hospital director)</p> <p>“If I have made a mistake as a leader, it is very nice if people come to me and tell me in private, “listen, you went too far. You shouldn’t have done this.” But that requires that people know that they can do so without it resulting in some kind of...military drill the next morning.” (mayor)</p>
Giving followers responsibility	<p>“we actually have a responsibility for moving in a positive direction (...) [That requires presence and focus.] If you were to come here, you would actually have to be interested in learning something. And that requires you to be present. You need to be observant and so on. We as coaches need to [be present and focused], the players need to be [present and focused], and <i>together</i> we then create dynamics which lead to good and inspiring learning environments.” (football manager)</p>
They believe in using authority when the situation requires it	<p>“I am for consensus (...) If you can get everybody to agree, nothing is better than that. But if you <i>cannot</i> reach consensus, then the boss kind of has to say “this is how it will be.”” (general)</p> <p>“As a leader, if I go out in this organisation and say that I have made a decision, and people ask me why, and I say, “because I said so and I am the boss,” nobody is impressed. They are impressed if they understand that this is a decision that makes the organisation better. So, authority doesn’t come as a result of <i>formal</i> authority; it comes as a result of respect for the job you do as a leader.” (finance CEO)</p> <p>“You need to have an organisation that accepts...that is, you need to have built up authority so that when you make that decision, it stands. But it also has something to do with credibility over a long period of time.” (general)</p>

### **4.3.1 Giving followers freedom and supporting their independence**

Many of the leaders in this study explain that they see it as important to give their followers freedom. This also includes supporting their followers' independence and giving them latitude to figure out how to do their jobs.

One of the leaders who speaks of the importance he places on giving his followers freedom, is the hospital director. He explains that he gives his followers a high degree of freedom. He states:

I have always been a proponent of delegating a lot of power and authority down the system and of giving people responsibility, and then they take responsibility. It is definitely about delegation, delegation, delegation. That is something I believe is really important. (hospital director)

The hospital director appears to be one of the leaders in this study who gives his followers the highest degree of freedom and responsibility. In the above statement, he emphasises that he strongly believes in giving his followers freedom and responsibility by saying that he has “always” believed in it, by saying that he gives them “a lot of” it, and by repeating the word “delegation” three times. He also expresses that he has faith in his followers by suggesting that they will “take responsibility” when he gives them responsibility. Elsewhere in his interview, he reconfirms his belief in giving followers freedom, by saying that he will defend them for anything as long as they do what is best for the patient. However, he also points out that he finds that this is rarely necessary as long as he communicates well with his followers about what he wants to achieve. This issue is further discussed as part of the theme “providing direction.”

Another leader who speaks of giving his followers freedom is the factory director. He appears to give his followers a lower level of freedom than the hospital director, and emphasises that he believes freedom should be combined with regular feedback and follow up. He emphasises that this is a way of supporting his followers, rather than leaving them to figure out a task on their own. This difference reflects that the practice of giving followers freedom can

take different forms, and that leaders can find ways of practising this principle in ways that they are comfortable with and that work for them.

Several leaders also emphasise that they want to lead in a way that supports their followers' independence. One of these leaders is the mayor, who states:

something which is incredibly important in relation to the employees (...) [is] teaching them to work independently...sometimes this takes time, and people are very different. (mayor)

The mayor explains that he finds that his followers vary in how comfortable they are with working independently, and that some take longer than others to adjust to working independently. While he sees it as important to take these differences into consideration, he nevertheless believes it is both possible and beneficial for most people to learn to handle more responsibility with proper guidance.

In summary, the leaders believe in supporting their followers' freedom and independence. They do so in different ways, and to different degrees. This variation allows the leaders to make adjustments for both their own and their followers' preferences and needs. However, although they give their followers different degrees of freedom, all the leaders have in common that the freedom they give their followers is not complete. They all assume that the followers have been employed to do a job, and that they must use the freedom they are given to help their organisation achieve its goals. In line with this, subtheme 4.3.5 and theme 4.6 discuss how the leaders also speak of how the freedom they give their followers has boundaries. This includes using authority when necessary, as well as setting clear goals to provide direction, communicating clear expectations, and providing guidelines for followers by working on ethics, values, and rules.

#### **4.3.2 Involving followers in decision-making processes**

Many of the leaders express that they see it as important to involve their followers in decision-making processes. This can give their followers the opportunity to influence their workplace, and to be included when decisions that concern them and their work are being made.



The mayor is one of the leaders who speaks of the importance of involving his followers. He states:

I am very concerned with involvement. (...) That is, involving people in planning, asking people for advice, making people feel ownership for the case (...) the people who are participating need to feel that it happens in a way so that they are part of it. (...) this is incredibly important with regards to the employees. (mayor)

The mayor makes several points about involving followers in the above extract. He explains that he wants his followers to feel that “they are part of it.” This can be interpreted to mean that involving followers is a way of making them feel included, and that not involving them could make them feel excluded. It could also mean that he wants his followers to participate actively in the workplace, rather than to be more passive. He also says that he wants to ask his followers for advice. This can be an opportunity for the employees to contribute with first-hand experience of their work which may lead to better solutions.

Several leaders also point out that involvement is not an easy solution. They explain that involving followers in decision-making can be demanding, time consuming, and requires patience.

The handball coach is one of the leaders who speaks about how involving followers can be time consuming. She explains that it took her several years to fully implement an involving way of working in the national handball team. When she took over the team, her involving leadership style was quite unconventional, and most of the players were used to coaches with more authoritarian leadership styles. The involving leadership style on the national team was therefore a large transition for them, and it meant that they had to learn a new way of working. She states:

It took some time before they trusted themselves when I started to ask them a lot of questions and involving them very actively. Because when they aren't used to it, when they are used to just having delivered to them what they need to do, then it is quite unfamiliar for them to be asked what

they *want* to do. But it is quite established in the culture now, and it took 3-4 years to turn this around. (handball coach)

From this statement we can see that the handball coach is willing to invest considerable effort into involving her followers. As several of the other leaders in this study point out, they do not involve their followers because they see it as an easy solution. Instead, they say that it would have been easier and faster to make decisions in more authoritarian ways. However, they choose to invest in more involving processes because they see it as more fulfilling for their followers to have the opportunity to influence and participate in decision-making processes that concern them and their work.

To sum up, the leaders in this study believe in involving their followers in decision-making processes. They thereby encourage their followers to participate more actively in the workplace. It can be seen as a way of making their followers feel included rather than excluded when decisions that concern them and their work are being made. Involving followers is not only more demanding for the leader, it is also more demanding for the followers because they need to consider options, make decisions, and participate in discussions. Followers who have been involved in a decision-making process are also likely to feel more obligation towards the decision, even if they do not agree, because they have taken part in making the decision.

#### **4.3.3 Supporting their followers' freedom of speech**

Many of the leaders speak of the importance of creating a work environment where followers dare to express disagreement and criticism to their leaders. This involves assuring followers that they will not be directly or indirectly sanctioned for their utterings. However, some of the leaders also point out that there are limits to the kind of criticism that they accept.

The factory director explains that he welcomes constructive criticism from his employees. However, he emphasises that this criticism needs to be constructive - he does not tolerate criticism that is not properly substantiated. He states:

[it is important to] have an open culture where you really *want* feedback. (...) If someone wants to oppose against me, or thinks that we should do something differently, if it is factual and properly presented and justified, that's great, and they are welcome to come to me twice, but if it is without substance, if it's just "no, I think that's a stupid idea," I'm not interested in that. (factory director)

The statement above suggests that the factory director wants his followers to feel that they can voice disagreement to him without fear of being sanctioned for doing so. However, he also makes it clear that there are limits to how far he allows his followers to go with their criticism, and that he therefore only allows criticism that is reasoned and well-founded. The factory director's statements suggest that he allows criticism because it can lead to better decisions, and because not doing so is oppressive and can create fear in the followers.

While the factory director only allows criticism that is reasoned and well-founded, the general is one of the leaders who also tolerate criticism that is more emotional. These two types of criticism can have different functions. While the former can lead to better decisions, the latter can be a way of letting out frustrations.

In line with this, the general suggests that expressing criticism can be beneficial for followers because it allows them to vent their frustrations rather than repressing them. He provides an example of how he does this by explaining that when he makes controversial decisions, he seeks out his followers. He does this to communicate directly with them, but also to give them the opportunity to express their frustrations to him if they wish to. This is a way to demonstrate to his followers that their concerns matter to him, and he has observed that this has a positive effect on his followers:

[when making controversial decisions]. You *have to* go out, you need to be there, you need to let people have the opportunity to come and yell at you. They didn't yell at you, you know, it's just something I'm saying (...) They can disagree, but just the fact that you are there. They have the opportunity...it has something to do with *recognising* that people have a need to let out their frustration. And then you need to be there for them.

And you need to know that this is my job! My job is to let them get it out (...) you need to dare to be in it (...) And you get a lot out of those people. (general)

It could be argued that allowing followers to express their negative emotions could undermine morale. However, the general's statement shows that he has experienced the opposite effect in his organisation, where he has seen a positive reaction in his followers when they experience that he is willing to hear them out. This could be because the followers appreciate being in an environment with a high tolerance level.

To sum up, several of the leaders in this study speak of how they support their followers' freedom of speech. The leaders do this by allowing their followers to voice their opinions when they disagree with decisions that are being made. Some of the leaders emphasise that this disagreement needs to be expressed in a reasoned and rational way, and that this can lead to better decisions. Some of the leaders also tolerate a different form of criticism - one that is more emotional, and whose purpose it is to vent one's frustrations with decisions that are being made. By seeking to build work environments where their followers feel free to voice their opinions, the leaders are supporting their followers' sense of freedom. In contrast, a work environment where followers feel that their opinions are not welcome, can feel oppressive and controlling, and thus be harmful to the followers' sense of freedom.

#### **4.3.4 Giving followers responsibility**

While the leaders in this study believe in leadership practices based on freedom and involvement, they also believe that this comes with responsibility. They expect their followers to contribute, do their best, and show initiative.

The handball coach explains that the freedom she gives her followers comes with obligation, and that she expects her followers to work hard towards the success of the team. She states:

An important aspect of this is that we can have a lot of freedom, but there needs to be a very strong obligation to the team (...). You can't become the best in the world without paying a price to get there. So the players who are part of the team need to be willing to make a great effort. (handball coach)

The other two sports coaches also teach their players to take responsibility. For example, the football coach explains that he holds every player responsible for making the most of their role in the team and for contributing to a good working environment.

An additional leader who teaches his employees to take responsibility and to contribute in the workplace is the factory director. He makes it clear to his employees that everybody in the organisation is responsible for contributing to the success of the business, and that he expects them to work hard. He states:

I am interested in having people with the attitude that a workplace becomes what you and I make of it. We are responsible for creating opportunities. (...) So, we try to make everyone who comes in understand that, just like three people starting up a carpentry firm...which makes it very easy for them to understand that if we are to make money, we need to work hard, we need to make profits out of this. (...) We depend on everybody's contribution, but of course, we do challenge them. It is very easy for many people to say "well, nobody asks me." I then ask in return, "which initiatives are you taking? To be asked? And how is it you want to contribute, which gives us a reason for asking you?" So it comes with obligation. You can't just say it's everybody else's responsibility to figure out how good I am, you also need to say what you can do, and be persistent. (factory director)

The factory director thus expects his employees to take responsibility by actively looking for ways to contribute to the business. He also expects them to show initiative, and not wait until they are asked. Together with the statements by the other leaders, this shows us that involving followers and giving them freedom requires followers to take an active role in looking for ways to contribute to their organisations.

Together, these statements suggest that freedom and involvement can be more demanding for followers. Instead of having decisions made for them, the followers need to consider options, make choices, and show initiative themselves. They also have to live with the consequences of their decisions. It can be easier to be told what to do, and to blame somebody else if things do not turn out as expected. However, the leaders believe it is beneficial for their followers to participate more actively in the running of their organisation and that the benefits of doing so outweigh these possible disadvantages.

#### **4.3.5 Using authority when necessary**

Although the leaders believe in democratic leadership principles such as freedom and involvement, they also believe it is necessary to use authority when the situation calls for it. For example, the handball coach makes the point that she does sometimes find it necessary to use her authority, but that these occasions are rare. She states:

That doesn't mean that there aren't certain situations where I have to put my foot down and say, "***this is how it is here.***" But to a very large degree...they are wise girls, wise individuals. So it is more about being clear about where we want to go, what we want to do to get there.  
(handball coach)

She thus finds that if she communicates well with her players, there is very little need for her to use authority. If the players understand what she wants them to achieve, and what she expects from them, they are likely to do what is required of them.

The football manager also makes the point that he sometimes finds it necessary to combine his democratic and involving leadership style with the occasional use of authority. In his experience, followers can at times become overwhelmed by too much involvement, and he therefore finds that there are sometimes situations where his followers benefit from the use of authority. He explains:

It is an involving leadership style. What you can call a democratic leadership style. But I stress that it is situational leadership, which means that I exercise authoritarian leadership when necessary. And I have noticed that you sometimes need to be more authoritarian, because it promotes security. And it promotes progress. And people kind of expect it. That you don't take it too far in some situations. If you involve too much, it can make people tired. So, again, it's about being so close to the group that you sense, "now I need to..." And this is something I believe is based on experience. Through experience, I have realised that this is enough, now I need to exercise this type of leadership, now I need to exercise that type of leadership. But underneath it all are those basic values which I have mentioned. So when I am being authoritarian, it is because I believe it promotes development, over time. (football manager)

The football manager thus observes that although he believes it benefits his followers to be involved in decision-making processes, this is not always the case. In some situations, it can be nice not having to make a decision and not having to spend energy on taking part in discussions about different options as part of a large group with different views and perspectives. The football manager therefore finds that it is sometimes best for his followers if he makes decisions for them. In these situations, his use of authority can be the best way for him to support his followers' needs.

To sum up, the leaders in this study explain that although they believe in promoting freedom, involvement, and responsibility, they also believe in using authority when it is needed. Several leaders do however point out that they rarely find it necessary to be authoritarian as long as they communicate clearly with their followers about what they want to achieve and what they expect from their followers. This is further discussed as part of the next theme, "providing direction."

#### **4.3.6 Conclusion - promoting freedom, involvement, and responsibility**

This section has presented the five subthemes that make up the theme "promoting freedom, involvement, and responsibility." The subthemes describe

how the leaders in this study (1) see it as important to give their followers freedom to figure out how to do their jobs. Some of the leaders also speak about supporting their followers' independence. (2) The leaders also see it as important to involve their followers in decision-making processes. This can be seen as a way of letting their followers participate more actively in their organisation, and of giving them the opportunity to influence decisions that concern them and their work. Furthermore, (3) the leaders speak of how they support their followers' freedom of speech. This involves seeking to create a work environment where followers experience that they will not be sanctioned for voicing disagreement with management. (4) They also point out that the freedom and involvement they give their followers comes with responsibility. They expect their followers to work hard. Some of the leaders also suggest that the high degree of involvement and freedom can be more demanding for their followers because it means that they need to make more decisions. Finally, (5) the leaders do use authority in certain situations. However, several leaders point out that they rarely find this necessary as long as they establish good communication with their followers.

Together, these subthemes can be seen as examples of how the leaders in this study aim to support their followers' autonomy. According to self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci 2017), autonomy is one of the basic psychological needs, and the theory also posits that fulfilment of this needs helps promote intrinsic motivation. By supporting fulfilment of their followers' needs for autonomy, the leaders in this study can thus also be seen to promote their intrinsic motivation.

#### **4.4 Developing people and promoting mastery**

Another main theme that emerged during the analysis of the interviews was that the leaders believe in developing their followers and promoting mastery. Many of the leaders see developing their followers as one of their main responsibilities. They develop their followers by promoting mastery in their organisations and helping their followers build on their strengths. Some of the leaders also speak of how they help their followers develop personally in addition to contributing to their professional development, thereby adding value to their lives. In addition, the leaders describe how their development work sometimes overlaps with innovation because they are pushing the boundaries in their field.



This section presents five subthemes. The subthemes are: (1) developing people, (2) promoting mastery, (3) building on people’s strengths, (4) promoting personal development, and (5) promoting development that turns into innovation. Table 4.5 shows these subthemes with illustrative quotes.

**TABLE 4.5: Developing people and promoting mastery**

Subtheme	Illustrative quotes
Developing people	<p>“a modern leader is like a coach. This means that his main responsibility is to develop the people that are to perform with him.” (football coach)</p> <p>“In the long run, what matters is how hard you work to get better. And above all you need to compete with yourself and your own development.” (factory director)</p> <p>“Although competition in our sport is quite intense, we are not in a situation where we have many many players on a high level at our disposal. We need to develop people over time, and be patient in that process, to reach the international level we want to be at.” (handball coach)</p> <p>“it’s really about optimising what lies in each individual [and] bringing out the best. (...) we are developing people” (football manager)</p>
Promoting mastery	<p>“A positive view of people [involves] willingness to spend time on others, because it is time consuming. It also takes patience, which is also quite crucial. [Instead of giving up on people too soon,] let them gain a sense of security by experiencing mastery, developing, and finding their own way of doing things - if you do that, you will see completely different results from that person than if you just say after half a year “sorry, bring in the next person.”” (mayor)</p>
Building on people’s strengths	<p>“it’s about letting people do what they are good at” (handball coach)</p> <p>“[I help the players increase their internal] conversation on what I am good at, what [skills] should I use most, what am I doing when I am playing well, and getting a very strong picture of that, and at the same time sense that I need to get a little better at this and a little better at that. And have enough energy for it. Because it is my experience that when they have enough energy, it also helps them work on their weaknesses. Only focusing on mistakes turns more and more into, kind of, “it’s no use anyway.”” (handball coach)</p>
Promoting personal development	<p>“I want the players and leaders who work for me to develop. And to be proud of themselves and what they are doing, proud of the team.” (football manager)</p>
Promoting development that turns into innovation	<p>“I challenge each individual in my group to think about what my role will look like in two to five years.” (football manager)</p>

#### 4.4.1 Developing people

Many of the leaders in this study express that they see developing their followers as one of their most important responsibilities. In line with this, the plant director says:

the main responsibility of every leader, on every level, is first and foremost to develop other people. (plant director)

Another leader who shares this view is the factory director, who also draws parallels between his own role and coaching when it comes to developing followers. He states:

I see this very much as a team sport. Very much so. We depend so much on getting hold of, cultivating, and developing the absolute best professionals we can possibly get hold of. (...) I definitely believe in searching for people with the right type of high-level skills that we are in need of, in combination with working systematically to develop those skills further. (factory director)

The factory director is thus saying that although he sees it as important for the success of his organisation to recruit highly skilled workers, this needs to be combined with great efforts to help them develop further. He prioritises this development work highly, and his aim in this process is to get to a place where his employees find satisfaction and joy in the process of always looking for ways to improve.

The leaders speak of several ways in which they promote development in their followers, and this will be discussed in the following subthemes.

#### **4.4.2 Promoting mastery**

Many of the leaders express that they believe in promoting mastery among their followers. This means that there needs to be a match between the skills their followers have and the challenges they are given. One of the leaders who makes this point is the NGO secretary general, who states:

I think it is very important, *very* important (...) that people have job descriptions that they master. And that people get job descriptions that match the type of resources they actually have. (NGO secretary general)

The football coach also underlines the importance of promoting mastery in his followers. He explains that he believes every person has a need to experience mastery by conquering challenges that match their skills. He states:

I have learned that you need to create platforms of mastery. (...) That is, there needs to be agreement between the skills you have, and the challenge you get. (...) You need to have platforms of mastery to stand on. If you tear that away, even those who are all the way up there, they will lose their footing, and perform poorly. You see it in penalty shootouts at the World Cup, they usually score in other situations. But the tension level and situation [they face] there [is too difficult]. (football coach)

By using the expression “platforms of mastery,” the football coach indicates that experiencing mastery can provide people with a sense of security. In contrast, facing challenges that are too difficult likely leads to failure, which creates negative feelings and discourages people from seeking new challenges. He has experienced that performers at all levels have a need to master the challenges they are facing. In his interview, the football coach also explains that he deliberately uses mastery to promote intrinsic motivation in his followers. One reason for this is that when people conquer challenges that are at the edge of their abilities, it can be immensely satisfying. These positive experiences (flow experiences, as described by Csikszentmihalyi 1990), can spur his followers to seek even higher challenges, and thereby to contribute even more value to his team. In this way, promoting mastery helps him support intrinsic motivation, development, and high performance in his team.

Several of the other leaders in this study also speak of how they promote mastery among their followers. In line with flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi 1990), this involves giving followers challenges that are not too easy and not too difficult, but still challenging enough to stimulate their followers so that they have to make an effort and stretch themselves.

#### 4.4.3 Building on people's strengths

Many of the participants express that they believe in building on their followers' strengths. They assume that everybody is good at something, and that many people have hidden skills. They therefore make efforts to find out what their followers are good at, and help them find ways of using these skills as much as possible in their work. They also encourage their followers to reduce their focus on weaknesses and pay more attention to their strengths.

One of the leaders who speaks of building on people's strengths is the football coach. He explains that because he believes that every person is good at something, his job as a leader is to help followers figure out what their strengths are and give them the opportunity to use those qualities and build on them. He describes how he applies this principle whenever a new player enters his team. He states:

[when a new player enters the team] First of all, we say to him, *show us everything you can do*. Then we will use it. You don't need to say a word about the things you can't do, because we will soon see that anyway. Right, show us what you can do, and you will then get a role that fits your skills. It then becomes your responsibility, your duty, to develop that role. And to carry it out in harmony with the other roles. (football coach)

This is an example of how the football coach actively looks for the strengths in his followers. He also helps his followers use their strengths as much as possible, both by giving each player a role that best fits their skills, and also by teaching his players to familiarise themselves with each other's strengths so that they can play to these strengths whenever they can. In these ways, he maximises his followers' opportunities to use and develop their strengths further.

The factory director also believes in building on followers' strengths. Like several other leaders in this study, he makes the point that helping followers focus on their strengths can generate positive energy. He states:

We have to *deal* with things that have gone wrong. But in my experience, it is much better to talk about everything that's going well, and get people to realise that this is how we want things to be. People will then show initiative and take responsibility (...). It is far easier to build bridges over weaknesses by developing our strengths than maintaining a one-sided focus on the things that have gone wrong or aren't good enough. It doesn't make things better. (factory director)

The factory director thus finds that helping his followers direct their attention away from their weaknesses and towards their strengths, generates energy. He has experienced that focusing on their strengths encourages followers to show initiative and take responsibility.

In summary, this subtheme shows that the leaders in this study believe in and look for the strengths in their followers. They help their followers use and develop their strengths, and some of the leaders involve their followers in these efforts. In addition, some of the leaders speak of how they help their followers focus on their strengths rather than on their weaknesses, because they believe too much focus on weaknesses drains energy, whereas focusing on strengths generates energy.

#### **4.4.4 Promoting personal development**

Some of the leaders speak of people development in ways that go beyond contributing to their followers' professional growth. These leaders speak of how their development work can also teach followers lessons they may benefit from outside the work situation and that can help them grow on a personal level.

The football manager explains that he wants to help his followers develop both on a professional and on a personal level, and he believes that the high standards he sets for his players in their daily work helps them develop in both these respects. He states:

One thing is that we develop as a team, but we also develop in such a way that, one day, when these players are finished with football, they carry

with them a wonderful set of lessons on their further path in life. (football manager)

The above statement exemplifies that the football manager takes a more holistic approach to developing his followers. He is not only helping them learn how to perform their current role more effectively, but he also sees the value in developing his followers in ways that can benefit them personally in the longer term.

The handball coach also aims to develop her players both on a professional and on a personal level. She explains that she wants participation in her team to be a positive experience that adds value to the players' lives. She says:

On the one hand, our work in the national team is concerned with the fighting for medals. But elite sports should be worth more than just the fight for medals. It should contribute to personal development and give people an experience that they can bring with them to the other environments they are involved in as well. Whether that is at home or in future job situations. And in that respect, I see benefits of our holistic way of working. I also hear from former players how they have benefited from this in their jobs. (handball coach)

In the above statement, we see that, like the football manager, the handball coach takes a holistic approach to developing her followers. This means that she aims both to improve the performance of the team, but also to help her followers grow in ways that benefit them outside their role in the team. She receives feedback from her players that this is actually the case.

The factory director similarly observes that the development work they do in his organisation can lead to personal growth in his followers. He explains that contributing to the professional and personal growth in his employees is one of the most meaningful aspects of his job. He describes how this development process may turn inexperienced youngsters who join his firm into competent and confident professionals:

Seeing a slightly timid apprentice, (...) who might have been very close to dropping out of the entire school system, and who comes in *completely* dispirited, with his hat covering his eyes, and seeing how they, especially boys, in the age of 16-17, where they in the course of 3-4-5 years, when they are taken care of by positive people who really *teach* them a trade, and where they start experiencing mastery, and can go home to their friends or family and tell them about the new equipment they have helped install, or helped repair. It is amazing, it makes me happy. (factory director)

In summary, this subtheme highlights how some of the leaders in this study promote development in their followers that goes beyond professional growth. By promoting personal growth in their followers, leaders may help them experience benefits outside the work situation and provide them with lessons that they can bring with them later in life. In this way, the development work these leaders do can add lasting value to their followers' lives.

#### **4.4.5 Promoting development that turns into innovation**

Some of the leaders describe development work that overlaps with innovation. This type of development work involves finding solutions that nobody else has thought of before, and the leaders describe how they involve their followers in these efforts.

The handball coach provides one example of such an approach. She explains that she wants her team to be at the forefront of developments in handball, thereby contributing to push the sport further. She therefore involves her followers in looking for new ideas and new solutions. She states:

Handball is still a very *young* sport. So, being in charge of one of the best handball teams in the world, and having an ambition to be among the best in the world, you also have an ambition (...) how can we influence the development [in the sport]? Can we envision handball being played differently, so there are many processes going on there. That means that your thinking can't be limiting, there has to be an openness in your

thinking. Without forgetting that there are some qualities that need to be built on. (...) And what's exciting in all this is that you need to combine that kind of open, development-oriented thinking with ongoing basic learning. Because there are some things you need to master, right, and that you need to practise and drill. So it's about creating motivation and understanding for the need to do this because it gives you freedom further along the way. (handball coach)

The handball coach thus describes how she integrates the search for new ideas in her team's development work, and that she involves her players in these efforts. This can also be seen as a way of building a different kind of competence in the players, and a way of giving the players responsibility for the team's development. It requires that the handball coach creates an environment where the players feel that their ideas are truly welcome. If the players experience that this is the case, they may find it inspiring to be part of shaping the direction of the team in this way.

The football manager also describes development work that overlaps with innovation. He explains that he encourages his followers to visit external environments to pick up new ideas and present them to the team. The ideas are then discussed in the team and implemented if deemed useful:

In our whole support team, within their fields of expertise, they go out internationally to bring in new impulses, on best practice, whether it is visiting clubs or research articles and so forth, bring it in, we discuss it, and we take new steps. So, this development-oriented thinking is deeply rooted in our group. (football manager)

Sending followers out of the organisation to search for new ideas is a way of involving them in the development work, and it also gives each follower the opportunity to influence their own role and the direction the team is taking.

To sum up, promoting development that turns into innovation can be seen as development work that involves coming up with and testing new ideas. The leaders describe how they involve their followers in this work. This is also a way



for the followers to take responsibility for their own and their team's development, and this activity in itself can also help them learn new skills.

#### **4.5.6 Conclusion - developing people and promoting mastery**

This section has presented the five subthemes that make up the theme “developing people and promoting mastery.” The subthemes describe how the leaders in this study (1) see developing their followers as one of their most important responsibilities. (2) They also explain that they believe in promoting mastery among their followers by giving them challenges that match their skill level. Furthermore, (3) they help their followers build on their strengths by finding out what they are good at and using these skills as much as possible in their work. (4) Some of the leaders also describe how they promote personal development in their followers by taking a holistic approach to their development that also benefits them in their lives outside the work situation. Finally, (5) some of the leaders describe development work that overlaps with innovation. They do this by involving their followers in finding new solutions that help their field move forward.

Together, these subthemes can be seen as examples of how the leaders in this study aim to promote competence in their followers. As mentioned in the theory chapter, competence is posited by self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci 2017) as one of the basic psychological needs, fulfilment of which promotes people's intrinsic motivation. This suggests that the practices described in this theme can also be seen as the leaders' efforts to promote intrinsic motivation in their followers.

#### **4.5 Promoting connectedness and cooperation**

The leaders express various ways in which they promote connectedness and cooperation in their teams. This work includes building interpersonal ties among their followers by promoting a sense of community and belonging, and preventing fragmentation by making followers understand that they depend on each other. They also promote cooperation by making people feel like they are

part of the same team, and by sanctioning people who do not cooperate. Finally, they also make efforts to harmonise the interests of individual organisational members with the interests of the organisation.

This section presents five subthemes. The subthemes are: (1) promoting connectedness, (2) preventing fragmentation, (3) promoting cooperation, (4) sanctioning people who do not cooperate, and (5) harmonising interests. Table 4.6 shows these subthemes with illustrative quotes.

**TABLE 4.6: Promoting connectedness and cooperation**

Subtheme	Illustrative quotes
Promoting connectedness	<p>“good leaders establish good cultures (...) [where people are] good at sharing, supporting, and helping each other.” (NGO president)</p> <p>“you are part of the same team! We were many thousand employees, but we were in it together.” (mayor).</p> <p>“it’s also about being happy there [in the team] and wanting to belong there.” (handball coach)</p> <p>“[what I’ve enjoyed most as a leader] has been when we have accomplished something together. (...) I am not really very much of a “lonesome commander.” I think it is more fun to do things together.” (INGO president).</p>
Preventing fragmentation	<p>“in a complicated hospital (...) you need to realise that everybody depends on everybody. (...) and making people understand that, and that it is stated clearly, that we actually depend on each other. We have different professions, we have different status, but we depend on each other. That is something I believe has been a small success factor.” (hospital director)</p>
Promoting cooperation	<p>“I believe the most important thing you can do is to get people and it all to play together.” (factory director)</p> <p>“I also believe that leadership is about trying to accomplish interplay among competent individuals and teams. And I believe that <i>properly</i> organised, properly run, properly led, one plus one in an organisation will always be more than two. Badly led, one plus one will be less than two. (...) imagine if you have an organisation with 2500 [people], imagine if they are <i>reasonably</i> agreed on what they are going to do, and that they are more or less pulling in the same direction; imagine the force that lies in such an organisation! In contrast to having 2500 [people] who are pulling in different directions, which gets you nowhere.” (finance CEO)</p>
Sanctioning followers who do not cooperate	<p>“[I don’t want people who only think about furthering their own careers] I have had many who [think] knowledge is power, who keep their knowledge to themselves, because then they know that they are in a special situation. I reward much more people who I know have lots of knowledge, lots of ideas, and who share everything. <i>They</i> are the people I want. <i>They</i> bring the company forward.” (general)</p>
Harmonising interests	<p>“I believe it is very important [to respect that] people have different personal goals (...) for their jobs. (...) So it is <i>very</i> important to take seriously people’s different individual motivations. And there I believe in going back and trying to understand: what is your goal for your work? What is it you are trying to accomplish? What is important to you?” (finance CEO)</p>

#### 4.5.1 Promoting connectedness

The leaders in this study emphasise the importance of promoting connectedness and interpersonal ties among their followers. They speak of building a sense of community and belonging, and of creating work environments where their followers care about each other.

In line with this, the football coach explains that he sees it as his responsibility to build social ties among his followers. This involves teaching his followers that they need to adjust their behaviours to each other and show consideration. He states:

those *social* skills, those relations, (...) you have to make sure to build them (...) [I tell my followers:] you have to, when you are with others, you have to *change* your behaviour. You don't have to change personality, but you need to *shape* your role [to fit in] with the roles of others. (...) [I also teach my followers the following rule,] and note the order: you are individually collectively responsible for creating a positive working environment, which promotes development. (football coach)

The above statement by the football coach suggests that he helps his followers build social ties and team spirit by teaching them how they should behave towards each other. In addition, he also provides them with rules that hold each member of his team accountable for coming into work with a positive attitude and for contributing a good working environment.

The general also places great importance on promoting connectedness among followers, and emphasises the role of the working environment in doing so. He sees connectedness as particularly important for soldiers, who need to be willing to go to great lengths for each other. He therefore believes that the military needs to invest heavily in building up good working environments for its soldiers. These working environments are characterised by strong ties of loyalty and trust among the soldiers. He explains:

Soldiers have never gone out to die for their country even though that is what is said. You die for your comrades. And just that means that you *have to* trust them, you *have to*. And those environments are amazing – people are shocked when they come in. Because they simply cannot believe it. But they have been built up very deliberately. After a lot of learning. And that is how it is. You have to believe in, you have to trust the guy at your side! If you don't trust him, you can die. So, the military is certainly one of the places where there is most room for the positive human being. I think they work hardest on it, too. Quite simply. (general)

The general's statement suggests that he sees promoting connectedness among his followers as a high priority, and that it requires investment of extensive thought and effort. He has experienced that these investments can result in high-quality social ties that can serve as a strong motivator for his soldiers, and that this motivation indeed can be so strong that they are willing to die for each other.

Of course, the military is an extreme case. In most organisations, organisational members do not need to risk their lives for each other. Nevertheless, the general's emphasis on building social ties among followers has relevance across organisational contexts. Leaders who invest in building loyalty, commitment, and support among their followers are likely to foster connections that can in themselves serve as strong motivators for organisational members to help each other and do their best. This can be useful for any kind of organisation.

Together, the findings suggest that the leaders in this study see it as important to promote connectedness in their followers. They therefore invest in building working environments that are characterised by team spirit, togetherness, a sense of belonging, and mutual support.

#### **4.5.2 Preventing fragmentation**

Connectedness can also be promoted by preventing fragmentation. Some of the leaders speak of how they prevent fragmentation in their organisations by bringing different groups in their organisation closer together, making their

followers understand that they depend on each other, and preventing alliances from forming.

The mayor is one of the leaders who is concerned with preventing fragmentation in his organisation. He explains that he dislikes fragmentation in the form of factions and alliances because he believes it leads to conflicts. He states that he seeks to prevent this by encouraging his followers to discuss their issues out in the open rather than behind closed doors. He states:

I really hate when people try to speak with others, to make alliances. It is against every...making alliances is good, but making them with the intention of making a small clique, you are kind of making a group, you are making conflicts, or you are making a fraction. I don't like that. In such cases I am crystal clear. When people are sitting in a meeting room, then you can say what's on your mind. Everybody can raise whatever issue they wish, openly, freely, you discuss anything. But that is where it happens. Not before and not after. When the meeting starts, it starts. There hasn't been any pre-meeting anywhere. And when it finishes, it finishes.  
(mayor)

It is perhaps surprising that the mayor, as a politician, speaks about his dislike of factions and alliances. However, his role as a mayor may mean that he would still like the group of politicians in his city council to come together to make joint decisions whenever possible. Elsewhere in his interview, he speaks of how he wants the politicians to feel like they are part of the same team. By promoting open decision-making processes where everyone has a chance to take part in the discussion and to be heard, he is counteracting those who want to make decisions behind closed doors. It is unlikely that he is able to completely remove such secret dealings among the politicians in his city, but by making efforts to include everyone, he could significantly reduce these hidden processes which contribute to fragmentation among his followers.

The hospital director also discusses efforts to prevent fragmentation in his organisation. He describes how the hospital consists of many different professional groups that used to be organised in separate teams with leaders from their own profession. This caused poor interdisciplinary cooperation. He sought

to remedy this problem by introducing interdisciplinary teams with one common leader, which initially was met with fierce resistance. He states:

We had agencies here who looked at this, and we looked at these “pillars in the desert” that we were struggling with. We said that we had to do something to break it down; we need better cooperation. And that’s when the idea of interdisciplinary leadership teams came up, with *one* leader. With one leader, and that’s when we had the “war in white,” where everybody went to the barricades and said, “it’s absolutely awful,” and the doctors said, “it’s unacceptable for doctors to be led by anybody but doctors,” and the nurses were furious (...) and so on. That’s a fight I believe we have managed to take, and now there is hardly any talk when a nurse is put in charge of the doctors or a bioengineer or what it may be. It has worn off. (hospital director)

The hospital director describes how his efforts to reduce fragmentation were initially met with fierce resistance, but that he carried them out anyway. He found that his followers eventually accepted that people from different professional groups were placed together in joint teams with one common leader. It is likely that bringing them together in this way has helped them communicate and understand each other better, as well as reducing the likelihood of conflicts.

To sum up, the leaders in this study describe how they engage in efforts to prevent fragmentation in their organisations, which can be a cause of conflict and division. Their efforts to prevent fragmentation can therefore be seen as a way of protecting connectedness among their followers.

### **4.5.3 Promoting cooperation**

The leaders see promoting cooperation among their followers as one of their most important responsibilities. This involves making their followers work together and pull in the same direction.

Some of the leaders emphasise that promoting cooperation involves making diverse groups of followers feel like they are part of the same team and work together. The NGO president states:

it is enormously motivating to see that you can get people of different ethnicities, ages and political views to work as part of the same team, and bring them together so that we solve problems *together*. (NGO president)

The football coach also sees it as important to promote cooperation among his followers. He explains that this involves getting his followers to realise that it pays to invest in each other. He states:

It's important that you go out on the field to be as good as possible yourself, but it is far more important that you go out on the field to make your teammates, that is, your *colleagues*, good. Because that is the only way you yourself will be best. (...) you need to get the group of people to experience that it *pays* to invest in each other. (...) You bring the group of people from *having to* [do the same thing], to *wanting* to do the same thing. And there is an essential difference. (football coach)

In the above statement, the football coach says that he aims to move his followers from “having to” cooperate to “wanting to cooperate.” He believes that people want to cooperate when they are convinced that it pays to do so. His method to achieve this is to give his followers a set of rules that they need to follow, which specify how they need to treat each other, help each other, play to each other's strengths, share their knowledge, and learn from each other. This in a way forces them to cooperate, and the aim is that this will help them experience first-hand that they achieve better results both together and as individuals by cooperating in this way. He then hopes that these positive experiences will make them *want* to cooperate, rather than feeling that they are forced to do so.

To summarise, the leaders express that they see it as an important responsibility to promote cooperation among their followers. They want their followers to support each other, share their knowledge, and play to each other's strengths. The next section will discuss how some of the leaders also promote cooperation by sanctioning followers who do not cooperate.

#### 4.5.4 Sanctioning followers who do not cooperate

Some of the leaders speak about how they also promote cooperation by sanctioning followers who do not cooperate. Such sanctioning can include giving negative feedback, withholding promotions, denying players time on the field, or firing people. By sanctioning uncooperative behaviours, the leaders are also making sure that it pays for followers to cooperate.

The general is one of the leaders who speaks about how he sanctions uncooperative behaviours among his followers. He explains that he only wants followers who contribute to the team, and that he therefore rewards cooperative behaviours and sanctions uncooperative behaviours. He says:

About people who [only think of furthering] their own careers, I say that *I* would rather have employees who think about the whole, and perhaps do not deliver 110%, than somebody who delivers great results, but who only thinks about themselves. I don't *want* that person. (...) because it is far more damaging. (general)

By rewarding those who share their knowledge with their colleagues, the general helps ensure that this kind of behaviour pays for his followers. It is likely that rewarding such behaviours encourages his followers to share more of their knowledge, which is likely to help them cooperate better. In addition, it is likely to contribute to a more pleasant work environment, because it also involves encouraging his followers to treat each other decently and to support each other.

The general's practice of rewarding those who share knowledge and sanctioning those who keep knowledge to themselves, could also influence those who are inclined to keep knowledge to themselves. They could decide to change their behaviour and become more cooperative, or they could decide that they do not fit in, and therefore choose to leave the team.

The factory director also speaks of how he sanctions followers who do not cooperate. He explains that he follows up anyone who does not contribute with their best efforts to the team:



People who come in here, and seem to think, “here I have found a secure and easy workplace in a large, safe, and somewhat complex environment; here I can do my own thing, deal with my own life,” they will have no peace. This is a competition, it is a team sport, or like a football pitch; everybody understands that it’s impossible if two people withdraw and don’t bother to contribute unless when they want to. They need to participate and make an effort. (factory director)

The factory director’s company faces fierce international competition, and he compares his followers with a football team to underline the competitive environment they are facing. For a football team to succeed, the team members must work well together, and each person must do their best. He compares himself to a football coach who follows up team members who are underperforming and not doing their share. By using the phrase “they will have no peace,” about team members who do not do their best, he indicates that he can make their situation uncomfortable by sanctioning them, and that it would therefore pay for them to increase their efforts to contribute to their team.

Other leaders in this study also speak about followers who do not cooperate. A separate theme discussed in this chapter is theme 7, “disciplining – dealing with suboptimal behaviours,” and several of the issues mentioned there also relate to followers who do not cooperate.

#### **4.5.5 Harmonising interests**

Another way in which the leaders in this study speak of promoting cooperation is by harmonising interests. This includes finding ways of creating a balance between the personal goals of the employees and the goals of the organisation. It also involves finding ways of harmonising the many different goals of the individual followers in the organisation so that they can find ways of working towards common goals.

The finance CEO speaks of how he believes that the leader should seek to create a balance between the personal goals of the employees and the goals of the

organisation. This involves looking for ways to allow the individuals in the organisation to pursue their personal goals while at the same time working towards fulfilling the goals of the organisation. He says:

That positive motivation, that interplay between individuals who have ambitions and goals for themselves, both personally and professionally, and the organisation, which has ambitions and goals for itself. That is what I think is one of the keys to good leadership. (finance CEO)

To achieve this, he believes the leader needs to respect that employees have different goals and motivations in their jobs, and must therefore make an effort to understand what they are trying to achieve and what is important to them in their work. However, he points out that while he believes it is important that he as a leader respects the goals of the employees, he also expects them to respect the goals of the organisation and make an effort to understand them. As their leader, he can help them understand where the organisation is headed, what is expected of them, and how the goals of the organisation are relevant to them. He then expects them to do their best to contribute to achieving these goals.

Another leader who speaks about harmonising interests in his organisation is the mayor. He speaks of this topic in a different way - by getting followers with different individual goals to agree on common goals. As a mayor, he worked to build large majorities among the politicians in the city council, and he did this by seeking solutions that as many politicians as possible could support. He states:

I believe you need to have common goals [in politics]. You need to build a fundament, a platform, and then you need to manoeuvre according to that. If I were to lead a municipality where there was a 34 against 33 majority, where 34 agreed on the way ahead and the fundament, and the others sat there and disagreed, we would never be able to manoeuvre in the right direction. We had to build a common platform with as many as possible, and we managed to do that. (...) You figure it out together. And that gives you that feelgood-atmosphere. Which makes it all much easier (mayor)

The mayor describes how creating large majorities in his city council helped create a “feelgood-atmosphere.” This can be seen as reflecting that both the

majority and the minority can be satisfied with solutions where they each make adjustments for each other's needs. He also says that this made "it all much easier." This suggests that harmonising interests in this way can help people "come on board" and pull together in the same direction towards common goals. In line with this, his city was able to carry out a range of large projects that would otherwise have been impossible. This is also related to creating enthusiasm around exciting visionary goals, which is discussed as a separate subtheme under theme 6, "providing direction."

To sum up, this subtheme concerns how some of the leaders promote cooperation in their organisations by harmonising interests. They do so both by looking for ways to let followers combine the pursuit of their personal goals with working to achieve the goals of the organisation, and by finding ways in which organisational members with different interests can work together towards common goals.

#### **4.5.6 Conclusion - promoting connectedness and cooperation**

This section has presented the five subthemes that make up the theme "promoting connectedness and cooperation." The subthemes describe how the leaders in this study (1) promote connectedness by building interpersonal ties, a sense of belonging, and team spirit among their followers. (2) They also prevent fragmentation by preventing alliances from forming and by making their followers understand that they depend on each other. Furthermore, (3) they promote cooperation by making their followers feel like they are part of the same team, support each other, and pull in the same direction. (4) They also sanction followers who are uncooperative. This involves making sure it pays for their followers to cooperate by rewarding cooperative behaviours and sanctioning uncooperative behaviours. Finally, (5) they also promote cooperation by seeking to harmonise interests. This involves seeking to find ways in which individuals in the organisation can work towards their own goals while also working towards the goals of the organisation. It also involves getting followers with different interests to agree to work towards common goals.

Together, these subthemes can be seen as examples of how the leaders in this study aim to promote relatedness in their followers. Relatedness is posited as one of the basic psychological needs by self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci 2017). Self-determination theory posits that fulfilment of the basic psychological needs promotes intrinsic motivation. This suggests that the practices described by the leaders in this theme can also be seen as efforts to promote intrinsic motivation in their followers.

#### **4.6 Providing direction**

The leaders speak of the importance of providing their followers with direction. This includes communicating clear goals so that everybody in the organisation understand what they want to achieve, as well as communicating clear expectations so that followers know what is expected of them. They also speak of the importance of setting boundaries for their followers so that they understand what their areas of responsibility are, and which behaviours are acceptable and unacceptable in the organisation. The leaders also influence their followers by using values to guide behaviour and by promoting positive energy. Finally, the leaders speak of the need to be close to the followers and to know what is going on in the organisation.

This section presents seven subthemes. The subthemes are: (1) providing a clear direction, (2) setting energising goals, (3) communicating clear expectations, (4) providing boundaries, (5) using values to guide behaviour, (6) promoting positive energy, and (7) being in touch with the followers. Table 4.7 shows these subthemes with illustrative quotes.

**TABLE 4.7: Providing direction**

Subtheme	Illustrative quotes
Providing a clear direction	<p>“I believe you need to want something. You need to have some kind of vision for the future. (...) I believe that to achieve your vision, you sometimes have to take many small steps in the right direction, and always keep sight of where we are going.” (hospital director)</p> <p>“[the leader needs to provide] clear goals [and a] clear direction” (finance CEO)</p> <p>“you need to be quite <i>clear</i>. That is, you need to be quite clear on where you want to go. (...) And I said it every time. Everybody knew that was where we were going.” (general)</p>
Setting energising goals	<p>“a visionary idea. You need to have some of those, you need to have some ideas like that, we will really show them that we can make it happen!” (hospital director)</p> <p>“clear goals, a clear direction, and the positive stimulus that lies in setting high goals, these are some of the driving forces in my way of leading” (finance CEO)</p> <p>“I sense such a positive energy in the organisation, because people have a common goal” (NGO secretary general)</p>
Communicating clear expectations	<p>“I believe it is healthy, and I like being met with high expectations, and I don’t have a problem with setting high standards for my employees. But it has to be done in a proper dialogue, and it has to be done in a way which makes the individual themselves find pleasure in it, and, at least that’s the ultimate goal, to drive themselves forward. Because that in itself is a pleasure. That is what I believe in.” (factory director)</p> <p>“An important principle for me, when it comes to equal worth (...) If you think about it, nobody truly respects anybody if they do not <i>also</i> have expectations of them. Because if you only look at somebody as a client or as somebody to be pitied, and are not willing to have any expectations of them, (...) then you are not looking at the other person as an equal.” (NGO president)</p> <p>“The better processes you have underneath, the more secure the employees will be in relation to knowing what is expected of them. And that is what I am concerned with; being <i>predictable</i>. I am predictable in what I expect from each individual.” (football manager)</p>
Providing boundaries	<p>“In our business, people have to be given large authorities. People are authorised to make deals for hundreds of millions, maybe billions, in short periods of time. (...) But I believe it is very important, then, that we build a framework around those people, so that we don’t combine this trust with too much temptation. So it is out of care that we set these boundaries. Both for the organisation and for the individual.” (finance CEO)</p>
Using values to guide behaviour	<p>“value statements that cannot be recognised in practice are actually completely valueless.” (football coach)</p> <p>“[the values set standards for] how we behave. What I call a training culture. And what do I mean by training culture? It means that we come to work every day because we want to get a little better.” (football manager)</p> <p>“[We developed] a platform which we called “this is how we do things in [company name].” (...) that is where your values meet the company’s values, and it is also within these boundaries that each employee acts, makes decisions, and performs on behalf of the company.” (finance CEO)</p>
Promoting positive energy	<p>“you need to educate people to <i>pay attention to what you can do something about</i>. (...) If you don’t focus on that, (...) you lose focus on your own development.” (football coach)</p> <p>“Keep up the mood, even when it looks...or I would rather say, <i>especially</i> when things are looking a little difficult. I know it means a lot to myself, when times are tough, and I register on <i>my</i> boss that [he or she] starts to look a little disheartened.</p>

	<p>It makes me think <i>oops</i>, it worries me. And I assume that's how it works at most levels. So, try to engage and inspire" (factory director)</p> <p>"People have to be seen. It's really important that leaders see each individual employee. (...) as a leader, you need to actually see and greet the employees, and be cheerful. (...) And I say that the most important thing a leader can do at the hospital, is walk around, smile, and greet everyone, (...) I think that has something to do with...it makes them feel seen. "Wow, he said hello to me today." And I think that's really important." (hospital director)</p> <p>"Praise is important. You need to praise people. (...) I think praise breeds more praise, and it generates positive work enjoyment. And it does something to people to receive praise (...) the more you praise, the more people will want to work with you." (hospital director)</p>
Being in touch with the followers	<p>"you have to go out [into the organisation], you have to be there" (general)</p> <p>"I am around greeting and seeing them [the people in the organisation] all the time." (NGO president)</p> <p>"I speak with everybody, and I speak a lot with everybody" (mayor)</p> <p><i>"daring</i> to be in the process. In my experience, the more insecure leaders are, the more they remove themselves from the process. They sit in those gilded towers and look down at what's happening, and then they soon lose control." (football coach).</p>

#### 4.6.1 Providing a clear direction

The leaders speak of the importance of having clear goals for what they want to achieve. They also emphasise the importance of communicating these goals clearly to their followers so that everybody in the organisation understands where the leader wants them to go. In line with this, the mayor states:

You must *want* something. You need to know the direction, you need to know where you are going, and lead for that purpose. (...) A leader needs to be a *strategist*. (...) So, having a goal and steering the whole group in that direction. (mayor)

In the above statement, the mayor underlines the importance of "wanting" something. This could mean that he finds it easier to communicate his vision clearly to his followers if he himself is clear about what he wants. Another possible reason for placing such significance on wanting something as a leader could be that it helps him be more convincing towards his followers. If he himself is strongly motivated by the goal he has set, he is likely to communicate with enthusiasm and conviction, which is likely to pass on to his followers. This issue is connected with the next subtheme, "setting energising goals."

The mayor also makes the point that he uses the goal to steer “the whole group in the same direction.” Clearly communicating a goal that everybody in the organisation can work towards, helps people have a common understanding of what they are aiming to achieve. This makes it easier to pull in the same direction, and thereby cooperate better. It can also help avoid disagreements, because people are less likely to have different understandings of what is expected of them.

The leaders also underline the importance of being clear (“tydelig”) with their followers. This involves making sure that the followers understand where they are headed and what is expected of them. The finance CEO states:

I simply believe it’s important to communicate openly, honestly and clearly. The organisation *expects* its leaders to take the lead, make clear decisions and to point out a clear direction. And to let people know what is expected of [them]. (finance CEO)

The Norwegian word “tydelig” also has a further meaning. In addition to meaning “clear,” it can also mean “being firm.” This meaning of the word adds a subtle extra force to the leaders’ words when they speak of the importance of communicating clearly to their followers where they want them to go and what they expect from them. In my interpretation, it could also imply that there could be consequences for followers if they deviate too far from what the leaders expect from them. The leaders’ views on the need for consequences will be discussed as part of theme 7, “disciplining.”

To sum up, the leaders see it as important to have a goal for what they want to achieve, and to communicate this clearly to their followers. They also emphasise the importance of making sure that everybody in the organisation understands what they want to achieve, so that they have a common understanding. This makes it easier to steer the group in the same direction.

#### 4.6.2 Setting energising goals

Many of the leaders also describe how their goalsetting has an energising effect on their organisations. These leaders set ambitious and visionary goals that boost motivation and enthusiasm among their followers. They describe how this energising effect comes from the attractiveness of the goals and from the forward motion they create.

One example is provided by the mayor. He explains that he has used this strategy many times to accomplish things for his city together with his employees and the population, such as establishing new cultural and educational institutions. He describes how setting visionary goals can excite people and draw them in:

It makes them say “yes! We want to take part in this!” And that’s how you trigger it. It’s kind of about what lies there ahead of you. (...) I have been a part of this many times. Lifting up, setting the goals, and then you speed up, and then you make it happen. [name of newspaper] once wrote in their editorial: “nothing is impossible in [name of city]!” Yes, anything is possible, it’s absolutely true! Anything is possible! It really is!” (...) “*Sometimes*, when you set the goal, it might happen [a year later than planned]. Right, but it doesn’t *matter* very much, because you get that enormous motion. (mayor)

The mayor’s statement describes how he has taken part in setting high, attractive goals that have excited his followers. Several of the other leaders also tell of such ambitious and attractive goals that have created enthusiasm in their followers. Examples of such goals include aiming to win championships, establishing a hospital with all major specialities, and making a factory “best in the world” at what they do. All these goals have in common that they are based on a strong optimism about the followers and what they can achieve together. It is likely that the enthusiasm with which the leaders have communicated these optimistic goals to their followers has been contagious, and thereby has contributed to their followers’ excitement. The leaders also describe how followers who are enthusiastic about such energising goals are willing to invest great efforts into achieving them.



### 4.6.3 Communicating clear expectations

The leaders speak of the importance of communicating clear expectations to their followers. This includes explaining to their followers what they want them to do, and setting standards for their performance.

The finance CEO is one of the leaders who speaks about the importance of explaining clearly to his followers what he expects of them. He states:

clarify our objectives (...) make it clear so that each individual has clear objectives for their work (...) So that I as an employee know very well what is expected of me. What is a good job? And what is a bad job. I believe this helps people feel secure and do their best. (finance CEO)

The finance CEO believes that breaking down the company's objectives in ways that make them relevant for each employee helps them understand concretely what is expected of them. Having specific targets for their work can not only provide followers with a sense of security because they understand what they need to do, but it can also be motivating because it helps them understand how their input helps the organisation achieve its targets.

The factory director also emphasises the importance of communicating clear expectations to his followers, and speaks of this in the sense of setting standards for their performance. He says:

I don't believe that having to *make an effort* to achieve something is bad for us. On the contrary, I believe we are built to stretch ourselves. We want to reach further; we want to achieve something more, something better. I often see more discontent among employees in groupings that are in a situation where for some reason they feel that they are not participating or contributing, or being noticed, or where nobody seems to have any expectations of them, or are interested in what they are doing. In such situations, job satisfaction tends to decrease and sick absence tends to increase. (...) From an amateur's point of view, it looks to me like people who have work that is challenging, exciting, and demanding, and which

gives something back in terms of recognition, a sense of mastery, and learning, it seems to me that they seem to be happier, have less sick absence, and fewer problems overall. (factory director)

The factory director thus makes the point that he believes it is good for people to be met with clear expectations, because it signals to them that the leader takes an interest in what they are doing, and because it forces them to challenge themselves. He believes that high expectations can help people push themselves to do their best and to develop further, and that this is highly satisfying and motivating for his followers. In contrast, he suggests that not being met with any expectations in the workplace can be experienced as unsatisfying and frustrating. He also believes that leaders who do not meet their followers with clear expectations signal to them that they are not interested in them or their work, and that this can undermine their followers' motivation.

To sum up, the leaders see it as important to provide their followers with clear expectations. They do so by communicating to their followers what they expect them to do, and by setting standards for their performance. This helps the followers understand what they each need to do to help the organisation reach its goals, and it also challenges the followers to do their best in these efforts.

#### **4.6.4 Providing boundaries**

The leaders speak of the need to set boundaries for their followers. This includes setting boundaries in the sense of demarcating people's areas of responsibility, and in the sense of drawing a line between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours in the organisation.

The general speaks of setting boundaries for his followers in the sense of clearly defining their areas of responsibility. He explains that the high degree of freedom he gives his followers needs to be combined with a good understanding of what the limits of this freedom are. Within these boundaries, his followers have the authority to act and make decisions on their own. He states:

[I tell all my leaders:] if you are a leader, you need to find the box that is yours. That is, what is your area of responsibility. That is something you need to be very aware of. **This** is my area. And within that area, you don't need to ask about anything. As long as you know the direction we are heading in, and you have been given responsibility within this area, you don't need to ask anyone. Nothing! Just do it! If you are getting closer to the edge, and are wondering if you are crossing it, then you can ask. But as long as you stay inside, **just do it!** (...) But you do have to define these boundaries very clearly. (general)

The general is thus saying that providing boundaries for his followers is a way of defining their areas of responsibility. This suggests that setting boundaries can be seen as a prerequisite for the high degree of freedom and authority he delegates to his followers. He also reiterates the importance of communicating a clear direction to his followers, so that everybody in his organisation uses the freedom they have been given to work towards the goal he wants them to achieve.

The finance CEO speaks of boundaries in the sense of setting up rules for his followers about what they are allowed to do and what they are not allowed to do. He states:

It is our responsibility as management to define **very** clear boundaries for what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. There should be **no doubt** about those boundaries. And they shouldn't just be set in the sense that they are there, but people need to **know** them, **understand** them, accept them, and feel a sense of ownership of them. That is to say, [we need to] really **work** on the setting of boundaries. (finance CEO)

Because many jobs in the finance CEO's organisation involve large sums of money, his organisation is an example of a context where it is particularly important to set out boundaries for acceptable and unacceptable conduct. This can help explain why he underlines that they work hard to ensure that everybody in his organisation knows and understands the rules. Elsewhere in the interview, he speaks of how there needs to be consequences for those who break the rules. Ensuring that everybody in the organisation is familiar with the rules and that there will be consequences for breaking them, reduces the likelihood that

they will break the rules, and thereby misuse the authority and freedom they have been given in their jobs.

In summary, part of providing direction for their followers involves setting boundaries for their conduct. The leaders speak of setting boundaries in the sense of demarcating their followers' areas of responsibility. They also speak of setting boundaries in the sense of which behaviours are acceptable and which behaviours are unacceptable in the organisation. By communicating these boundaries clearly to their followers, the leaders reduce the chance of misunderstandings and oversteps. Communicating clearly about these boundaries also makes it reasonable to sanction followers who overstep them. This is further discussed as part of theme 7, "disciplining."

#### **4.6.5 Using values to guide behaviour**

Several of the leaders in this study use values to guide the behaviour of their followers. The leaders explain that they use values as a way of setting standards for their followers, and the values act as a set of flexible rules or boundaries for which behaviours are acceptable in the organisation and which are not. This can be seen as a way of influencing followers that is non-controlling, and therefore conducive to giving followers freedom and responsibility.

Many of the leaders emphasise the importance of translating values into practice, and to live by these values in their daily work. They therefore express that they prioritise their work on values and spend a considerable amount of time on working with their followers to implement the organisational values in their organisations. For example, the handball coach states:

if you have *jointly* lifted up a set of values that you want to respect and stand for (...) if you merely have some group work and some involvement, and then *forget* about it afterwards, then to me it's just a party game. (handball coach)

She therefore explains that she involves her followers by holding sessions where they decide what the organisational values mean to them, and how these values

should concretely guide their work. The players are then responsible for coaching each other to ensure that the values are implemented in their team. Involving followers in this way gives them an opportunity to reflect on and influence how they want things to be in their organisation and what is most important to them in their work. It also promotes ownership and obligation to the organisational values.

The football manager also explains that he spends a considerable amount of time on implementing organisational values in his team. He involves his players in an annual process where they decide on a set of rules for how to treat each other and the public, based on the organisation's values. He states:

our core values are deeply rooted in the club, (...) and we spend time on implementing them in the group through what we call team rules. That is, how we should behave on and off the field (...) [The involvement] is so deeply rooted here that you cannot on the one hand take part in deciding something, and then afterwards say, "no, I don't want this." (football manager)

By holding an annual process where the players have to agree on a set of rules that guide their behaviour, he makes sure that everybody in his team is familiar with the rules. This process also gives his players the opportunity to influence the rules, and to fight for their views in discussions with their colleagues. Having this kind of democratic process also means that not every suggestion is accepted, but it does nevertheless create obligation because they have agreed on the rules together as a team.

Using values to guide behaviour can be seen as a non-controlling way of providing direction to their followers. The leaders use the values as a set of flexible rules that guide their followers' behaviour in a wide range of areas. The leaders also point out that values that are not translated into practice are valueless. They therefore invest time and effort in implementing and following up the values in their daily work.

#### 4.6.6 Promoting positive energy

The leaders in this study also influence their followers by promoting positive energy. They do this by helping their followers pay more attention to the things that are going well, and to the things it is possible to do something about. They also promote positive energy through the way they behave towards their followers, including cultivating a good mood, seeing their followers and making them feel valued, and by giving them frequent praise.

Several leaders speak of how they help their followers pay more attention to their positive experiences. For example, the handball coach explains that she trains the members of her team to cultivate their sources of joy, their accomplishments, and their good experiences. She says:

one key is to focus on the things that are going well. (...) so we have spent some time in the group [on] (...) what makes you happy, how can we make sure that it is emphasised? That again has to do with taking pleasure in our big and small accomplishments, and in the things that are going well (...) sharing more of our good experiences is one key in this.  
(handball coach)

She believes that when people learn to register more of their positive experiences, it can help them develop more positive feelings and attitudes over time. In contrast, she believes people often tend to pay too much attention to their shortcomings and negative experiences, and this drains energy and leads to negative feelings and attitudes.

Relatedly, some of the leaders also speak of another way they help their followers direct their attention away from negative sources of energy. This involves teaching them to focus on the things they can do something about, and not on the things they cannot do something about. This is exemplified by the factory director, who states:

You cannot do anything about what the others are doing, but you can do something about what you are doing. (factory director)

By this, he means that when people pay too much attention to what their competitors are doing, which they have no influence over, they lose focus on what they *can* do something about, namely their own development.

In addition to promoting positive energy in their organisations by helping their followers pay more attention to positive aspects of their existence, some of the leaders also speak of how they themselves engage in behaviours that can promote positive energy in their followers. These behaviours include keeping up a good mood, making their followers feel seen and valued, and giving their followers frequent praise.

One example of such a behaviour is the leader's own mood. For example, the factory director explains that he believes his own mood can affect his followers' spirits either positively or negatively. He is therefore conscious of keeping up his own mood, and uses it to encourage and motivate his followers. Another example is provided by the hospital director. He believes it lifts his followers' spirits when he walks around the hospital and smiles, greets, and talks with them, because it demonstrates to them that he sees and values them. A further way the leaders engage in behaviours aimed at spreading positive energy to their followers is by giving them praise. Several leaders underline the importance of giving their followers frequent praise because it offers them encouragement, gives them recognition, and makes work more enjoyable.

To sum up, the leaders in this study speak of how they seek to influence their followers by promoting positive energy. They do this by helping their followers focus on positive aspects of their existence, and by engaging in behaviours that evoke positive feelings in their followers. These efforts can help increase their followers' positive feelings and reduce their negative feelings, which can give them more energy to invest in their work.

#### **4.6.7 Being in touch with the followers**

Many of the leaders in this study emphasise the importance of being in touch with the people and processes they are leading. They see it as crucial because it

helps them understand what is going on in their organisations. It also helps them understand their followers' needs, which makes them better able to provide them with direction.

One of the leaders who emphasises the importance of being in touch with his followers is the football manager, who states:

it's about being so close to the group that you sense [what the group needs]. (football manager)

His statement implies that he sees it as important to lead in a way that supports his followers' needs. Such an intention may seem obvious. However, organisational leaders have many competing interests that they need to balance, and the needs of their employees can easily be forgotten among these.

When speaking of the importance they place on being in touch with their organisation and the people in it, some of the leaders point out that some leaders appear not to *want* to be in touch with their followers. They see this as wrong, and believe it is harmful to keep too much distance from what is happening in their organisation and the people in it. The hospital director is one of the leaders who holds this view. He says:

You need to see reality. (...) Some leaders say, "no, we don't want to show off. We want to sit in our office and kind of manage from there." That's **completely** wrong. Some are anxious about seeing reality, and some are afraid of sort of talking too much with the employees and listening to them. (hospital director)

Because he sees it as so important to be in touch with his organisation and the people in it, he regularly walks around in the hospital to talk with and listen to his followers. This helps him understand what is going on in his organisation and what his employees need. Doing so can help him make better decisions and correct mistakes if he sees that his decisions have unintended consequences.

In summary, many of the leaders in this study speak of the importance they place on being in touch with their followers. This gives them a better understanding of



the people they are leading, their situation, and what their needs are. It is also a way of seeing how their decisions are impacting the organisation and the people in it. This can help the leaders make better decisions, and thus provide their followers with better direction.

#### **4.6.8 Conclusion - providing direction**

This section has presented the seven subthemes that make up the theme “providing direction.” The subthemes describe how the leaders in this study. (1) provide their followers with a clear direction. This includes having goals for what they want to achieve, and communicating these goals clearly to their followers so that everybody in the organisation understands them. (2) the leaders also describe how setting goals can have an energising effect on their followers. They describe how this energising effect comes from the attractiveness of the goals and the forward motion the goals create. In addition, (3) the leaders also communicate clear expectations to their followers. This includes explaining to their followers what they want them to do, as well as setting standards for their performance. Moreover, (4) the leaders also provide boundaries for their followers. They do so both in the sense of defining people’s areas of responsibility, and in the sense of drawing a line between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours in the organisation. (5) The leaders also use values to guide the behaviour of their followers. They speak of how they use values as a way of setting standards for their followers, and as a set of flexible rules that can regulate their followers’ conduct in different areas. (6) The leaders also influence their followers by promoting positive energy. They do this by helping their followers pay more attention to their positive experiences. The leaders also engage in behaviours that aim to bring out positive feelings in their followers. Finally, (7) the leaders speak of how they see it as important to be in touch with their followers. This helps them understand the issues their followers are facing and what their needs are, and thus enables the leaders to provide their followers with better direction.

The subthemes that make up this theme can all be seen as examples of mainly non-controlling ways in which the leaders in this study seek to influence their followers. This is in line with the principles of McGregor’s (1960/2006) Theory Y leadership, which involves relying mainly on forms of influence that are non-

controlling. By being non-controlling, these forms of influence can be seen as being autonomy supportive. According to self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci 2017), autonomy-supportive leadership practices are likely to support fulfilment of people's basic psychological needs. This means that the forms of influence described in this theme are conducive to promoting intrinsic motivation in followers.

#### **4.7 Disciplining**

The final main theme that was identified was that the leaders believe it is important to be able to uphold discipline in their organisations. This includes being able to give negative feedback when appropriate, sanctioning followers who knowingly break the rules, and dealing with followers who bully or harass their colleagues. The leaders also point out that these disciplining behaviours should be handled with care so as not to instil fear in the organisation.

This section presents six subthemes. The subthemes are: (1) giving negative feedback, (2) sanctioning followers who break the rules, (3) letting people go if they stray too far outside the rules, (4) dealing with signs of bullying and harassment, and (5) being careful so it does not turn into “management by fear.” Table 4.8 shows these subthemes with illustrative quotes.

**TABLE 4.8: Disciplining**

Subtheme	Illustrative quotes
Giving followers negative feedback	<p>“if a player doesn’t see what is needed, then it is my job to point it out, and also to challenge, encourage, and teach...” (handball coach)</p> <p>“this is not just a “good boy”-story, it’s not. There are many serious conversations between a good leader and the employees.” (plant director)</p>
Sanctioning followers who break the rules	<p>“there are some limits to how far you can let things go before they will have to face consequences.” (football manager)</p> <p>“There have been occasions where I have dragged young boys in here and told them that they have to make a choice. (...) Where the player understands very well that they have gone too far, they have acted like a local Tarzan and not played by the rules. On such occasions I am <i>very</i> clear. The players get some chances, but they also know where the boundaries are. And I have taken part in firing players. And I will almost certainly do so again in the future.” (football manager)</p>
Letting people who stray too far outside the rules go	<p>“[it is a question of] how far outside [the boundaries] you can go before we have to tell you to leave” (general)</p>
Dealing with signs of bullying and harassment	<p>“[about bullying and harassment] It can be very, completely devastating. There are many examples in the workplace where people can destroy each other. (...) In such cases it is the leader’s responsibility to summon the individual and confront them with what has been said and, if possible, try to find another way of doing things. But sometimes you just have to say goodbye.” (INGO president)</p>
Being careful so it does not turn into “management by fear”	<p>“I don’t believe scared people are creative. That is to say, I don’t believe in “management by terror,” I don’t think you can scare people to be innovative. I don’t think you can <i>pressure</i> people by using fear as an instrument. Very, very important.” (finance CEO)</p> <p>“I have observed in so many people that you cannot <i>scare</i> anybody to be good. There is a <i>message</i> in this (...) If you are going to be dominant, authoritarian, a despot on the top...that type of leadership is finished. [It] will never come back either.” (football coach)</p>

#### 4.7.1 Giving negative feedback

The leaders point out that good leadership also involves being able to give followers negative feedback when their performance is not up to standard. In line with this, the mayor says:

sometimes you also have to tell people things that are not very good. And you need to let them know when things are not working out. That is, if things aren’t developing the way they should. (mayor)

The above statement suggests that although the mayor gives his followers freedom and responsibility, this is not limitless. He combines this freedom with

setting standards for the followers that need to be met. If the followers do not live up to these standards, he will communicate with them to rectify the situation.

The finance CEO emphasises the need to be supportive when giving feedback to followers, but also raises the issue of kindness (“snillhet”). He makes the case that kindness is not always compatible with the need to give followers negative feedback. He states:

Some think being nice to the employees is important. But I think “nice” is a concept that is very dangerous in this context. I think it’s important to be clear, I think it’s important to coach, to help. I think it’s important to show consequences when things don’t work out. But this kindness-concept; this idea of sort of being a leader while being “buddy-buddy” and having a beer with the boys and so on, that’s something I don’t think is that important. (finance CEO)

The CEO’s statement indicates that being too close with the employees can make it harder to raise difficult issues with them. Although he, like the other leaders in this study, believes that employees should be treated with respect and be supported, he makes the point that it is also part of the leader’s responsibilities to be able to convey unpopular messages to employees and deal with performance that is not up to standard.

#### **4.7.2 Sanctioning followers who break the rules**

Several of the leaders speak about how they believe there must be consequences for those of their followers who knowingly break the rules of the organisation. In line with this, the finance CEO argues that sanctioning followers who break the rules is necessary to uphold the organisation’s regulations and values. He states:

I have increasingly realised the necessity of leading with consequences. (...) What this means is that if we draw up some lines for how we should behave and decide on some values to guide the organisation, if we then have examples of leaders who break with that, then the organisation is

very concerned that it needs to have consequences. We get lots of feedback that calls for clarity, also when it comes to consequences. And I think it is important and interesting that the organisation is so clear about this. (...) If you know what's right; and if you then, *after* it has been pointed out to you that you are doing something wrong, if you then knowingly continue to make the same mistake, then at some point there has to be a consequence. If not, it breaks down the entire value system of the organisation. Because then everybody else will think "why on earth should we spend so much effort on this" if it does not have any consequences. (finance CEO)

The finance CEO's statement illustrates how sanctioning followers who break the rules can help uphold respect for the rules and values of the organisation. Sanctioning those who stray too far outside the rules helps make sure that it pays to follow the rules and that it is costly to break them. It is also likely to deter others from breaking the rules.

We have seen in the previous theme "providing direction" that the leaders use rules and values to help their followers pull in the same direction and work constructively together. Rule breakers undermine these efforts. Sanctioning followers who break the rules can therefore be seen as a way of protecting the leader's efforts to provide direction for their followers.

#### **4.7.3 Letting people go if they stray too far outside the rules**

Many of the leaders explain that it is sometimes necessary to let people go if their behaviour is too unacceptable. However, they also point out that they do not take this decision lightly, and that they believe in giving people the chance to correct themselves if at all possible. The NGO president says:

If it is of a type where there is time and room to provide guidance, give people a chance, and to let them learn, then you should do that. In most cases it is possible to correct and improve and develop [people]. (NGO president)

His statement suggests that he is willing to give people several chances to correct their behaviour before letting them go. This is a sentiment he shares with many of the other leaders in this study, and it is in line with their belief in their followers' ability to learn and adapt. However, there are also limits to their tolerance, and sometimes they do believe it is necessary to fire people.

Like other leaders, the finance CEO explains that he does not take the decision to let someone go lightly. However, if a person is not willing or able to act within the value system of his organisation, this is a necessary step. He states:

If you are going to work for [company name], you have to be willing to work on your own attitudes to adapt to our core values. Violating them won't work. So I have unfortunately had to take part in firing people because they have attitudes that are not in keeping with what we believe is right in [company name]. (...) It is very unpleasant, but absolutely necessary in some cases. (finance CEO)

It is clear from the above statements that the leaders feel great unease about firing people, but that they will do so if employees go too far in violating the rules of the organisation. In such cases they need to act in order to maintain discipline in the organisation and to protect the interests of their other followers.

#### **4.7.4 Dealing with signs of bullying and harassment**

Another way in which leaders can provide discipline in their organisations is by preventing and dealing with bullying and harassment. One example of this is provided by the factory director, who explains that he sees such behaviours as devastating for the organisational culture and the people in it. He therefore believes in early detection and in taking decisive action when discovering signs of bullying and harassment in his organisation. He says:

Cases involving indications of bullying or harassment of individuals, we have very few, but it has happened. Of course this is dealt with directly with those involved. Furthermore, cases have been brought up in general at meetings with all the employees where I have made it clear that that is

something we do not accept. We don't want things to be that way here. And I believe that is absolutely necessary. Sometimes I might react a little too fast on things like that, but I think it is so, it is totally destructive. For the culture that we need here. (...) I say, do something about these things as soon as possible, because it almost *never* gets better by itself. It almost always only gets worse. Also, it signals to the organisation that we don't accept it, it's not the way we want things here. (factory director)

In the above excerpt, the factory director explains that he seeks to prevent bullying and harassment by announcing in clear terms to all the members of his organisation that he does not tolerate it and will act swiftly and strongly if he hears of it. He also explains that he deals with it perhaps "a little too fast," because the sooner such behaviours are dealt with, the less damage they can do. It is also likely that when other members of the organisation see that this is not tolerated, it also has a preventative effect.

The factory director's proactive and uncompromising approach to preventing and dealing with signs of bullying and harassment can be seen as an example of maintaining discipline in his organisation. By weeding out such destructive behaviours, he is preventing them from undermining all the other work he does to create good working conditions for his employees.

#### **4.7.5 Being careful so it does not turn into "management by fear"**

A possible side effect of sanctioning followers is that it can lead to fear. Several of the leaders in this study share the view that fear is damaging and should be avoided. One of these leaders is the finance CEO. He cautions that there is a careful balance when it comes to sanctioning followers, because it can easily create fear in the organisation. He states:

There are also many dilemmas involved [in the question of sanctioning followers]. Because you need to be careful so it doesn't turn into "management by fear." Where [people have the feeling that] if you don't do things right, then somebody will come...you kind of have a sword hanging over your head all the time. (finance CEO)

The finance CEO's statement suggests that while he believes sanctioning rule breakers can be beneficial, it is important that such sanctions are administered with care. This means that sanctions should be applied restrictively, with fairness, and in combination with very clear communication about what is expected of followers. If sanctions are applied in this way, they can help uphold the rules and values of the organisation, and thereby help organisational members function better together. However, if sanctions are not applied with care, and are instead seen as being applied excessively or unfairly, they can spread fear in the organisation. Applied in this way, sanctions can thereby undermine all the other efforts that the leaders engage in to support their followers' needs.

#### **4.7.6 Conclusion - disciplining**

This section has presented the five subthemes that make up the theme "disciplining." The subthemes describe how the leaders in this study (1) find it necessary to give their followers negative feedback when their performance is not up to standard. (2) They also speak of the need to sanction followers who stray too far outside the rules, and find this necessary to uphold the regulations and values of the organisation. Furthermore, (3) they find that it is sometimes necessary to let people go if they stray too far outside the rules of the organisation. They do however not take this decision lightly, and believe in giving people a chance to correct their behaviour if possible. (4) Some of the leaders also speak of preventing and dealing with signs of bullying and harassment. They see it as important to weed out such destructive behaviours because they are harmful for their other followers and for the work environment. Finally, (5) the leaders point out that these disciplining actions must be applied with care so as not to create fear among their followers. However, if such sanctions are used restrictively, they can help uphold the rules and values of the organisation.

The above subthemes describe how the leaders in this study seek to prevent their followers from engaging in destructive behaviours. If followers are allowed to engage in such destructive behaviours, they can harm the work environment and make it difficult for their colleagues to focus on their jobs. This can undermine



the efforts described in themes 3, 4, 5, and 6, which all aim to support follower needs and their intrinsic motivation. This theme can therefore be seen as being about protecting the leaders' efforts to promote their followers' intrinsic motivation.

This can be tied back to theme 1, "having a positive view of people," and its subtheme "acknowledging that there are also destructive tendencies in human nature." In this subtheme, the leaders explain that they believe by far most people want to do a good job if given the opportunity, but that there are exceptions to this rule, and they need to be dealt with. We see illustrated in themes 3-6 that the leaders spend most of their effort on creating conditions that aim to help their followers perform their best. This current theme, "disciplining," then illustrates how the leaders deal with the "exceptions" - the minority of followers who do not respond well to these efforts to create good conditions. In this theme, we see that the leaders seek to weed out these destructive behaviours so that they are not allowed to harm the work environment and their colleagues' opportunities to focus on their jobs, to have their needs fulfilled, and thereby to be intrinsically motivated.

#### **4.8 Summary**

This chapter has presented the thematic analysis of this study. Seven main themes were derived from the analysis of the interviews. The first of these was (1) having a positive view of people. This main theme relates to the underlying assumptions that these leaders hold about human nature and human behaviour, and can be seen as influencing their leadership practice. This theme corresponds with Box A in the preliminary framework in Figure 2.3 on page 55.

The second theme was (2) personal convictions that influence whether and to what degree assumptions are translated into practice. This theme helps explain how leader assumptions about human nature and human behaviour can influence leader practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers. This theme corresponds with Box B in the preliminary framework in Figure 2.3.

The remaining five main themes that were derived from the analysis were:

(3) promoting freedom, involvement, and responsibility, (4) developing people and promoting mastery, (5) promoting connectedness and cooperation, (6) providing direction, and (7) disciplining. These main themes can be seen as elements of the informants' leadership practice which aim to promote intrinsic motivation in their followers. These themes correspond with Box C in the preliminary framework.

This section will summarise the seven themes that were derived from the analysis of the interviews.

### **Theme 1: Having a positive view of people**

This main theme is based on statements where the informants describe their view of people, in the sense of their underlying attitudes and approaches to the people they are leading. This includes statements where they express a general belief in people, a belief in people's talents and competence, and a belief in people's loyalty and care. The theme is also based on statements where the leaders express that they believe in the good in people in general, while acknowledging that there are also destructive tendencies in human nature. Moreover, the theme is based on statements where the leaders express that they respect and care about their followers, want to bring out the best in them, and believe in promoting the motivation of their followers.

The theme consists of eight subthemes. The subthemes are: (1) having a generally positive view of people – believing in people, (2) believing in people's competence, (3) believing in people's willingness to do their best, (4) believing in people's need for connectedness, (5) acknowledging that there are also destructive tendencies in human nature, (6) respecting their followers, (7) caring about their followers, and (8) believing in promoting motivation from within.

This main theme differs from the other main themes that were identified in the study. While this main theme is about the beliefs, values, and intentions that underlie the informants' leadership, themes 3-7 are about how they actually practise leadership. Theme 2 can be seen as connecting theme 1 to themes 3-7, by helping determine to what degree these beliefs are translated into practice.

Theme 1 is thus connected to all the other main themes because the leaders' view of people influences how they practise leadership.

Themes 1 and 3-6 are influenced by several elements from the theoretical perspectives that were presented in the theory chapter. Theme 1, "having a positive view of people," describes some of the underlying values and assumptions that the leaders in this study hold about human nature and human behaviour. The question of which assumptions leaders hold about their followers is a central issue in the work of McGregor (1960/2006) on Theories X and Y.

### **Theme 2: Personal convictions that influence whether and to what extent assumptions are translated into practice**

This theme identified several personal convictions that impact whether and to what degree the leaders translate their view of people into practice. This includes seeing it as important to promote intrinsic motivation in followers, prioritising it, choosing to base their leadership practice on their view of people, being aware of it in the everyday work situation, and assuming that it requires much effort.

This theme can be seen as mediating the influence of theme 1, "having a positive view of people" on the leadership practices that are described in themes 3-7.

Theme 2, "personal convictions that influence whether and to what extent assumptions are translated into practice," can also be related to McGregor's (1960/2006) Theory Y. The personal convictions described in this theme can be seen as mediating the relationship between having Theory Y assumptions and practising Theory Y leadership in McGregor's theory.

### **Theme 3: Promoting freedom, involvement, and responsibility**

This main theme is made up of statements relating to how the leaders encourage followers to be "active agents," that is, being active rather than passive participants in their organisations. This includes statements about how the leaders believe in giving their followers freedom and responsibility, involving them in

decision-making processes, supporting their independence, and supporting their freedom of speech. The theme also consists of statements about how this freedom is not without limits, and that the leaders do use authority when they feel that it is needed.

This main theme consists of five subthemes. The subthemes are: (1) giving their followers freedom and supporting their independence, (2) involving followers in decision-making processes, (3) supporting their followers' freedom of speech, (4) giving followers responsibility, and (5) using authority when necessary.

The subtheme "using authority when necessary" could also have been placed under the main theme "providing direction," since using authority can be seen as a way of providing direction. However, I chose to place it under this main theme to highlight that the leaders prefer to limit their use of authority, and instead rely more on other forms of influence that promote the freedom and involvement of their followers.

Theme 3, "promoting freedom, involvement, and responsibility," can be related to the concept of autonomy in self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan 1985, 2000, Ryan & Deci 2017). This theme is also related to self-control and participation which are principles of McGregor's (1960/2006) Theory Y leadership.

#### **Theme 4: Developing people and promoting mastery**

This main theme is made up of statements about different ways in which the leaders in this study promote the development of their followers. This includes statements about how they see it as a leadership responsibility to develop followers, how they develop their followers by promoting mastery in their organisations, and how they build on people's strengths. Some of the statements describe how they help followers develop personally, thereby adding value to their lives, while other statements describe how their development work can also overlap with innovation, since they are in the forefront of their field.

The theme consists of five subthemes. The subthemes are: (1) developing people, (2) promoting mastery, (3) building on people's strengths, (4) promoting personal development, and (5) promoting development that turns into innovation.

Theme 4, “developing people and promoting mastery,” can be related to the concept of competence in self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan 1985, 2000, Ryan & Deci 2017). Mastery is also described in the theories of flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 1990) and thriving (Carver 1998, Spreitzer et al. 2005, 2010).

### **Theme 5: Promoting connectedness and cooperation**

This main theme is made up of statements about how the leaders promote relatedness and collaboration in their teams. This includes statements where they describe building interpersonal ties among their followers by promoting a sense of community and belonging, preventing fragmentation by making followers understand that they depend on each other, as well as promoting cooperation by making people feel like they are part of the same team. Furthermore, the theme consists of statements about sanctioning people who do not cooperate, and statements about harmonising the interests of individual organisational members with the interests of the organisation.

The theme consists of five subthemes. The subthemes are: (1) promoting connectedness, (2) preventing fragmentation, (3) promoting cooperation, (4) sanctioning followers who do not cooperate, and (5) harmonising interests.

The subtheme “preventing fragmentation” could also have been placed under the main theme “disciplining – dealing with suboptimal behaviours” because it is also a way of preventing undesirable behaviours in the organisation. I did however choose to place it under this main theme because the leaders do it to promote connectedness and cooperation in their organisations.

Similarly, the subtheme “sanctioning people who do not cooperate” could also have been placed under the main theme “disciplining – dealing with suboptimal behaviours.” I chose to place it under this main theme because the purpose is to

promote cooperation. It is also a way of creating conditions where it pays to cooperate, and where it is costly not to do so.

Theme 5, “promoting connectedness and cooperation,” can be related to the concept of relatedness in self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan 1985, 2000, Ryan & Deci 2017), and to McGregor’s (1960/2006) integration concept.

### **Theme 6: Providing direction**

This main theme is made up of statements about how the leaders provide their followers with direction. This includes communicating clear goals so that everybody in the organisation knows where they are headed, and communicating clear expectations so that followers know what is expected of them. Furthermore, it includes setting boundaries so their followers know which behaviours are acceptable and which behaviours are not. The theme also incorporates statements about how the leaders use values to influence followers, how they promote positive energy among their followers, and how they see it as important to stay in touch with their followers.

The theme consists of seven subthemes. The subthemes are: (1) providing a clear direction, (2) setting energising goals, (3) communicating clear expectations, (4) providing boundaries, (5) using values to guide behaviour, (6) promoting positive energy, and (7) being in touch with the followers.

This main theme is related to another main theme, namely “promoting freedom, involvement, and responsibility.” The reason for this is that it becomes particularly important to provide followers with a clear direction when they are given a high degree of freedom and responsibility. When followers know where the leader wants them to go, they can be given a great deal of discretion to make their own decisions about how best to get there.

Theme 6, “providing direction,” can be related to McGregor’s (1960/2006) Theory Y leadership, which involves influencing followers mainly in non-controlling ways. This theme can also be connected to self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci 2017). Because the forms of influence described in this theme are

non-controlling, they can be seen as autonomy supportive. According to self-determination theory, autonomy supportive leadership practices are likely to support fulfilment of people's basic psychological needs, and thereby also their intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Decie 2017).

### **Theme 7: Disciplining – dealing with suboptimal behaviours**

This main theme is made up of statements relating to maintaining order and discipline in the organisation. This includes statements about giving negative feedback when appropriate, sanctioning followers who knowingly break the rules, dealing with followers who bully or harass their colleagues, but also about the need to be careful with these disciplining behaviours so they do not instil fear in followers.

The theme consists of five subthemes. The subthemes are: (1) giving negative feedback, (2) sanctioning followers who break the rules, (3) letting people go if they stray too far outside the rules, (4) dealing with signs of bullying and harassment, and (5) being careful so it does not turn into “management by fear.”

The subthemes “sanctioning followers who break the rules” and “letting people go if they stray too far outside the rules” are also related to the main theme “providing direction.” We have seen that the theme “providing direction” involves communicating expectations, rules, boundaries, and values that the leaders expect their followers to abide by. The leaders explain that these standards are undermined if followers who knowingly break them are not sanctioned. The subthemes “sanctioning followers who break the rules” and “letting people go if they stray too far outside the rules” describe how the leaders sanction followers who break these standards. These two subthemes can therefore be seen as ways in which the leaders uphold the standards that they communicate to their followers as part of the theme “providing direction.”

The subtheme “dealing with signs of bullying and harassment” is also connected to the main theme “promoting connectedness and cooperation.” The reason for this is that destructive behaviours such as bullying and harassment can undermine connectedness and cooperation in the organisation. Leaders who

effectively sanction followers who bully or harass others make it costly to engage in such behaviours. As a consequence, followers are less likely to engage in these destructive behaviours. Dealing with signs of bullying and harassment can therefore be seen as a way of protecting connectedness and cooperation in the organisation.

Theme 7, “disciplining,” can be connected to transactional leadership theory (Bass & Riggio 2006). The practices described in this theme have controlling elements, and can therefore be seen as examples of transactional leadership. This theme can also be linked to self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci 2017). The reason for this is that the leaders appear to engage in these transactional leadership behaviours as a way to protect their followers against destructive behaviours that may harm fulfilment of their basic psychological needs, as posited by self-determination theory. The leaders’ use of elements of transactional leadership can therefore be seen as a way of protecting their followers’ intrinsic motivation.

The next chapter will discuss the implications of these findings.



## 5. DISCUSSION

This chapter first revisits the research questions that guided this study. It does so by discussing how the findings can help shed light on how positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour can help leaders promote intrinsic motivation in followers.

This is followed by a discussion of the study's two main theoretical contributions. Firstly, the study identifies a gap in McGregor's (1960/2006) Theory Y, and proposes to fill this gap by adding a mediating box to the relationship between Theory Y assumptions and Theory Y leadership practices, as illustrated in Figure 5.1 on page 179. This mediating box is filled with five personal convictions that are based on the findings of this study. These five personal convictions help determine whether and to what degree a leader with Theory Y assumptions translates these assumptions into practice. The second main contribution of this study is a model that is illustrated in Figure 5.2 on page 181. This model goes into more detail about the mediating personal convictions. It does so by providing further explanation of the role of each of these personal convictions and how they influence the relationship between leader assumptions and leader practices in McGregor's theory. By adding the mediating box to the relationship between Theory Y assumptions and Theory Y leadership practices, proposing to fill the box with five personal convictions, and explaining the role of the personal convictions, the study fills a gap in McGregor's (1960/2006) original theory by providing a detailed explanation of the process through which leader assumptions are translated into leader practices in his theory.

After this comes a discussion of possible practical implications of the study, before the chapter concludes with a summary of the main contributions.

### *5.1 Addressing the research questions*

The aim of this study was to explore how having positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour can help leaders promote intrinsic

motivation in followers. To this end, the study was guided by three research questions. This section will provide answers to these questions.

**RQ1: What can it mean for leaders to have positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour?**

This study has identified a set of positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour that can underlie and inform leadership practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers. Theme 1, “having a positive view of people,” presents a set of assumptions that the leaders in this study hold about their followers and their followers’ motivation. We have seen in the previous chapter that for the leaders in this study, this involves having a general belief in their followers, and assuming that they will want to do their best at work if the conditions are right. The leaders also see it as their responsibility to help create conditions where their followers will want to do their best. These assumptions are conducive to believing that every person has the potential to be intrinsically motivated, and wanting to create conditions that support this tendency in their followers.

The positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour expressed by the leaders in this study are consistent with McGregor’s (1960/2006) Theory Y assumptions. As described in the theory chapter, having Theory Y assumptions involves assuming that most people are naturally motivated if the conditions are right. McGregor also posits that Theory Y assumptions underlie leadership practice by prompting leaders to practise Theory Y leadership, which involves creating conditions that promote intrinsic motivation in followers.

The findings of this study also support that positive leader assumptions about people can underlie leadership practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers. This is consistent with previous studies, which have found support for Theory Y assumptions as underlying Theory Y leadership (Fiman 1973, Lawter et al. 2015) and transformational leadership practice (Pastor & Mayo 2008, Şahin et al. 2017). Both these leadership forms involve promoting intrinsic motivation in followers.

Furthermore, the findings of this study also lend support to Theory Y assumptions as antecedents of leadership that supports fulfilment of the three needs of self-determination theory. The reason for this is that the leaders in this study, who hold assumptions consistent with Theory Y, engage in practices that promote autonomy, competence, and relatedness in their followers, as exhibited in themes 3 (“promoting freedom, involvement, and responsibility”), 4 (“developing people and promoting mastery”), and 5 (“promoting connectedness and cooperation”). Together, these relationships lend support to McGregor’s idea that the assumptions leaders hold about people and motivation can help them engage in leadership practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers.

The positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour expressed by the leaders in this study are also consistent with the organismic-dialectic view on which self-determination theory is based (Ryan & Deci 2002). This view assumes that human beings have a potential for growth and development that can either be supported or thwarted. It also includes an ethical element, which I believe the leaders in this study share.

The leaders in this study express that in addition to believing in the positive qualities in people, they also acknowledge that there are negative tendencies in human nature. This is consistent with the organismic-dialectic view, which posits that people have tendencies towards both constructive and destructive behaviours (Ryan & Deci 2002). According to this view, supporting fulfilment of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness fosters constructive behaviours like optimal functioning, well-being, and intrinsic motivation. This view also posits that thwarting these needs can lead to destructive behaviours, and can harm optimal functioning, well-being, and intrinsic motivation.

Like McGregor’s (1960/2006) theory, self-determination theory is a humanistic theory that is concerned with promoting human well-being and reducing suffering (Gagné & Deci 2005, Ryan & Deci 2017). According to both these views, it can therefore also be seen as a moral responsibility for leaders to promote fulfilment of the three needs and hindering the thwarting of these needs in followers. This concern for supporting the well-being of followers is consistent with views expressed by the leaders in this study.

**RQ2: How can leaders' positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour influence how they practise leadership to promote intrinsic motivation in followers? What are some of the components of this influencing process?**

Based on the findings of this study, I propose a set of five mediating personal convictions that can help explain whether and to what degree leaders with positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour are likely to engage in practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers. These mediating personal convictions are presented as part of theme 2, “personal convictions that influence whether and to what extent assumptions are translated into practice” in the findings chapter.

The personal convictions and their mediating role in the relationship between leader assumptions and leader practices will be further explained in sections 5.2 and 5.3, which form the main theoretical contributions of this study. In section 5.2, I propose that these personal convictions can be seen as a “missing link” between Theory Y assumptions and Theory Y practices in McGregor’s (1960/2006) theory. In section 5.3, I go into more detail about the role of these personal convictions in explaining the relationship between having Theory Y assumptions and translating them into Theory Y practices (or not).

By putting forward these mediating personal convictions, I propose that having positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour alone is not sufficient to ensure that leaders will promote intrinsic motivation in followers. Leaders must also have a high degree of each of the proposed personal convictions to invest in leadership practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers. I propose that the more strongly the leader believes in intrinsic motivation, in wanting to promote intrinsic motivation, and in the five personal convictions, the more extensively the leader is likely to engage in practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers.

By identifying these five personal convictions and describing their role in the relationship between positive leader assumptions about human nature and human behaviour and leader practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers, this

study improves our understanding of the nature of the relationship between Theory Y assumptions and Theory Y practices in McGregor's (1960/2006) theory. Additionally, it sheds light on the relationship between having positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour and practising leadership that promotes intrinsic motivation in followers, as well as the connection between Theory Y assumptions and transformational leadership and practices that promote autonomy, competence, and relatedness in followers.

McGregor (1960/2006) does not go into detail about the nature of the relationship between having Theory Y assumptions and practising Theory Y leadership in his theory. In fact, he appears to assume that there is correspondence between the leader's assumptions and the leader's practices. In spite of this, previous empirical studies that have investigated the relationship between Theory Y assumptions and Theory Y practices do indicate that leaders with Theory Y assumptions practise different degrees of Theory Y leadership (Fiman 1973, Lawter et al. 2015). However, the focus of these studies has been to establish a positive relationship between Theory Y assumptions and Theory Y leadership practices, and have not discussed this issue.

It is nevertheless interesting to understand how and why leaders with Theory Y assumptions can vary in the extent to which they practise Theory Y leadership. Because Theory Y leadership involves promoting intrinsic motivation in followers, it is valuable to understand the elements in the relationship between Theory Y assumptions and Theory Y practices. If we understand these elements and their role in this relationship, we can learn how to better help leaders promote intrinsic motivation in their followers. This knowledge can be used in educating and training organisational leaders.

### **RQ3: How can leaders with positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour promote intrinsic motivation in followers?**

The leaders in this study, who have positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour, and who have high levels of each of the five personal convictions, engage in an extensive range of practices that promote intrinsic motivation in their followers.

These practices are exemplified in themes 3-7 in the findings chapter. Themes 3-5 correspond with supporting the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness as posited by self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci 2017). Theme 3, “promoting freedom, involvement, and responsibility,” relates to the need for autonomy, theme 4, “developing people and promoting mastery,” relates to the need for competence, and theme 5, “promoting connectedness and cooperation,” relates to the need for relatedness. According to self-determination theory, supporting these three basic psychological needs in followers promotes their intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci 2017).

Themes 6 and 7 also play a role in fostering intrinsic motivation in followers. Theme 6, “providing direction,” supports intrinsic motivation by setting inspiring goals for their followers and by channelling their energies towards constructive goals and away from distractions. Theme 7, “disciplining,” involves protecting intrinsic motivation by dealing with disruptive behaviours that could hinder followers from having their basic needs fulfilled. Together, themes 3-7 thus demonstrate that leaders can engage extensively in practices that promote and protect their followers’ intrinsic motivation.

These findings support McGregor’s (1960/2006) Theory Y, which suggests that having positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour can help leaders engage in practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers. However, this study also suggests a modification to McGregor’s (1960/2006) Theory Y by proposing that in addition to having these positive assumptions, leaders must also have high levels of each of the five identified personal convictions to engage extensively in practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers.

Theme 7, “disciplining,” differs from the other leadership practices described in themes 3-6. While the practices described in themes 3-6 align with the principles of transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio 2006), the practices in theme 7 align with aspects of transactional leadership (ibid). This suggests that the leaders in this study, who state that they have positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour which are consistent with Theory Y assumptions, also practise elements of transactional leadership.

That these leaders with Theory Y assumptions engage in transactional leadership practices seems to contradict the findings of previous research. For example, studies by Pastor and Mayo (2008) and Şahin et al. (2017) have focused primarily on establishing a positive relationship between Theory Y assumptions and transformational leadership, rather than with transactional leadership. However, as Pastor and Mayo suggest, it is likely that most leaders engage in both transformational and transactional practices, as reflected in this study. Nonetheless, although the leaders in this study engage in some transactional practices, the majority of the practices they describe can be characterised as transformational.

Furthermore, the finding that leaders with Theory Y assumptions engage in transactional practices to promote intrinsic motivation differs from previous research by Hetland et al. (2011). Their study found a negative relationship between transactional leadership practices and fulfilment of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Because self-determination theory posits that fulfilment of these needs promotes intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci 2017), Hetland et al.'s study suggests that transactional leadership may be harmful to intrinsic motivation.

Nevertheless, this study suggests that leaders who want to promote the three needs and intrinsic motivation in their followers, must also engage in some transactional behaviours. Because these practices are controlling, they should be kept to a minimum to prevent harm to follower needs. However, avoiding them entirely can also harm follower needs and intrinsic motivation.

This balance resembles putting salt in porridge - only very little is needed. Without salt, the porridge tastes bland, but adding just slightly too much spoils the dish. This need to find a balance between too much and too little transactional leadership could also explain why Hetland et al.'s (2011) study found a negative relationship between transactional leadership and fulfilment of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. I suggest that if a leader engages in too much transactional leadership, and where followers experience it as unjustified, transactional leadership is likely to harm fulfilment of the three needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In contrast, I suggest that if

transactional leadership is kept to a minimum, where followers experience its use as justified, it can, and is even necessary, to promote fulfilment of the three needs in followers. I do however agree with Hetland et al. (2011) that transactional leadership *can* harm fulfilment of the three basic needs, and in line with this, several leaders in this study point out that they see this as an issue that needs to be handled carefully.

## **5.2 The “missing link”: bridging Theory Y assumptions and practices**

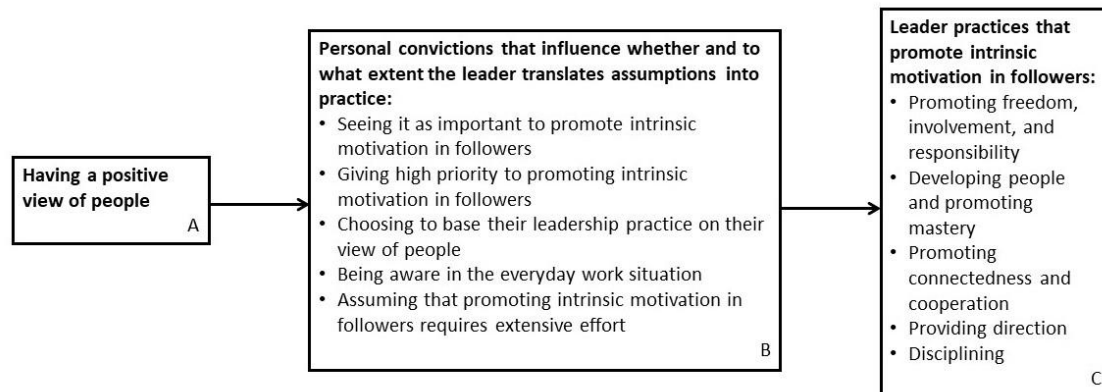
This section and section 5.3 provide the main theoretical contributions of this study. These sections will explain the role of the five personal convictions as an intermediate step between the leader’s positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour and leader practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers. By introducing and explaining the role of these personal convictions, this study addresses a gap in McGregor’s (1960/2006) theory. Unlike McGregor’s work, which does not explicitly explain the process through which Theory Y leader assumptions are translated into Theory Y leader practices, this study introduces these five personal convictions as a “missing link.”

Figure 5.1 illustrates how the leader’s positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour (Box A), the mediating personal convictions (Box B), and leader practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers (Box C) are connected. The figure is based on the findings of this study, and also illustrates how the seven themes that were presented in the findings chapter are related. In addition, the figure can be seen as illustrating how Theory Y assumptions and Theory Y practices are connected by the five personal convictions.

In Figure 5.1, Box A, “having a positive view of people,” represents the leader’s positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour that underlies their leadership practice. This box is based on theme 1 from the findings chapter, and corresponds with McGregor’s (1960/2006) Theory Y assumptions.



**FIGURE 5.1**  
**Modified framework**



Box B, “personal convictions that influence whether and to what extent the leader translates assumptions into practice,” represents an intermediate step between the leader’s positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour (Box A) and leader practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers (Box C). It is based on theme 2 from the findings chapter, and consists of the five identified personal convictions. This box can also be seen as an intermediate step between Theory Y assumptions and Theory Y practices in McGregor’s (1960/2006) theory.

Box C, “leader practices that promote intrinsic motivation followers,” is based on themes 3-7 from the findings chapter. This box corresponds with McGregor’s (1960/2006) Theory Y leadership practice. The figure suggests that the extent to which the leader engages in practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers is influenced by the strength of the leader’s positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour and the mediating personal convictions.

It should be noted that the relationships are not as straightforward as indicated by the figure. For example, it is likely that the leader’s experiences with these practices (Box C) will influence the leader’s assumptions (Box A) and personal convictions (Box B), and that this mutual influence is an ongoing process.

Figure 5.1 illustrates how this study contributes to theory by addressing a “missing link” in McGregor’s (1960/2006) theory. It does so by proposing Box B as an intermediate step in the relationship between positive leader assumptions

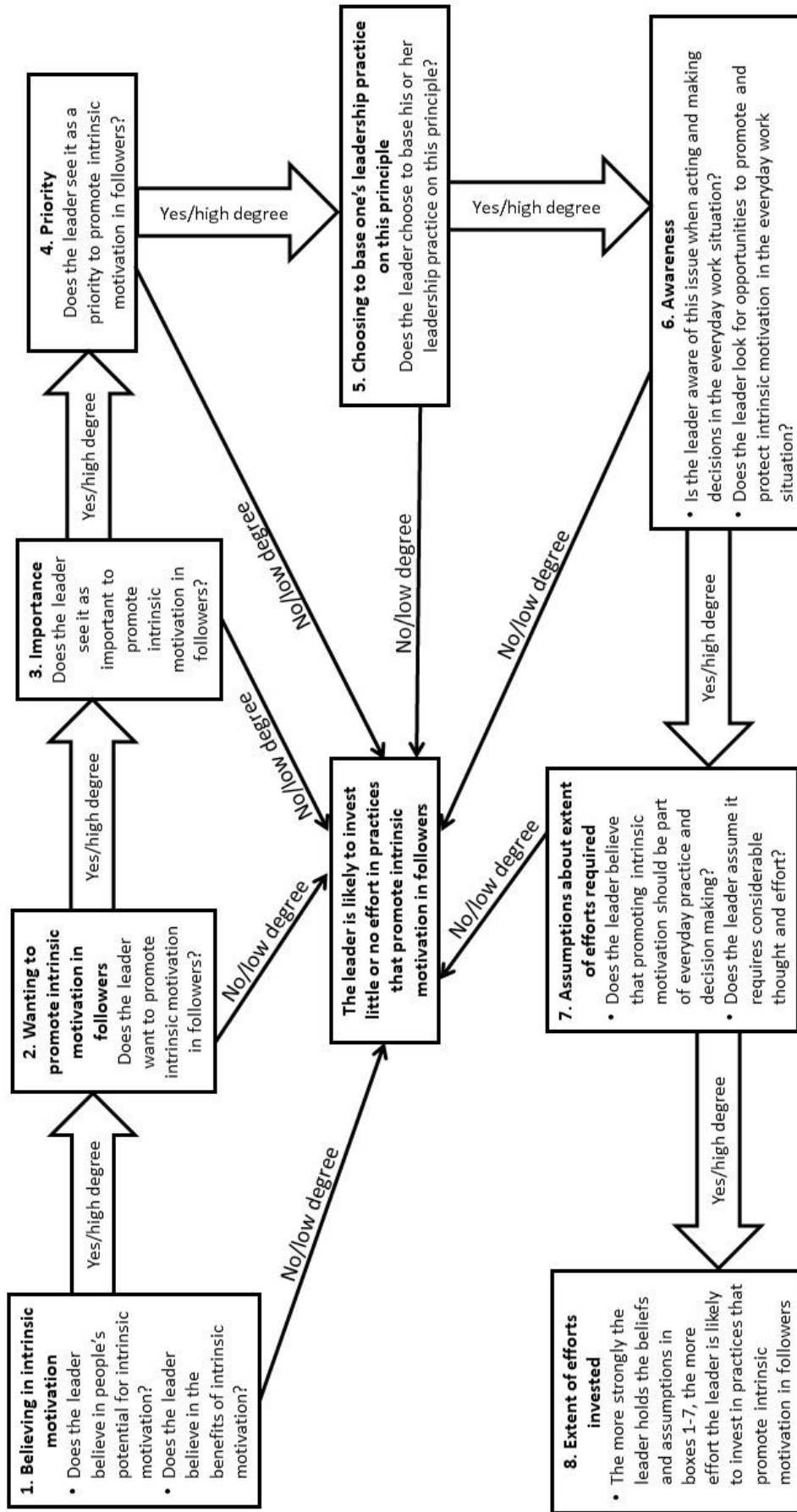
and human nature and human behaviour and leader practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers. Moreover, the figure also illustrates how the study identifies five personal convictions as components of this intermediate step. By identifying this intermediate step and its components, the study improves our understanding of McGregor's theory and the nature of the relationship between Theory Y assumptions and Theory Y practices. The next section will further discuss the role of the personal convictions.

### **5.3 Proposed model: the mediating role of personal convictions**

This section presents a model which goes into more detail about the mediating personal convictions. The model provides further explanation of the role of each of these personal convictions and how they influence the relationship between leader assumptions and leader practices in McGregor's (1960/2006) theory. The model constitutes the second main theoretical contribution of this study because it adds to our understanding of how positive assumptions can be translated into leadership practices.

Figure 5.2 focuses more specifically on how having positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour may help leaders promote intrinsic motivation in followers. It does so by singling out two aspects of having positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour that I believe are particularly relevant to leadership practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers. These aspects are believing in intrinsic motivation and wanting to promote intrinsic motivation in followers. In addition, the model also discusses in more detail how each of the five personal convictions from theme 2 may help leaders translate their assumptions into practice.

**FIGURE 5.2: Explaining the role of personal convictions**



### 5.3.1 Believing in intrinsic motivation

In this model, believing in intrinsic motivation involves assuming that most people have the potential to be intrinsically motivated. It also involves believing that being intrinsically motivated has benefits, such as enhancing a person's performance and well-being. A leader with these beliefs is therefore also likely to believe that it is beneficial to lead in a way that promotes intrinsic motivation in followers.

Believing in intrinsic motivation can be seen as being consistent with McGregor's (1960/2006) Theory Y assumptions (and as inconsistent with his Theory X assumptions). For example, as part of the Theory Y assumptions, McGregor states:

The average human being does not inherently dislike work. Depending on controllable conditions, work may be a source of satisfaction (and will be voluntarily performed) or a source of punishment (and will be avoided if possible) (McGregor 1960/2006, p. 65)

In this statement, McGregor indicates that having Theory Y assumptions involves assuming that people can take inherent pleasure in their work when the circumstances are right. This corresponds with the belief that people have a potential to be intrinsically motivated.

It is likely that the more strongly a leader believes in their followers' potential for intrinsic motivation and in the benefits of intrinsic motivation, the more likely they are to invest effort in promoting intrinsic motivation in followers. In contrast, a leader who does not believe in intrinsic motivation is unlikely to invest effort in promoting intrinsic motivation in followers, and may instead rely on the use of control and/or extrinsic rewards to get followers to do their jobs.

The element of believing in the benefits of intrinsic motivation overlaps with the constructs "behavioural beliefs" and "attitude towards the behaviour" in the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen et al. 2018), as presented in Figure 2.1 on page 27. "Behavioural beliefs" refer to beliefs about the likely outcomes of

the behaviour, and “attitude towards the behaviour” refers to the assumed favourability of engaging in the behaviour. For my model, this suggests that the more strongly the leader is convinced of the benefits of intrinsic motivation, the more favourable they will be to engaging in practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers.

### **5.3.2 Wanting to promote intrinsic motivation in followers**

Following from the previous point, it is reasonable to assume that a leader who believes that most people have the potential to be intrinsically motivated and that being intrinsically motivated is beneficial, will want to promote the intrinsic motivation of their followers.

In line with this, the leaders in this study express that they want to promote their followers’ intrinsic motivation. This can help explain why they invest so much effort into this leadership practice.

However, it should be pointed out that wanting to do something is not the same as actually doing it. We may want to do many things without acting on these wants. For example, many of us want to exercise more or eat more healthily without doing so. In a similar way, it is likely that many leaders, if asked, would say that they want to promote intrinsic motivation in their followers, but that does not necessarily mean that they invest any significant effort into this activity.

The model therefore assumes that more steps are needed in the leader’s thought process to go from wanting to, to actually engaging in practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers. The model also assumes that the strength of the leader’s willingness influences how likely the leader is to engage in these practices.

This element in the model has similarities with “intention” in the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen et al. 2018). In the TPB, intention involves making the decision to engage in a behaviour. This is similar to wanting to engage in the behaviour. However, “intention” goes further than “wanting to,” and in

accordance with this, “intention” is the final step before engaging in the behaviour in the TPB.

In contrast, “wanting to promote intrinsic motivation in followers” is closer to the beginning of the process of translating assumptions into practices in my model. My model suggests that promoting intrinsic motivation could be one of several things the leader wants to do, and that more steps are needed before the leader decides whether to act on it or not.

### **5.3.3 Seeing it as important to promote intrinsic motivation**

In order to put in the amount of effort that is required to promote intrinsic motivation in followers, the leader must see doing so as important. The importance the leader places on this activity is related to the previous points. In particular, it is likely that the more convinced the leader is of the benefits of having intrinsically motivated followers, the more importance they will place on this issue. For example, a leader who has witnessed first-hand how much a group of highly motivated employees can achieve, and how much positive energy this can generate for the organisation, is more likely to place importance on promoting intrinsic motivation than a leader who has not had this experience.

In the findings chapter we have seen that the leaders in this study express that they see promoting intrinsic motivation in their followers as important.

In contrast, a leader who does not see intrinsic motivation as important is unlikely to invest much effort in promoting it. A leader who does not see a strong link between intrinsic motivation and the performance and well-being of followers, is unlikely to think of intrinsic motivation as particularly important. This could explain why some leaders may think of motivation as more of a “nice to have,” rather than as the “must have” role it plays in the leadership practices of the participants in this study.

Accordingly, it is likely that the more important the leader believes it is to promote intrinsic motivation in followers, the more likely they are to invest effort in doing so.

This element of the model is related to two constructs in the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen et al. 2018). One of these constructs is “behavioural beliefs,” which refers to beliefs about likely outcomes of the behaviour. It is likely that the more strongly the leader believes in the benefits of intrinsic motivation, the more importance they are likely to place on promoting it. The second of these relevant constructs from the theory of planned behaviour is “perceived behavioural control,” which refers to believing that one has the skills and resources to perform the behaviour. It is also likely that the leader will place more importance on promoting intrinsic motivation in followers the more convinced they are that they have the skills and resources to do so.

#### **5.3.4 Giving high priority to promoting intrinsic motivation in followers**

In addition to seeing it as important to promote intrinsic motivation in followers, the leader must also prioritise it highly. In the everyday work situation, a leader has many considerations to take into account, and the leader may see many of these as important. The promotion of intrinsic motivation can therefore easily be neglected if it is not given precedence above other issues that are also seen as important by the leader or other stakeholders.

As was argued under the previous point, it is likely that the more the leader knows about and has experienced the benefits of intrinsic motivation, the more they are likely to see its promotion as a priority. A leader who is strongly convinced of the benefits of intrinsic motivation, is also more likely to be able to withstand pressures to prioritise differently.

The leaders in this study give high priority to efforts that promote their followers’ intrinsic motivation. All the practices that are displayed in themes 3-7 in the findings chapter can be seen as examples of such efforts. For each of these practices they must have made a choice, consciously or subconsciously, to engage in this practice rather than attending to another competing demand.

That the leaders in this study manage to invest such significant amounts of effort into promoting intrinsic motivation in their followers, suggests that they prioritise

this activity highly, and that they are able to resist pressures that seek to prevent them from doing so. Leaders who are unable to make this priority, are unlikely to be able to put in the amount of effort that is required to effectively promote the intrinsic motivation of their followers.

This element of the model differs from the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen et al. 2018). According to the TPB constructs “normative beliefs” and “subjective norms,” the leader is likely to act in line with the perceived expectations of respected others. This differs from the logic of this box in my model, which is likely to instead involve withstanding pressure from others. This box in my model refers to how stakeholders may offer resistance against engaging in practices that promote intrinsic motivation, and how the leader needs to withstand this resistance to prioritise promoting intrinsic motivation in followers.

In line with this, many of the leaders in this study speak of how they withstand pressure. They speak of the need to be able to make decisions that are sometimes unpopular, and they appear to have the strength to make the choices they believe are right even though others may dislike those choices. I also believe they are good at explaining and communicating their choices to their stakeholders, and this increases the chance that their choices will be accepted. This can be contrasted with the TPB constructs that are about being influenced to act in accordance with the expectations of others. However, that does not mean that the leaders in this study do not consider the opinions of others, but they can be uncompromising if they believe it is necessary to do the right thing.

### **5.3.5 Choosing to base their leadership practice on their view of people**

In addition to seeing it as important and as a priority to promote intrinsic motivation, the leader must also choose to base their leadership practice on this principle. Although a leader who sees this activity as important and as a high priority is more likely to act on this principle, it is not a given. Assigning importance and priority to a task can be a theoretical exercise if it is not translated into practice. The leader must therefore also decide to use this principle as a guideline for their own leadership practice.



This choice can be made either deliberately or in a more intuitive way. In accordance with this, several leaders in this study state that they choose to base their leadership practice on their view of people. They are thus deliberately choosing to use their view of people as a guideline for how to act and make decisions in their everyday work life. Several of the leaders in this study indicate that the principles they lead by have come to them more intuitively. Nevertheless, I believe that even though their principles may have come to them in a more natural way, they must still also make deliberate choices every day to act in accordance with those principles.

A leader who does not make this choice may still see promoting intrinsic motivation in followers as important and as a high priority. However, possible reasons for not choosing to base one's own leadership practice on this principle may be that the leader lacks knowledge about how to do it or believes that it should be left to specialists. Another reason could be that the leader thinks of it as something that should take place in one-off events such as seminars or lectures, and not as part of the everyday work situation.

This element in the model is related to the TPB constructs of “control beliefs” and “perceived behavioural control” (Ajzen et al. 2018). As previously mentioned, these constructs refer to the person's beliefs about whether or not they have the skills and resources that are required to perform the behaviour. It is likely that the more strongly the leader believes that they have the skills to promote intrinsic motivation in followers, the more likely they are to choose to base their leadership practice on this principle. In contrast, a leader who does not believe that they have the skills to do so, is unlikely to make this decision, regardless of how much importance and priority they place on the intrinsic motivation of their followers.

This element in the model is also related to the “intention” construct in TPB (Ajzen et al. 2018). “Intention” involves deciding to engage in the behaviour. “Choosing to base one's leadership practice on this principle” can be seen as an element of the TPB construct of “intention.” However, in TPB, “intention” is more closely linked to actually engaging in the behaviour than in my model. In my model, choosing to base one's leadership practice on this principle has two more steps before engaging in the behaviour (or not). In my model, it is not

enough to decide to base one's leadership practice on this principle, but to do so also requires awareness in the everyday work situation, and it also requires the leader to acknowledge that it requires extensive effort to promote intrinsic motivation in followers. So in my model, the relationship between choosing to do something and acting on this is not as straightforward as in the theory of planned behaviour.

The reason for this difference is that I am assuming that promoting intrinsic motivation in followers requires extensive effort. The focus of my model is therefore to understand how leader assumptions and personal convictions can help leaders engage in extensive practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers. In my model, it is not enough that the leader engages in these practices - the engagement must be extensive to be of value. In contrast, the focus of the theory of planned behaviour is to understand how a person's attitudes can influence the likelihood that the person will engage in the behaviour or not. The theory of planned behaviour thus has a slightly different focus from my model.

### **5.3.6 Being aware in the everyday work situation**

Every time the leader acts, speaks, or makes decisions that affect the followers can be an opportunity to promote or harm the followers' intrinsic motivation. If the leader is not aware of this, these opportunities will be missed. It can therefore be argued that awareness in the everyday work situation is another condition for being able to engage in practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers.

Every day, leaders make a myriad of large and small decisions. One way of being aware involves taking into consideration whether and how each of these decisions may affect the followers' intrinsic motivation. Keeping in the back of their minds the question: "does this decision help or hinder my followers' intrinsic motivation?" can help leaders make better use of opportunities to support and protect their followers' intrinsic motivation. Even though this concern cannot be accommodated in each decision, being aware in this way can still have a large cumulative impact since leaders make so many decisions that affect their followers.

Another way leaders can be aware is by looking for opportunities to promote or protect follower intrinsic motivation. This can involve looking for ways of implementing new measures that can help followers better fulfil their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which according to self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci 2017) promotes intrinsic motivation. Or it can involve looking for issues in the organisation that hinder their followers in fulfilling their needs, so that these issues can be removed or reduced.

The findings of this study suggests that the informants have a high level of awareness of this issue in their everyday work situation, because they describe how they work on promoting intrinsic motivation on an ongoing basis as an integrated part of their everyday work.

Awareness may also involve knowing one's followers, their situation and what they need to perform their best. This understanding can help leaders better adapt their leadership approach to the particular needs of their followers.

The more awareness a leader has, both in the sense of considering this issue when making decisions and by looking for opportunities to promote and protect intrinsic motivation, the better they will be able to engage in practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers. A leader who lacks such awareness is unlikely to act on their intention of promoting intrinsic motivation in followers.

By proposing this element, my model differs from the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen et al. 2018), which does not include such an element. Nevertheless, I believe this point is an important condition for being able to translate one's assumptions about intrinsic motivation into practice. It is also important for helping understand how Theory Y assumptions can be translated into practice. Including this issue of awareness in the model can also help explain why underlying assumptions matter in leadership: If the leader has made the decision that certain assumptions or principles will guide their leadership practice, then a logical consequence of this will be that the leader is likely to be aware of this principle and include it when making decisions. (Although it is not a given in practice).

I also believe that this very deliberate element is somehow missing in the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen et al. 2018). The theory of planned behaviour seems a little more “mechanical” in the way it describes how attitudes influence behaviour - if the person has these attitudes, they will likely behave in this way. But the aspect of making deliberate decisions about how the person *wants* to act, does not seem to be very strong in the theory of planned behaviour. In the theory of planned behaviour, the intention to act is mainly an outcome of the person’s assumptions about the expectations of others, of one’s skills, and the expected outcomes of the behaviour. Although the expected outcomes and intention are connected to the person’s deliberate decisions, the skills and other people’s expectations are nevertheless major influences in the model. The person’s own expectations and wants seem to be missing in this model. The element of the leader’s own wants is stronger in my model, although it is perhaps not clear enough in my model either. After all, my model is also a simplification of reality, and I extracted only two elements from a larger set of assumptions that underlie the leadership practice of the informants.

### **5.3.7 Assuming that promoting intrinsic motivation in followers requires extensive effort**

Leaders who want to promote their followers’ intrinsic motivation are likely to have assumptions about the amount and type of effort to invest in supporting their followers to achieve this. These assumptions are likely to affect how much effort they invest in supporting their followers’ intrinsic motivation.

Leaders may vary in whether they assume that the promotion of intrinsic motivation requires a more “shallow” approach, or a “deeper” and more thorough approach. Based on the findings of this study, I suggest that a deep level approach may involve assuming that intrinsic motivation should be promoted as an integrated and ongoing part of everyday practice. It may also include assuming that the leader needs to take personal responsibility for making sure that this happens, and that this work requires a great deal of thought, time, and effort. This approach may also involve believing that followers should be actively involved in this work.

In contrast, a more superficial approach may involve assuming that intrinsic motivation can be promoted mainly outside the everyday work situation, by arranging one-off motivational events such as courses, seminars, or speeches. Since these events can be arranged by outsiders, this approach may assume that the leader can delegate responsibility for promoting intrinsic motivation to others. This means that the leader does not need to dedicate as much time and effort to this work. Another implication of seeing motivation as something that can be promoted through motivational events, is that followers tend to be given a more passive role as “receivers” of motivation, rather than as co-creators of a work environment that facilitates their motivational needs.

The leaders in this study describe how they promote intrinsic motivation as part of their everyday work activities on an ongoing basis, rather than only on special occasions. The seven main themes 3-7 in the findings chapter describe how they as a group promote intrinsic motivation in a multitude of ways, suggesting that their approach to this work is comprehensive and thorough, rather than superficial. This suggests that their approach is based on the assumption that the promotion of intrinsic motivation requires considerable and sustained effort.

A leader with a “deep” view, who believes in devoting time, effort, and thought to promoting intrinsic motivation, and in taking personal responsibility and involving followers in this work, is likely to do more to promote the intrinsic motivation of followers than a leader with a more superficial view, who may assume that responsibility for this work can be delegated to others and that it can be promoted in one-off motivational events.

This element in the model is related to the TPB construct of “intention,” which also involves deciding how much effort to engage in the behaviour (Ajzen et al. 2018). This box could be an antecedent of “intention,” because the leader’s assumption about how much effort is possible and required to truly promote intrinsic motivation is likely to influence how much effort the leader is willing to invest in the behaviour.

My model differs from TPB by including this assumption as an influence on behaviour. I believe this assumption could be a reason why many leaders do not invest extensive effort in promoting intrinsic motivation in their followers. This

may be the case even though this is something these leaders want to do, and may even believe that they are doing. But then they underestimate how much effort is necessary and how much can be done, and therefore do not invest sufficient effort. If they had not made this underestimation, it is possible that many of these leaders would have been willing to invest more effort into promoting intrinsic motivation in their followers.

### **5.3.8 Engaging in leader practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers**

Figure 5.2 illustrates that the leader needs to have high levels of the beliefs and convictions in all the other boxes to invest significant effort in practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers. This means that the leader must: (1) believe that the followers have a potential for being intrinsically motivated and that it is beneficial for them to be so, (2) want to promote intrinsic motivation in followers, (3) see it as important to promote intrinsic motivation in followers, (4) see it as a priority relative to other important issues that need to be dealt with in the organisation, (5) choose to base their leadership practice on this principle, (6) be aware of this issue in the everyday work situation, and (7) assume that it requires much effort.

Each of these assumptions and personal convictions helps influence how much effort the leader is likely to invest in practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers. The stronger the leader's beliefs and convictions are in each of these boxes, the more effort they are likely to invest in promoting intrinsic motivation in followers. If the leader has a low level of the beliefs or convictions in one or more of the boxes, they are likely to invest little or no effort in this activity.

In the findings chapter, we have seen that themes 3-7 suggest that it is possible for leaders to take a comprehensive approach to promoting intrinsic motivation in followers. This can be contrasted with leaders who take a more superficial approach where motivating followers is thought of in terms of one-off events such as courses, seminars, or lectures.

The findings suggest that a comprehensive approach can be interwoven in the leader's everyday practice. This means that it can be a fundamental part of how the leader thinks, plans, acts, and makes decisions. The findings also suggest that these efforts can be ongoing rather than one-off, and that the leader can be involved and take responsibility for these efforts. In addition, the findings suggest that a comprehensive approach can also involve making efforts to be in touch with their followers and their work situation. This can help leaders get a better understanding of their followers' motivational needs and how they can support and protect these needs.

This can be contrasted with a more limited approach where a leader thinks of motivating followers as sending them to a course, seminar, or lecture. Such a leader is in fact "outsourcing" responsibility for motivating followers to the organisers of this type of event, rather than taking responsibility themselves. This could signal to the followers that it is not important enough for the leader to be personally involved. It also means that they think of motivating employees as an activity that can take place outside the everyday work situation, which means that the lessons learned are likely to have limited relevance for their work. Another reason why the lessons are likely to have limited relevance is that the lecture addresses all the employees in the same way, rather than addressing their individual needs. The limited duration of a one-off lecture is also likely to have less effect than motivational efforts that are ongoing throughout the year. But perhaps the most important reason why this approach is unlikely to have much effect on the intrinsic motivation of employees, is that this concern is not a fundamental part of the leader's way of thinking, planning, acting, and decision-making. This means that the leader misses out on the opportunity to promote intrinsic motivation in the employees' everyday work situation.

This element in the model can be related to the TPB concept of "behaviour," which refers to the likelihood that the person will engage in the behaviour (Ajzen et al. 2018). This differs from the focus of my model, which is more on the extent to which the leader is likely to engage in the behaviour, than on whether or not the leader is likely to engage in the behaviour.

The reason for this difference is that TPB is a general theory that can be applied to a wide range of behaviours, contexts, and situations. In contrast, my model is

more specific, and I can therefore adjust the components to my particular interest. Of course, it is of interest in my model whether the leader acts or not, and the possibility of not acting is therefore included as an option in my model. However, I believe it is more interesting to understand what it takes for the leader to engage extensively in the practices, as I propose that only doing so to a small degree has little value when it comes to promoting intrinsic motivation in followers.

Together, the elements of this model can be summed up in the following proposition:

**Proposition:** *The more strongly the leader holds the following assumptions and convictions: (1) believing in intrinsic motivation, (2) wanting to promote intrinsic motivation in followers, (3) seeing it as important to promote intrinsic motivation in followers, (4) giving high priority to promoting intrinsic motivation in followers, (5) choosing to base one's leadership practice on this principle, (6) being aware in the everyday work situation, and (7) assuming that promoting intrinsic motivation in followers requires extensive effort, the more extensive effort the leader is likely to invest in promoting intrinsic motivation in followers.*

### **5.3.9 How the model can add understanding to McGregor's theory**

By going into more detail about how the personal convictions in Box B can influence the relationship between Theory Y assumptions and Theory Y practices, the model in Figure 5.2 on page 181 can also add more understanding to McGregor's (1960/2006) theory. According to this model, the leader must have high levels of each of the positive assumptions and personal convictions in boxes 1-7 to engage substantially in practices that promote intrinsic motivation in followers. Translated to Theory Y, this means that the leader must have high levels of Theory Y assumptions, but also of each of the five personal convictions in order to engage significantly in Theory Y practices. This differs from McGregor's theory, by not taking it as a given that having Theory Y assumptions automatically means that the leader will also engage in Theory Y practices. The study thus proposes a modification to McGregor's theory, by suggesting that a leader with Theory Y assumptions will only practise Theory Y leadership to the



extent that the leader sees the principles of Theory Y as important, as a priority, as something they choose to base their leadership practice on, as something they are aware of in their everyday work, and to the extent that they assume that it requires extensive effort.

By proposing these mediating personal convictions, the study is thus improving our understanding of the process through which Theory Y assumptions can influence leaders to practise Theory Y leadership. The model in Figure 5.2 also explains how these personal convictions can cause leaders to vary in the extent to which they translate their Theory Y assumptions into Theory Y leader practices, or indeed not translate their assumptions into practice at all. This differs from McGregor's (1960/2006) original formulation, because he appears to assume that there is correspondence between the leader's Theory Y assumptions and Theory Y practices. This is also of particular interest to this study, since the focus is on Theory Y as a leadership form that involves promoting intrinsic motivation in followers. And as previously discussed, the logic of this study assumes that leaders must engage in high levels of Theory Y leadership to truly promote intrinsic motivation in followers.

### **5.3.10 Insights for transformational leadership and self-determination theory**

The findings of this study also have relevance for transformational leadership theory (Burns 1978/2000, Bass 1985, Bass & Riggio 2006). We have seen that previous studies have found Theory Y assumptions to be antecedents of transformational leadership (Pastor & Mayo 2008, Şahin et al. 2017), and that transformational leadership involves promoting intrinsic motivation in followers (Conchie 2013, Shin & Zhou 2003, Wang & Gagné 2013). This suggests that the leader assumptions and personal convictions described in the model in Figure 5.2, are also antecedents of transformational leadership behaviour. The model can therefore explain why transformational leaders vary in the degree to which they promote intrinsic motivation in their followers, and the influencing role of leader assumptions and personal convictions in this process.

In addition, the findings of this study can also improve our understanding of self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci 2017) in organisations. We have seen in the findings chapter that the leaders in this study engage in extensive behaviours that promote fulfilment of the three needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness as posited by self-determination theory in their followers. The positive leader assumptions and personal convictions described in the model in Figure 5.2 can therefore also be seen as antecedents of leader practices that promote the three basic psychological needs in organisations, and the model thus explains why leaders vary in the degree to which they promote these needs in organisations.

#### ***5.4 Implications for practice***

The findings of this study have several possible implications for practice. One such implication is that the study provides examples of how leaders can promote intrinsic motivation in their followers. These examples offer lessons that other leaders can learn from.

Another lesson for practice is how much the leaders in this study do to promote intrinsic motivation in their followers. Promoting the motivation of their followers is not something they deal with in a seminar once a year; instead, this is an integral part of their leadership. This way of thinking is exemplified by one of the sports coaches in this study, who explains that almost everything he does as a coach is about furthering the motivation of the people he is working with, and that he sees motivation as something that is “deep and lasting within us.” This illustrates how the leaders in this study do not see promoting the motivation of their followers as a superficial activity; instead, it is deeply ingrained in their leadership practice. By taking such an extensive approach, the cumulative effect of the leaders’ efforts can be substantial.

A further implication of these findings is that leader training and education could place more emphasis on assumptions, beliefs, and attitudes. When teaching leaders theoretical knowledge about intrinsic motivation, this could involve placing greater emphasis on the benefits of intrinsic motivation. By placing more emphasis on the *why* of intrinsic motivation, and not only on the *what*, leaders are more likely to be convinced that this is something worth investing in.

Another way leader training could address the leaders' assumptions and attitudes is by giving them practical exercises in how to promote intrinsic motivation in followers. This gives leaders the opportunity to experience first-hand the benefits of promoting intrinsic motivation, and it gives them practical experience with how it can be done. Leader training can also address assumptions and attitudes by letting leaders reflect on their own experiences of being intrinsically motivated. This can also increase their awareness and appreciation of the benefits of intrinsic motivation. As I argue in this dissertation, it is likely that the more convinced the leader is of the benefits of intrinsic motivation, the more likely they are to invest efforts in promoting it.

## ***5.5 Conclusions***

McGregor's (1960/2006) theory is still relevant today, more than 60 years after its introduction. It is regarded as one of the most important management theories (Bedeian & Wren 2001), and is still frequently cited in the management literature. Despite the prominence of the theory, the issues McGregor addressed still persist in the real world. The level of intrinsic motivation in the workplace remains low (Gallup 2016), suggesting that most managers still do not lead in ways that support their followers' intrinsic motivation. This study has revisited McGregor's theory by demonstrating its continued relevance, and offering suggestions for how it can be developed further.

One of the main theoretical contributions of this study is the identification of a gap in McGregor's theory. While McGregor posits that leaders who have positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour will practise leadership that promotes intrinsic motivation in followers, he does not fully explain the process where assumptions are translated into practice. To address this gap, I proposed a model, illustrated in Figure 5.2, that explains the role of five mediating personal convictions in this process.

The proposed model improves our understanding of McGregor's Theory Y by explaining how personal convictions can influence whether and to what degree leaders are likely to translate their Theory Y assumptions into Theory Y practices. By posing a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between

assumptions and practices in McGregor's theory, this study offers a new perspective that goes beyond McGregor's original formulation which assumed correspondence between Theory Y assumptions and Theory Y practices.

This study can also offer contributions to other theories. The proposed model illuminates the relationship between Theory Y assumptions and both transformational leadership theory (Burns 1978/2000, Bass 1985, Bass & Riggio 2006) and self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci 2017). Based on the shared principles of Theory Y leadership and transformational leadership, the study can also contribute to our understanding of how positive assumptions can influence transformational leaders to engage in practices that promote intrinsic motivation in their followers. The study also contributes to a better understanding of self-determination theory in the workplace. Because the leadership practices described in this study also align with the principles of self-determination theory, the study contributes to a better understanding of the antecedents of leadership that promotes self-determination in the workplace.

In conclusion, this study supports the enduring relevance of McGregor's Theory Y and contributes to our understanding of how positive assumptions about human nature and human behaviour can influence leaders to promote intrinsic motivation in followers. By highlighting the significance of McGregor's theory and offering insight into the role of personal convictions, this study contributes to the furthering of leadership theory and provides valuable insights for practitioners who want to promote intrinsic motivation among their employees.

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## **7. APPENDIX: SAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE**

### **1) Background – starting the interview**

-Could you tell me a little about yourself and your role as a leader?

### **2) About your view of people**

-How would you describe your view of people?

-Why do you think about people in this way?

-How have people responded to this?

### **3) The motivation of the followers**

-How do you think about the motivation of the followers?

-How do you support their motivation?

### **4) Values**

-Which values guide your view of people?

-Which values are most important to you as a leader?

### **5) View of people and leadership**

-What significance does your view of people have in your leadership?

-How do you think about bringing out the best in your followers?

-How do you think about balancing the interests of the employees and the interests of the organisation?

### **6) Trust and limits to trust**

-How do you think about trusting the employees? Is that always possible in your job?

-What does one do with people who do not have the best interests of others in mind?

-What is the best way to deal with such people?

### **7) Concluding remarks**

-Is there anything you would like to add?