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# **Leadership Practices in the Fashion Industry: Aligning the creative and commercial aspects within a fashion company context**

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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>This thesis explores leadership practices, which align the creative ability of the fashion designer with the commercial goal of the fashion company, without the risk of suppressing the artistic motivation. In addressing this agenda, this study draws on both creativity and leadership literature to outline the emergent creative leadership concept and does answer to the call of De Fillippi, et al. (2007) which asked for more empirical studies in different cultural industries about the leadership of creativity. The importance of the study is given to the rising need for creativity for all industries to support the impertinent need for constant innovation.</p> <p>The Thesis is divided into two main parts, a theoretical and an empirical part. The theoretical part consists of an extensive literature review about the definition of creativity, the fashion business, leading creativity in cultural industries and the leadership-as-practice view. The empirical part examines the leadership practices of three successful Finnish fashion companies, by interviewing the leadership team of the companies and evaluating the interviews in a cross-case analysis. Both parts have been used to determine three leadership practices in fashion companies that allow the alignment of creative and commercial aspects within a company: “structured milestone meetings and informal communication”; “counterbalance and mutual decision making”; “a structured freedom space for the designer”. In addition, further practical implications and guidelines are elaborated in the discussion part which could not be identified as leadership practices.</p>		
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## Preface

From a personal perspective, I have always been attracted to the creative mind, as I do see myself as an analytical one. Since high school, I found it fascinating how people would not be able to see structure in numbers as I did but on the other side easily created stories from scratch which I struggled with. Understanding the difference between those minds and trying to achieve abilities in both fields, creativity and analytics, has become a personal agenda. During my working life a further phenomena caught my attention: leadership. I found it fascinating to observe leaders and followers and analyze the different behaviors. I found myself wondering why certain people were able to lead efficiently teams while others failed before starting. This major interest in leadership brought me to study Knowledge Management and Leadership at Aalto University.

This thesis is born at the intersection of two personal interests of mine: the creative mind and leadership. Luckily, nowadays is the right time to study those phenomena as creativity is seen as a major source of competitive advantage and companies need to be able to align the creative abilities of their employees with their commercial goal. I choose the fashion industry because I do believe that the fashion industry encompasses creativity and commerce at its maximum extension. The fashion industry is inspiration, creativity and intuition on one hand and organisation, strategy and management on the other.

Hereby, I choose the leadership-as-practice lense to study the phenomenon, because I do support the idea that leadership is created within social environments and does not emerge from a single person. However, I do leave the question open if certain people are abler then others to initiate practices in their favor and therefore can not completely undermine the competency literature. The leadership-as-practice literature is still very young, therefore I struggled with implementing the lense due to lack in definitions and examples, however, I am convinced that I was able to add new findings to the literature and helped narrow definitions for the leadership-as-practice theory. Moreover, I did struggle with the qualitative analysis paradigm, as this was my first qualitative analysis. Nevertheless, both struggles allowed me to broaden my knowledge and I am grateful to have achieved substantial knowledge in both qualitative analysis and leadership-as-practice.

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Furthermore, I would like to thank all the people who agreed to be interviewed by me and made this thesis possible. Without your willingness to share your knowledge and personal experience, this Thesis could have never happened.

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# 1. Introduction

Creativity is seen as the decisive source of competitive advantages (Florida, 2002) throughout most industries as creativity is needed to achieve continuous innovation, which will allow companies to stay competitive in a constantly changing environment. The accustomed belief is that creativity is incomprehensible, abstract and potentially contrasting the business logic, as aesthetics is pitted against the efficient, and commerce battles with 'art for art's sake' (Townley, et al., 2009). However, the true nature of the tension between creativity and commerce, between art and business, remains often unclear. This Thesis wants to offer a new perspective on leadership of creativity by studying the fashion business. The fashion business, part of the cultural businesses, which are per definition businesses based on individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property (DMSC, 1998), requires a high demand for creativity perfectly balanced with business skills to be successful. Moreover, the fashion business is seen as fore-runner of management techniques (De Fillippi, et al., 2007) and suggested as an organizational template for sectors struggling with volatile customer taste and reduced product life cycles (Townley, et al., 2009) designating it as suitable sector to study the balance between two seemingly opposing company aspects, such as creativity and commerce. The focus of this Thesis are leadership practices in Finnish fashion companies, which have demonstrated constant growth in the previous years and achieved international brand recognition. In particular, this Thesis will study how creative employees are led in order to achieve commercial success, hereby we will not study how creativity is fostered, as the literature regarding fostering creativity in employees is highly extended, but how to align creativity and commercial goals.

The Thesis is divided into two main parts, a theoretical and an empirical part. The theoretical part consists of an extensive literature review about the definition of creativity, the fashion business, leading creativity in cultural industries and the leadership-as-practice view. The empirical part examines the leadership practices of three successful Finnish fashion companies, by interviewing the leadership team of the companies and evaluating the interviews in a cross-case analysis. Both parts will be used to determine leadership practices in fashion companies that allow the alignment of creative and commercial aspects within a company.



This first chapter is an introduction to the study. First, the background and motivation of this Thesis will be presented. Secondly, the research problem, as well as three research questions, will be defined and the objectives and the scope of the study will be discussed. The chapter ends by explaining the structure of the Thesis.

## 1.1 Relevance of creativity

Global competition, rapid technological change, and an increasingly demanding environment, force companies to continuously innovate to maintain their market position. The ability of organizations to innovate has become crucial to their long-term performance (Yoshida, et al., 2014). As creativity is seen as the cornerstone of innovation (Klijn & Tomic, 2010), it consequently has gained notability in the last decades. Accordingly, creativity in the workplace has become an important prerequisite of organizational performance and success (Anderson, et al., 2014) and employees are expected to exhibit creative behavior (Guo, et al., 2018). As a result, organizations strive to understand the process of creativity and adopt policies to foster and harness their employee's creativity.

The academic community has understood the need of organizations and exponential growth in the number of published articles on creativity and innovation and on workplace creativity and innovation can be observed over the last decades (Anderson, et al., 2014). Studies have been carried out to understand the impact of work environment (Coman & Bonciu, 2014), intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Li, et al., 2018), job autonomy (Li, et al., 2018), management (Galloway & Haniff, 2015), and leadership (Mumford, et al., 2002) on employees creativity. Especially the impact of leadership on creativity and team innovation is seen as essential (Hughes, et al., 2018), leading to studies of the impact of different leadership styles on creativity such as: transformational leadership (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009), authoritarian leadership (Guo, et al., 2018), servant leadership (Yoshida, et al., 2014), organic leadership (Manucot, 2018), authentic leadership (Zubair & Kamal, 2015) or creative leadership (Mainemelis, et al., 2015). For the purpose of this Thesis, I will focus on the impact of leadership on employee's creativity, however, I will distance myself from the concept of leadership styles and focus on leadership practices. The choice to focus on leadership practices is grounded in the belief that practices are more suitable to describe a social phenomenon, such as the alignment of commercial and creative company aspects, because the as-practice view allows a more holistic and contemporary view of the

phenomenon (Nicolini, 2012). The holistic view is achieved due to the analysis of groups and relationships instead of a single leader (Raelin, 2016). Moreover, although multiple studies about the impact of leadership on creativity have been carried out, a gap in the literature can be found reading leadership practices and their impact on creativity.

As stated beforehand, the recent interest in creativity can be explained as a strategic response to ever hardening competition and globalization. The first response to these threats was cost reductions. As the pressure of international competitiveness increased a downward trend in cost occurred. These cost reductions were either met by labor substitution, for example through automation, or by cheaper labor, mostly found in alternative regions (Jeffcut & Pratt, 2002). During the cost reduction cycle, the cultural industries found themselves mostly in tumult, as their lack of management hindered the focus on cost reduction (Saviolo & Testa, 2000). Nonetheless, a clear shift in the cultural industries towards a more management-driven approach occurred, allowing new companies like Zara and H&M to succeed due to their effective and responsive operation techniques (Ünay & Zehir, 2012) that lead to cost reductions instead of fashion creations. The cost reduction cycle forced cultural industries to learn from technological management-driven industries.

The creative cycle we are currently experiencing calls for the opposite trend. Technological management-driven industries nowadays should learn from creativity-driven industries. Ibbotson & Darsø (2008), state that new possibilities of learning from artist and artistic methods have emerged leading to new methods and practices for all industries. Likewise, De Fillippi, et al. (2007) regard the cultural industries as major forerunners and experimental sites for managerial practices of the permanently innovating organization. Nonetheless, only a few papers have looked at cultural industries, one of the fastest growing sectors in many economies, to understand how creativity is managed (Galloway & Haniff, 2015) (De Fillippi, et al., 2007) (Jeffcut & Pratt, 2002). Therefore, this Thesis will look at a cultural industry, the fashion industry, to understand how to lead creativity. The fashion industry was chosen due to its characterization by its volatility, velocity, variety, complexity and dynamics (Ciarniene & Vienazindiene, 2014), which reflect the rapid technological change and short product development cycles of the contemporary technical industry (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009). Moreover, the conflicts and tensions between the imperative of a relentless creation of products on the one hand and economic viability on the other,

presumably take shape in the fashion industry in a most striking way (De Fillippi, et al., 2007).

## 1.2 Research objectives

The co-existence of business and artistic objectives in creative companies (Reid & Karambayya, 2009), and especially in fashion companies, provides a convenient setting to explore leadership practices which successfully align commercial and creative goals.

The general assumption is that art and business constitute distinct and potentially contradictory aspects within a company, however, the nature of these aspects and the tensions between them remain often unclear. In literature we can find studies about those tensions, and how they have been managed, in cultural industries, such as theater management (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007), haute cuisine (Svejenova, et al., 2007) architecture (Galloway & Haniff, 2015), film production (Perretti & Negro, 2007) and music recording (Gander, et al., 2007) (Thompson, et al., 2007). However, similar studies have not been conducted in the fashion industry, even if De Fillippi, et al. (2007) asked for more empirical studies in different cultural industries, because from each can be learned due to their own distinctive environment. The scope of this Thesis is not to close this gap in the literature; however, I will discuss the overall tension between art and business in the literature review using the logic of practice by Pierre Bourdieu (1992).

The scope of this Thesis is to explore leadership practices, which align the creative ability of the fashion designer with the commercial goal of the company, without the risk of suppressing the artistic motivation. Hereby, I want to differentiate this study from research concerning how to foster creativity in employees, as this Thesis is concerned with how the already existing creativity can be channeled in order to accomplish the commercial goals of the company. In literature, one finds significant associations between leadership styles and leader characteristics with fostering followers' creativity (Hughes, et al., 2018), however, a lack in "creativity leading" can be found.

This Thesis integrates two streams of leadership literature, the leadership-as-practice literature and literature about creative leadership. Furthermore, the tension between business and art and the definition of creativity will be elaborated to establish an overall

understanding of the phenomenon. In general, I will use the practice theory to support my chosen definitions and to analyze the case studies, as the practice theory is useful both in explaining the tension between the creative and commercial aspects of the company and the effect of leadership on the artistic and commercial success of the company. Accordingly, the following research questions have been defined:

1. How do leaders of fashion companies align the creative and commercial aspects within the company?
2. Which practices enable the leaders of fashion companies to channel the creative intuition of fashion designers in the same direction as the commercial gain?
3. Which practices allow the leaders of fashion companies to reduce the risk of suppressing the artistic motivation by commercial pressure?

By answering these research questions the aim is to improve the understanding of creative leadership by detecting practices suitable to lead creative employees to commercial success without diminishing their artistic motivation. Hereby, the third research question was formulated according to Amabile (1998) who states that suppressing creativity is one of the biggest risks when leading creative people. In choosing the fashion industry, I am seeking to avoid the omission of creativity and organizational anarchy on one hand and commercial rationality and standardization on the other (Jeffcut & Pratt, 2002). Besides the fashion industry itself, the whole cultural industries and probably all industries can take advantage of such practices. However, we will leave it to further studies to determine the suitability of the detected practices for other industries.

The research questions are answered through a case-study research in which three fashion company cases will be examined and cross-analyzed. The case studies are conducted by interviewing 2-4 people who are members of the leadership team and represent either the creative or the commercial aspect of the company. These people include the main designer, the commercial leader and core employees involved in the design process.

This Thesis aims to answer and enhance understanding on leading creativity to commercial success within fashion companies using a leadership-as-practice approach. The research opens up new avenues for further research, as no initial or explorative research has been

made on this specific topic before. The qualitative explorative findings can offer an excellent breeding ground for future research.

### 1.3 Structure of the Thesis

This Thesis is divided into five sections: (1) introduction, (2) theory and literature, (3) research methodology, (4) data collection and analysis, and (5) discussion.

Following this introductory chapter, I review the academic literature which is relevant for the purposes of this study. The focus of the chapter is to understand the tensions between art and business within a company based on the logic of practice by Bourdieu P. (1992) and at the same time to show its compatibility with the leadership-as-practice approach. Furthermore, this chapter will include definitions of creativity and available literature about leading creative employees.

The third chapter presents the methodology used in this Thesis. The research design choices will be elaborated and evidence for the chosen research design will be demonstrated. Furthermore, the research context will be described, the three case studies presented, and their suitability elaborated. Lastly, the chapter will elaborate on the data analysis. Hereby, each case will be analyzed by its own and only in a second step a cross-case study will be carried out.

The fourth chapter presents the findings of the empirical part of the study, delineating the three leadership practices elaborated in this Thesis. The last chapter presents the integration of the findings with the existing literature, the limitations of the study and the recommendations for further research. The structure of the chapter follows the research questions. At the end of this chapter, the most important practical and theoretical implications are presented, and study limitations are critically discussed. Finally, concluding remarks are provided to summarize the Thesis.

## 2. Theoretical background

This Thesis involves two topics: leadership as practice and creativity and its management. Albeit, the two literature streams concern the same phenomenon, the leadership of employees, they have developed independently. My research questions exist at the intersection of these two leadership streams and by merging the literature with the findings of the cross-case study tries to achieve a comprehensive view of leadership practices in the fashion business. This literature review will discuss the relevant findings from the literature streams, after introducing the fashion business and examining tensions between creative and commercial logics in creative organizations. The chapter will conclude with a synthesis of the literature streams, which will explain why the leadership-as-practice concept and the definition of creativity according to the logic of practice have been chosen as theoretical lenses.

### 2.1 The Fashion Industry

*Fashion companies require both fashion creativity and business intellect  
(Ünay & Zehir, 2012)*

The Fashion industry encompasses a larger social and cultural phenomenon named by Ciarniene and Vienazindiene (2014) as the fashion system, a concept that includes art and business as well as production and consumption. By this means, the industry incorporates the design, manufacturing, distribution, marketing, retailing, advertising, and promotion of all types of apparel (Ciarniene & Vienazindiene, 2014). The wide-range nature of the fashion industry, aggravated by its volatile environment due to rapidly fluctuating trends influenced by fashion leaders, make the industry one of the most rapidly changing. Hereby, fashion leaders are not the leaders of fashion companies, but trendsetters, such as bloggers or celebrities. How rapidly changing this industry is can be shown by the time-to-market, as the sourcing of material, the manufacturing of the product and the delivery to the market is invariably longer than the time the customer is prepared to wait. All these factors characterize the fashion business as a forward-thinking sector (Ünay & Zehir, 2012) leading fashion companies to strive for innovation, differentiation, and appeal.

While fashion companies strive for innovation and appeal, it can be difficult to identify the indicators of success for fashion companies as success can be described through pragmatic outcomes, such as sales, but also through less measurable gains, such as cultural and reputational values (Marcella & Rowley, 2015). Those less measurable gains coincide with the non-utilitarian value of creative products, which offers the client aesthetic, symbolic and experiential value instead of functional (Townley, et al., 2009). Fashion products embody both non-utilitarian and utilitarian values, demanding from fashion companies to achieve both product innovation and business operation innovation. Hereby, product innovation describes the creative and artistic innovation achieved by the designer, while business operation innovation encompasses the innovative use of marketing and supply chain management methods (Ünay & Zehir, 2012). The duality of fashion companies, represented by the non-utilitarian value of the product on one side and the short time-to-market requests on the other, depicts the need for both management techniques and creative skills (Ünay & Zehir, 2012) and the temporal and conceptual alignment of those. For example, if the designer creates a new shape, the business operations have to adapt to be able to deliver the shape, while on the other hand if a new fiber has been developed due to new production methods, the creative part must temporarily and conceptually align in order to bring the new fiber on the market.

Despite the need of management practices in the fashion industry, the industry was neglected from an academic point of view (Saviolo & Testa, 2000), and only in the last two decades, studies about managing and leading fashion business have arisen. However, the research focused on areas such as marketing, event management, supply chain management and communication (Marcella & Rowley, 2015), not on leading creativity within the fashion business and research into leadership practices in the fashion industry is still sporadic. Nonetheless, I argue that to stay competitive, leaders of fashion companies have to excel in leading creativity as much as in managing marketing, supply chain, and retail. This statement is supported by the fact that the fashion business is a desire-based, as opposed to needs-based industry (Manucot, 2018), therefore, the artistic appeal of the product has the same value of the timely placement on the market.

In conclusion, fashion companies are not only about style and continuous style changes but also about efficient supply chains and innovative materials, requiring both “fashion creativity and business intellect” (Ünay & Zehir, 2012) within a fashion company. This duality

of fashion companies delineates them as adequate study setting for this Thesis, as the focus of the Thesis is the alignment of creative and commercial aspects and therefore it is crucial to place the study in a setting where both creative and commercial aspects are represented in the companies.

## 2.2 Creativity

*“Creativity, as has been said, consists largely of rearranging what we know in order to find out what we do not know. Hence, to think creatively, we must be able to look afresh at what we normally take for granted”*

*George Kneller*

In recent years, both industry and academia have placed a premium upon creativity, as it drives progress and allows organizations to maintain competitive advantage (Hughes, et al., 2018). However, the dynamic nature of creativity caused dilemmas and paradoxes in defining and measuring it. Interestingly, definitional confusion of creativity has been reviewed in multiple studies, nevertheless a unified definition could not be achieved (Anderson, et al., 2014). On one hand, creativity is defined as the generation of new ideas (Mumford, et al., 2002) or the ability to create something novel and appropriated (Amabile & Khaire, 2008), on the other it is defined as the mental process that interconnects novel ideas and context (Jeffcut & Pratt, 2002). Hereby, the first definition defines creativity by its outcomes, while the second describes creativity as a mental activity. For the purpose of this Thesis, the value of the second definition is acknowledged, in alignment with the argument of Hughes, et al. (2018) that defining a phenomenon by its outcomes does not describe the nature of the phenomenon and makes it difficult to differentiate the phenomenon from its effect.

Besides distancing the definition of creativity from a definition by its outcomes, for the purpose of this Thesis, the definition of creativity will furthermore be disconnected from the lonely-genius concept. Hereby in the “Western” tradition from Plato to Freud and Popper creativity has mostly been regarded as divergent, impulsive, ‘messy’, embodied in a type of personality, such as the lonely genius, and connected to an enigmatic moment of Genesis (De Fillippi, et al., 2007). However, the contemporary literature, especially in sociology of art and culture and in sociology of knowledge, has contradicted this



conception and pointed to the importance of the context and relationship within which creativity takes place (Ibbotson & Darsø, 2008). This is especially true in fashion companies, where the designer is influenced by the context he/she works in and the networks surrounding him/her as the designer takes inputs from the environment, ranging from the trends of the last season to socio-political trends, and elaborates them in complex cycles of knowledge flows between people within his team. In other words, creativity is a mental process that requires personal knowledge and the acquisition of new information from the environment and consists of rearranging this information (Kneller, 1965).

Finally, a third concept is introduced to finalize the definition of creativity for the fashion industry: the aesthetic component of creativity. For the purpose of this Thesis, creativity will not be seen as problem-solving ability, but as an expression of artistic abilities, as “arts-for-arts-sake” ability. This means that the value of the creative product lies in the aesthetic value attributed by the socio-economic environment within it is created (Townley, et al., 2009) instead of in the functional value it incorporates. This definition seems especially appropriate for the fashion industry, as a new product can only be viewed as creative if it is novel and it creates aesthetic value for the fashion market.

In conclusion, for the purpose of this Thesis, creativity is defined as the mental ability to rearrange knowledge within a certain environment to generate novel products of aesthetic value. Besides being suitable to describe creativity in the fashion context, this definition does also align with the as-practice view used to describe the concept of leadership in this Thesis, as both highlight the importance of relationships and context in their definition.

## 2.3 Creative vs. commercial company aspects

*Creative industries are still industries and as such must fit a reasonable business model if they are to be sustainable. Therein lies the balance leaders in creative industries have to manage on a daily basis.*

*(Galloway & Haniff, 2015)*

Art and commerce are often seen as polar opposites. While commerce is associated with exploitation for efficiency and profitability, art is seen as an exploration in which returns are both uncertain and not limited to economic ends (De Fillippi, et al., 2007). Therefore, if a

company encompasses both art and commerce it requires a balancing act between seemingly contradictory goals (Lampel, et al., 2000). The nature of this tension has mainly been described using two different theories; the theory of the creative and analytical mindset (Marcella & Rowley, 2015) and the theory of social practices and capitals (Townley, et al., 2009). The theory of the creative and analytical mindset is based on the differentiation between the right and the left hemisphere. Hereby, the left hemisphere helps us to articulate our understanding and follow logical thoughts, while the right hemisphere allows us to connect the said and heard to emotions. The left hemisphere allows us to analyze contemporary events, the right hemisphere allows us to imagine the future (Marcella & Rowley, 2015). While this theory is quintessential, in analyzing the behavior of analytical and creative people, I do argue that it is not useful in analyzing the tension between creativity and commerce in organizations, as it focuses on personal internal tensions between creativity and analytics, instead of external tensions expressed in relations and actions. Therefore, I will concentrate on the theory of practices and capitals, which on one hand allows me to describe the tension between creative and commercial and on the other aligns with the theory of practices used to describe leadership in the following chapter.

Bourdieu's theory of the logic of practice, allows us to explain how art and commerce can influence individual work-related actions, as it ideates individuals as producers of social practices that derive from specific logics of practice (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007). Social practices are "regulated" actions undertaken by individuals without being the product of obedience, however, orchestrated collectively without the organizing action of a conductor (Bourdieu, 1990). For example, a social practice is wearing black at a funeral, the action is taken by all the members of the group, without anyone orchestrating it and without an act of obedience. Interestingly, individuals underestimate the harmonization of actions with members of the same group or class and are convinced of their autonomy in action, which however leads to, as Leibniz said, "agree with the others". This agreement is driven by the aim of maintaining or increasing one's personal capital, which can be of economic, social or cultural nature (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007). The economic capital describes wealth in general, while social capital indicates the resources one can activate thanks to a membership of social networks, lastly cultural capital is one's personal and individual competencies (Townley, et al., 2009).

Those capitals are the basis on which individuals within fields, for example, business, culture, politics or academia, establish their practices. For example, in the business field, individuals will create practices to render the most benefit in economic capital, while cultural capital will be the focus in the cultural field. Bourdieu (1990) elaborated field specific logics, which describe the norms, values and unwritten laws upon which the actions of all players in a field are based. Of interest for this Thesis, are the artistic and economic logic, as the fashion industry can be understood as an intersection of the business and the cultural field. The economic logic of practice is based on market orientation. Individual benefit is achieved through exchanging goods and services via markets, for example, product markets, capital markets, and labor markets. Developed practices concern the maximization of economic gain based on cost efficiency, which is the most profitable use of financial resources. Economic social practices are therefore produced with the primary intention of producing market value and exchanging the output on a market. On the other hand, artistic logic of practice is based on the desire to produce *l'art pour l'art*. The value of the product is determined by the aesthetics or the individual reaction of the recipient and not determined by the market, even if market value sometimes exists. Therefore, social practices following the artistic logic are concerned with the primary intention of contributing to art as a greater good (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007).

In the fashion industry, we can find social practices following both the economic and the artistic logic. Hereby, the overlapping of the two logics causes the tension between the creative and commercial teams of the fashion company, because one team follows practices according to the economic logic, while the other team follows practices according to the artistic logic, causing a misunderstanding between the two teams. For example, the creative team may have difficulties to understand the commercial reasons to reduce costs, as this practice is connected to the logic of markets instead of the logic of aesthetic value on which the creative practices are based on. On the other hand, the commercial team may find it difficult to accept re-launching an innovative product with low sales, which goes against the logic of markets, while the creative team supports the re-launch due to the aesthetic value of the product. However, the practices arisen from the two logics are not erroneous, they just have to be adapted to the new environment (Amabile & Khair, 2008) and new practices have to form based on the overlapping of the two fields.

In conclusion, the nature of the tension between creative and commercial aspects within a fashion company is based on social practices and the logic of practice they follow, which enhance different and sometimes counterposing goals to attain. The purpose of this Thesis is to define those social practices, which allow the two fields to cooperate and align.

## 2.4 Leadership-as-practice

*‘Central to a practice lens is the notion that social life is an ongoing production and thus emerges through people’s recurrent actions’  
(Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011).*

Leadership-as-practice (LAP) is the movement which formally developed the as-practice approach to leadership (Raelin, 2016). Their main goal is to challenge the ‘ubiquitous’ competency paradigm (Carroll, et al., 2007) and enrich the leadership theory by describing leadership as practice rather than as an individual trait or behavior. The two streams, competency and practice, can be described by using Heidegger’s metaphor of *building* and *dwelling*. The building mode characterizes the competency logic and is based on preconceived objectives carried out by an intentional actor who acts on a world they stand separate from (Carroll, et al., 2007). In other words, the competency logic believes in isolated actions, which due to the fragmentation of a process in single steps, lead to a specific preconceived outcome. On the other hand, the dwelling mode, which characterizes the practice logic, is based on the individual being part of the world and immanent actions emerging non-deliberately through everyday practical coping (Chia & Holt, 2006). The practice theory considers the non-linearity of actions, as actions take place intuitively as reactions to the world, hereby the focus lays on groups and relationships instead of individuals. For the purpose of this Thesis, leadership will be consider as a set of collective practices, instead of a set of traits among gifted individuals (Raelin, 2016), complying with the leadership-as-practice lens.

As stated in the chapter “Creative vs. commercial company aspects”, practices develop within a community from mutual and recurring patterns over the time among those engaged in the practice as non-deliberative collective actions (Kempster & Gregory, 2017). In other words, a practice is “a coordinated effort among participants who choose through their own rules to achieve a distinctive outcome” (Raelin, 2016). Hereby, practices are based on

a shared common sense, co-constructed from social interactions and physical artifacts. The shared common sense, which allows the members of the community to align their commitment and to work towards the same goal, is constructed through a social meaning-making process (Drath & Palus, 1994). Hereby, meaning making is the individual mental process of interpreting one's personal experience to construct a coherent reality and anticipate future events. Social meaning-making is a similar mental process which includes exchanging information with the social environment and achieving a common view of what is happening (Drath & Palus, 1994). The social meaning-making process can also be aligned with the definition of leadership by Locke (2003): " the process of inducing others to take action toward a common goal".

For better understanding, we look at the example of a jazz band. During a jazz improvisation, the next tune (the direction) is only decided in the moment of playing, however, all members share a sense of knowing the practices of the jazz band, allowing a piece of coherent music to originate. Hereby, the practices are based upon the common sense of the "internal" band and the jazz community; such as technical or social skills developed in the cultural and socio-historic background of jazz (Kempster & Gregory, 2017). The Jazz example underlines the powerfulness of the as-practice view, because like the jazz music is constantly changing, so is also the world constantly in flux and interconnected. Therefore, the as-practice view is a useful tool to describe the contemporary experience of our world (Nicolini, 2012).

In conclusion, the as-practice view focuses on actions and interactions undertaken by individuals in communities of practice, which lead to collective practices. Hereby, the as-practice view is used to study multiple phenomena apart from leadership, like the strategy-as-practices view, which is much more established than the leadership-as-practice view. However, the underlying paradigms are the same for all as-practices approaches, such as identifying human agency as a producer of organizational reality (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011) and defining the unit of analysis the practices undertaken instead of the organization. Finally, defining leadership as construct of processes and practices, allows LAP a more nuanced analysis as competency or leadership type literature. I do believe that the practice theory is well suited for this study, as it allows us to study complex, dynamic and transient environments (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011) like the fashion industry.

## 2.5 Creative leadership

This Thesis focuses on creative leadership, in the belief that creative leadership does differ from the leadership of non-creative ventures. Those differences arise from the nature of creative work, which is characterized by ill-defined goals, unsure outcomes and happens at the intersection of innovation and organization (Mumford, et al., 2002). By definition creative efforts present novel and ill-defined tasks, as a result, leadership must be capable to induce direction and provide a structure where there is no inherent direction. However, leadership should not undermine the autonomy, professionalism, and motivation of creative employees by position power or conformity pressure. Therefore, leadership does include subtle influencing methods to lead creative people (Mumford, et al., 2002). In addition, the creative effort can stand opposed to the organizational purpose of a company, which does focus on efficient use of resources while creativity represents risky endeavors with unassured success (Mumford, et al., 2002). All these characteristics of creative work support the choice of the as-practice view to study the phenomena, as creative work seems more an interplay of different parties instead of a leader-follower structure. Nevertheless, creative leadership has been mainly studied from a leadership style and competences perspective.

Leadership styles are a combination of personal traits and behavioral patterns of the leader, such as transformational leadership encompasses charismatic role-modeling, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009). Hereby leadership styles, as opposed to leadership practices, view the leader as an individual able to influence its environment without being influenced. Transformational leadership and relational leadership are the two most frequently studied leadership styles concerning creativity. For both roughly equivalent association can be found with follower creativity and innovation, however, at the same time a high degree of variability in observed associations needs to be highlighted (Hughes, et al., 2018). A third leadership style worth noticing is the integrated leadership style. This style is composed of three elements; the established of an idea-generating-friendly environment, the structuring of ideas and the promotion of ideas within the company (Mumford, et al., 2002).

Besides leadership styles also single personal traits and moderating variables have been studied to determine the influence of leaders on creativity and innovation. Li, et al. (2018)

for example, have studied the effect of autonomy and intrinsic motivation on creativity, determining the latter as indecisive finding mixed empirical findings and the first as context-bound. Seemingly contradictory to the findings of Li, et al. (2018) about the importance of job autonomy are the findings related to constraints by Ibbotson & Darsø (2008). Hereby, constraints are seen as useful because they force people to explore different physical and emotional tools to pursue their objectives. However, constraints are clearly distinguished from targets, which are seen as less useful as they are mostly expressed in numbers and therefore not suitable for creative efforts. (Ibbotson & Darsø, 2008). Structured working schedules derived by project management tools can hereby probably be seen as such appropriated constraints (Galloway & Haniff, 2015). Further, Coman and Bonciu (2014) highlight the importance of a supportive work environment which is contemporary fair regarding decisions, psychologically safe to support the generation of ideas and characterized by a flat structure to support the exchange of knowledge. The importance of knowledge exchange is supported by Amabile & Khaire (2008), who states that creativity occurs in teams with people from different backgrounds who share their knowledge. Lastly, studies have concerned moderating variables such as team climates and leader-follower relations (Yoshida, et al., 2014), external support for innovation, learning orientation, psychological empowerment, organizational structure, creative ability and many more.

The general belief is that creative employees, based on autonomy and professionalism, don't need leadership to succeed. However, Mumford, et al. (2002), does provide compelling proof to contradict this belief. Nevertheless, how this leadership is structured or expressed is yet not fully developed due to a highly fragmented research field. One of the reasons for such a fragmented study field could be the cause of multiple definitions of creativity, leading to different study results. In conclusion, the abundance of research in leadership styles, moderating variables and creativity has caused an overly complex literature that hinders understanding, theory building and development of practical implication (Hughes, et al., 2018). This Thesis will, therefore, propose a new perspective on creative leadership, by studying the phenomena using the as-practice tense. Due to the importance of context and relationships for creative leadership highlighted by multiple studies the as-practice view classifies as more suitable research lens than the leadership style or competences perspective.

## 2.6 Summary of literature review

To be able to study a phenomenon, the phenomenon itself must be defined. Therefore chapter two of this Thesis, describes the definition of creativity, leadership and the fashion industry I choose in order to frame the study. The fashion industry was defined as industry encompassing both fashion creativity and business intellect, as well as rapidity in evolution and customer orientation (Ünay & Zehir, 2012). The duality of the fashion industry, arisen from the combination of creative and commercial industry goals, delineates the fashion industry the appropriate setting to study the alignment of commercial and creative company aspects. Hereby, creativity was defined as the mental ability to rearrange knowledge within a certain environment to generate novel products of aesthetic value. The definition was broadened through the concept of the logic of practices, which defines both creative and commercial endeavor through social practice based on cultural capital (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007). Lastly, leadership was defined using the as-practices view, which does define leadership as a social practice within a community of practice instead of a personal trait of a single person. The chosen definitions of leadership and creativity, allows me to study both phenomena based on the same underlying concept of practice, as both can be defined as social practices.

The literature chapter was concluded with an overall view of established creative leadership literature. Even if most of the creative leadership literature does not align with my theoretical lens, as it studies leadership from a competency and personal traits perspective, I included it to show the current state of the literature regarding creativity and leadership. Furthermore, I will use the creative leadership literature to support my finding in the discussion part as the as-practice literature about creativity and leadership is limited.

The theoretical lens of this Thesis is mainly based on two different literature streams: Bourdieu's theory of the logic of practices and the leadership-as-practice view. Bourdieu's logic of practice and the leadership-as-practice movement can be distilled to the same underlying concepts. Both literature streams see the human world as interconnected, based on social practices and contextually bounded. Hereby social practices are "regulated" actions undertaken by individuals without being the product of obedience, however, orchestrated collectively without the organizing action of a conductor (Bourdieu, 1990). For this Thesis, I will look at leadership practices, which I identify as those actions



undertaken together with or in accordance with the CEO and main designer of the company. In particular, I will consider those actions which support the alignment of creative and commercial company aspects. Furthermore, as I do outline practices as contextually and relationally bounded, I will also analyze the context within the practice takes place, the relational elements included in the practice and the physical artifacts involved in the practice.

In conclusion, this Thesis will use an as-practice lens to conceptually elaborate leadership practices which increase the probability of the alignment of creative and commercial company aspects. A practice lens is suitable as both studied phenomena, leadership and creativity, can be described as social practices and the phenomenon considered, the alignment of commercial and creative company aspects, is contextually bounded and includes a community of practice.

## 3. Methodology

This chapter describes the research methodology used for this Thesis. The description includes the research approach, the research design, the research settings, and the methods used for data collection, data processing, and data analysis. The data analysis will be described in a detailed manner in the last two sub-chapters. Hereby, in the description, I differentiated between the single-case analysis and the cross-case analysis. In order to describe the process in the most comprehensive way, I decided to integrate the coding results in the methodology chapter, therefore, sub-chapter 3.4 will include the coding results of the three single case analysis while sub-chapter 3.5 will include examples of the coding structure of the cross-case analysis.

### 3.1 Research approach

*Research is a process of trying to gain better  
understanding of the complexities of human experience  
(Marshall & Rossman, 2006)*

This Thesis took the form of an exploratory study drawing on qualitative data, where the views of individuals leading Finnish fashion companies were obtained in order to explore leadership practices, which support the alignment of creative skills and commercial goals. The research paradigm is qualitative because the focus of this Thesis is human behaviors in an organizational real-world environment and the qualitative research approach is considered appropriated to study human behaviors as they are best understood by investigating the views of the people involved (Galloway & Haniff, 2015). Moreover, qualitative research is concerned with understanding the meanings which people attach to phenomena within their social worlds (Snape & Spencer, 2003), such as this Thesis attempts to generate insight into the actions and decisions undertaken by creative and commercial teams while collaborating. Furthermore, qualitative research pursues the goal to understand phenomena in context-specific settings (Golafshani, 2003), such as this Thesis seeks to understand the phenomenon of leadership of creativity in a fashion company context. Finally, the qualitative paradigm is based on the phenomenological approach which postulates multiple interconnected realities (Ketokivi & Choi, 2014), which

aligns with the concepts of the social meaning-making process and the leadership-as-practice theory, the main theoretical base of this Thesis. To support my choice in the following paragraphs I will describe the ontology and epistemology of qualitative research.

How qualitative analysis is carried out, depends on the belief about the nature of the social world and what can be known about it (ontology) and the nature of knowledge and how it can be acquired (epistemology), as no single, accepted way of doing qualitative research exists (Snape & Spencer, 2003). The ontology of qualitative research concerns, whether or not social reality exists independently of human conceptions and interpretations, whether there is a shared social reality or just multiple context-specific realities; and whether or not social behavior is governed by “laws” (Snape & Spencer, 2003). For the purpose of this Thesis, I adopt the “subtle realism” as ontological position. Hereby, subtle realism accepts the social world as existing independently of subjective individual understanding, but only accessible via the respondents’ interpretations and in a second step via the researchers’ interpretations (Snape & Spencer, 2003). In particular, I support the belief in diverse perspectives and interpretations of the social world, but at the same time believe in an external reality which can be grasped. Hereby, I believe that multiple interpretations and perspectives of experienced reality add richness to my understanding of the phenomenon.

The same beliefs are reflected in the epistemology of my research, as I do support the notion that neutrality and objectivity can never be obtained fully even if it should be aspired by the qualitative researcher. Neutrality is hard to achieve because the researcher is seen as an instrument at the center of the data-gathering process in order to indwell in the context (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Hereby, my data-gathering process focuses on contextual data instead of numeric data to increase the understanding of the phenomenon. The goal is to understand minds and emotions of the research subjects, by interacting with the subjects, and to construct a concept reflecting the context and the experiences of the research subjects (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Nevertheless, neutrality and objectivity will be targeted by appropriated data-gathering methods, like open, non-leading, questioning techniques and reflexivity about the biases experienced during the research. Lastly, the epistemology of my research is based on the belief of evolving interpretations, which do start from interpretations as close as possible to the single case, however, evolve by interlocking, synthesizing and comparing multiple cases. This underlying belief, in

particular, led me to the choice of the combination of three single case studies and a cross-case analysis.

Finally, the main reason to choose qualitative research is to understand the world from the perspective of participants and thus make discoveries that contribute to the development of empirical knowledge. In particular, discoveries in areas which have not been previously (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994), such as leadership practices in creative industries. Therefore, this research requests an inductive approach to research, as creating a theory beforehand is unfeasible. In conclusion, to investigate leadership practices in the fashion industry I have chosen an inductive qualitative research approach, which allows me a deep understanding of specific contexts and the exploration of similar situations (Golafshani, 2003).

### 3.2 Data collection methodology

The selection of the data collection methodology is based on the appropriated methods to address specific research questions (Snape & Spencer, 2003). For this Thesis, it is of importance to choose methods, which allow rich and extensive data to achieve a detailed description of the phenomenon, as the research questions concern social practices within a fashion context. For the purpose of this Thesis, a case study research method paired with a thematic interview method was chosen.

Case study research focuses on understanding the dynamics present within a single setting and can be used to accomplished various aims (Eisenhardt, 1989). The aim of this case study research is to provide a description of leadership practices in the fashion industry. This aim (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) will be achieved by cross-analyzing (Yin, 1984) three independently conducted case studies. Hereby, each case study was separately conducted, and I committed myself to carry out each case study with a theoretical clean slate. Nevertheless, qualitative analysis requests the integration of the researcher in the research setting, which bears the risk of contaminating the research setting (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Aware of the possible contamination of the findings, I allowed three weeks to pass between each case study and reduced the literature review to a minimum before the interviews to approach the case studies in the most neutral way possible. Despite the risk connected to case study research, the integration of the researcher in the research setting allows the in-depth analysis and the exploration of human perspectives

needed for this analysis, establishing the multiple-case study as a suitable research approach for this Thesis.

Moreover, the case study approach brings with it a duality of being situationally grounded and at the same time seeking a sense of generality (Ketokivi & Choi, 2014). This duality allows me to concentrate on the contextual characteristic of each case study while attempting to achieve a broader theoretical understanding of thought abstraction. The generality of a case study is also supported by Yin (1984), however, as mentioned before, the goal of this Thesis is not to assess the generalizability of the constructed leadership practices.

As data collection method I chose the thematic interview method because it allows me to achieve an intimate connection with empirical reality, a deeper understanding of the interviewees' mental state and contextuality of the data (Vuori, 2017). Hereby, building psychological safety for the interviewees was my biggest concern, as my goal was to explore tensions between commercial and creative employees, something people avoid talking about or sometimes are not aware of. To achieve psychological safety, I interacted with the interviewees beforehand and allowed them to see the interview themes before the interview. Conscious that this could alter their answers, I chose to go this way as the established psychological safety would allow me a deeper understanding of the interviewee's mental state. On the other hand, the interview themes were broad enough to avoid pre-meditated answers while making the interviewee feel more in control.

The interview themes were elaborated based on the research questions (Appendix 1). Hereby, the themes move from general questions about the person to company process questions and lastly to personal opinion questions. Starting with general questions about the person is a further technique to create psychological safety in the moment of the interview (Vuori, 2017). I wanted to give the interviewee the feeling, he or she has the answers to my question. If one is able to answer the first question, later he/she feels more comfortable to answer questions he/she is not sure about, such as questions about tension within the company. Starting from the interview themes I ideated interview questions. My goal was to leave the question as open-ended as possible, however, I wanted to avoid drifting too far from my scope during the interviews. Therefore, I ideated broad main interview questions, which I supported with more specific interview questions in case the

interview would develop towards an unwanted direction. To ideate the interview questions, I followed Patton's six types of questions: experience/behavior, opinion/value, feeling, knowledge, sensory and background questions (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). These types allowed me to focus on the person's behavior and mental state instead of ideating closed question which would support my personal beliefs.

The interviews took place at the premises of the organization and varied in length between 30-90 minutes. Each interviewee was interviewed in a separate room to avoid interference from others and to increase the psychological safety of the participant. Only in case company Kalevala, this could not be applied completely as the company was working in an open space, therefore there was not the possibility to find a separate room. Notes were taken during the interviews to record ongoing thoughts and non-audible expressions of the participants, like facial expressions. The notes have later been integrated into the transcriptions of the interviews. The interviews were recorded and transcribed anonymously in accordance with the consensus of the interview participants. Hereby, I have slightly modified sentence structures and removed pauses to increase the legibility of the transcriptions. The codes for the interview participant are represented in Table 1.

*Table 1 - Interview codes*

nr	Job description	Creative / commercial	Case company	code
1	Chief executive officer	commercial	Kalevala	Ka-C
2	Lead designer	creative	Kalevala	Ka-D
3	Chief operational officer	commercial	15-items	15-O
4	Chief executive officer	commercial	15-items	15-C
5	Lead Designer	creative	15-items	15-D
6	team leader of sampling and production	creative	15-items	15-S
7	Lead designer	creative	Meaning	Me-D
8	Fashion Concept manager	Commercial	Meaning	Me-C
9	Head of Marketing	commercial	Meaning	Me-M

To assure the quality of the Thesis a triangulation (Eisenhardt, 1989) of the empirical data was achieved by enlarging the interview data with publicly available data and internal

documents (secondary data). In conclusion, three cases studies were carried out separately by conducting 2-4 thematic interviews per each case. All interviews were recorded and transcribed to allow a contextual analysis. The cases were analyzed separately to achieve context-related theories and in a second step cross-analyzed to achieve abstraction and consequently greater applicability of the findings.

### 3.3 Research setting

I chose to place this research in the fashion business, as fashion companies requiring both “fashion creativity and business intellect” (Ünay & Zehir, 2012) to be successful and therefore are suitable to give answers to research questions concerning the alignment of creative and commercial aspects within a company. The sample of fashion companies was not random and reflects the selection of specific cases to extend the theory to a broad range of organizations (Eisenhardt, 1989). In specific I have chosen three small and medium sized fashion companies, which have experienced growth and success in the last years. Hereby, I have chosen three companies of different life-spans, to achieve an overall view of successful small and medium sized companies and therefore achieve as rich understanding as possible. It is worth noting that it is probably difficult to study the entirety of the concept within the limits of one study, therefore the aim of this research is not to arrive at a number of generalizable conclusions, but enhance understanding of the phenomenon.

While the first selection criterion was the size and success of the fashion company, the second selection criterion was the design-focus of the fashion companies. This selection criterion was crucial to choose companies whose vision and company goals are creative as well as commercial, to avoid the omission of creativity on one hand and rationality on the other and therefore the absence of tension between the commercial and creative team. This goal was achieved, as all three case companies define themselves as design-companies, stating hereby the importance of creativity for their business. In conclusion, all three case companies are established or emerging successful Finnish designer brands. I decided to focus on small and medium sized fashion companies, as they represent most of the Finnish and international fashion business world.

The first case company (Kalevala), was established in 2014 and is composed of a team of 5 people. The founder of the company is the designer, who combines traditional Kalevala inspiration with modern recycling ideas, by turning trash leather material into design bags. The CEO of the company joined the designer during the first year, to allow the company to grow internationally and establish a successful business model. The company has found national and international success and just opened its first concept store. The whole team is currently working at the concept store, as the concept store encompasses office and storefront. The company does not follow the traditional fashion cycles, spring-summer and autumn-winter, and has adopted a direct consumer strategy. This allows the company to structure its working routine based on their needs instead of the fashion cycles, like weekly and monthly meetings.

The second case company (15-items) was founded in 2011 by the designer of the company. The main goal of the designer was to create a women capsule collection of 15 items to contrast cheap and everchanging clothing items. Since then the company has grown internationally, being displayed in magazines like Vogue, and now employs around 30 people. The financial partner and CEO has joined the company in 2012 to develop the business plan and the company vision. The whole team, besides the retail team, work at the same location, but in different offices. The design team has it's own office, as does the sampling team and the financial team. The company follows the traditional fashion cycles, which highly influences their working structure, like milestone meetings according to fashion drops.

The third case company (Meaning) was established more than 20 years ago and belongs to one of the biggest clothing manufacturers in Europe. The brand defines itself as design-oriented and wants to offer "beauty with a meaning" to its customers. The current designer of the company has joined the company 6 years ago. As the company is part of a fashion group the brand has no direct CEO, but an assigned Division Manager and Fashion Concept Manager which are also responsible for other brands. The company is a successful brand in the Nordic Nations and employs a team of 8 people, however, some of these people might also work for other brands. As case company 15-items, Meaning follows the traditional fashion cycles and has structured their working schedule accordingly.



### 3.4 Single case content analysis

One of the defining characteristics of qualitative research is an inductive approach to data analysis (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Therefore, I chose a theory-building process based on the grounded theory analysis to analyze the interview data. More specifically, the interview data was analyzed in an iterative process which includes the following steps: transcription; codification; comparison; categorization; and synthesis. In particular, I chose the constant comparative method to analyze the interview data and the Goia Methodology to achieve abstractions of the findings. The constant comparative method combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of the codes and coded groups (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This means each new identified code is compared to all other codes and grouped within 1-st order categories (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). If a code cannot be grouped in an existing 1-st order category a new category is established. This iterative method allows for the theory to emerge with each code and allowed me to indwell in the context as I was constantly reminded off all the previously coded units.

As a code, I identified all aspects and comments of the interviewees regarding the alignment of creative and commercial company aspects. In specific, I focused on communication flows, meeting schedules, working routines, and the design process, but also on personal opinions and feelings regarding the “opposite” team. As mentioned before the interview questions were designed to discover human behaviors which are often carried out unconsciously. In specific, the open-ended structure allowed the interviewee to describe freely their activities, while the more specific questions, which evolved from the narrative, drove the interviewee to elaborate more in detail their working method enabling us to uncover the unconscious activates.

After analyzing all the interviews within a case, I examined all codes found, checked them for importance and if necessary re-categorized codes. As relevant for the analysis I identified all those codes which represent a leadership practice or explain how the leadership practice helps to promote the alignment. Hereby, I defined as a leadership practice, actions and emotions undertaken together with the commercial leader, in accordance with the commercial leader or initiated by the commercial leader. Moreover, I included the artifacts and spatial connotations that are related to the leadership practice to assure the contextuality of my findings. In the beginning, my focus was neither on the

commercial or creative leader to avoid preconceived ideas to cloud my analysis. However, after the interviews, I narrowed my focus on the commercial leader as it crystallized that the alignment of the creative and commercial aspects of the companies originated mainly from the commercial leader. Moreover, within all the case companies the CEO was the commercial leader and I decided to see the CEO as the principal leader of the company.

Analyzing interview data requires being mindful of the content and context of the spoken, rather than coding it mechanically with the aid of interpretations theories (Vuori, 2017), therefore I took very seriously this part of the process. I engaged as deeply as possible with the data, by reorganizing codes, reading codes again and by re-listening to the recordings. I tried to find the real meaning to the words and distill the actual behavior of the people, besides the word spoken. This was particularly important as in this content analysis, the first order codes describe human behaviors and actions.

After having grouped the first-order codes and established the second order categories, I moved on to synthesizing the findings using the Goia Methodology. This method distinguishes between the information that is acquired from the interviewees (informant-centric) and information that has been linked to theory (theory-centric). In particular, this methodology allowed me to distill the established second-order categories (groups of human behaviors) into overarching theoretical dimensions (leadership practices) and hereby achieve abstraction of the data and connect the data to the theory. I used the theory of practice to establish the theoretical dimensions, which allowed me to refine the informant-centric terminology, without losing the case-specific elements.

As stated above, each of the research cases has been analyzed separately to avoid contaminations in the case-specific concepts. Figure 1, 2 and 3 present an excerpt of the data structure for each case study, while the complete structure can be found in the Appendix 2. For a better understanding of the codes, I will shortly explain the context-specific peculiarities of the case.

- Meeting structure: Case company Kalevala, does not follow the classical fashion cycles, therefore we find a weekly and monthly meeting structure. In Case companies 15-items and Meaning instead of weekly and monthly meetings, we find milestones meeting within the fashion cycles, like prototype-meeting or the price-

meeting, which repeat within each fashion cycle. During these meetings both commercial and creative employees are present, I did not analyze “one-sided” meetings.

- Lead persons: In case companies Kalevala and 15-items, we find a double leadership. Both the CEO and the main designer are strongly represented and share the leadership of the company. On the other hand, in case company Meaning there is a very experienced lead designer, with experiences also on the commercial side, which leads the brand. Commercial leaders are present as division manager and the fashion Concept manager, however, play a less present role and put their trust in the lead designer.



Figure 1 - Code structure of case company Kalevala

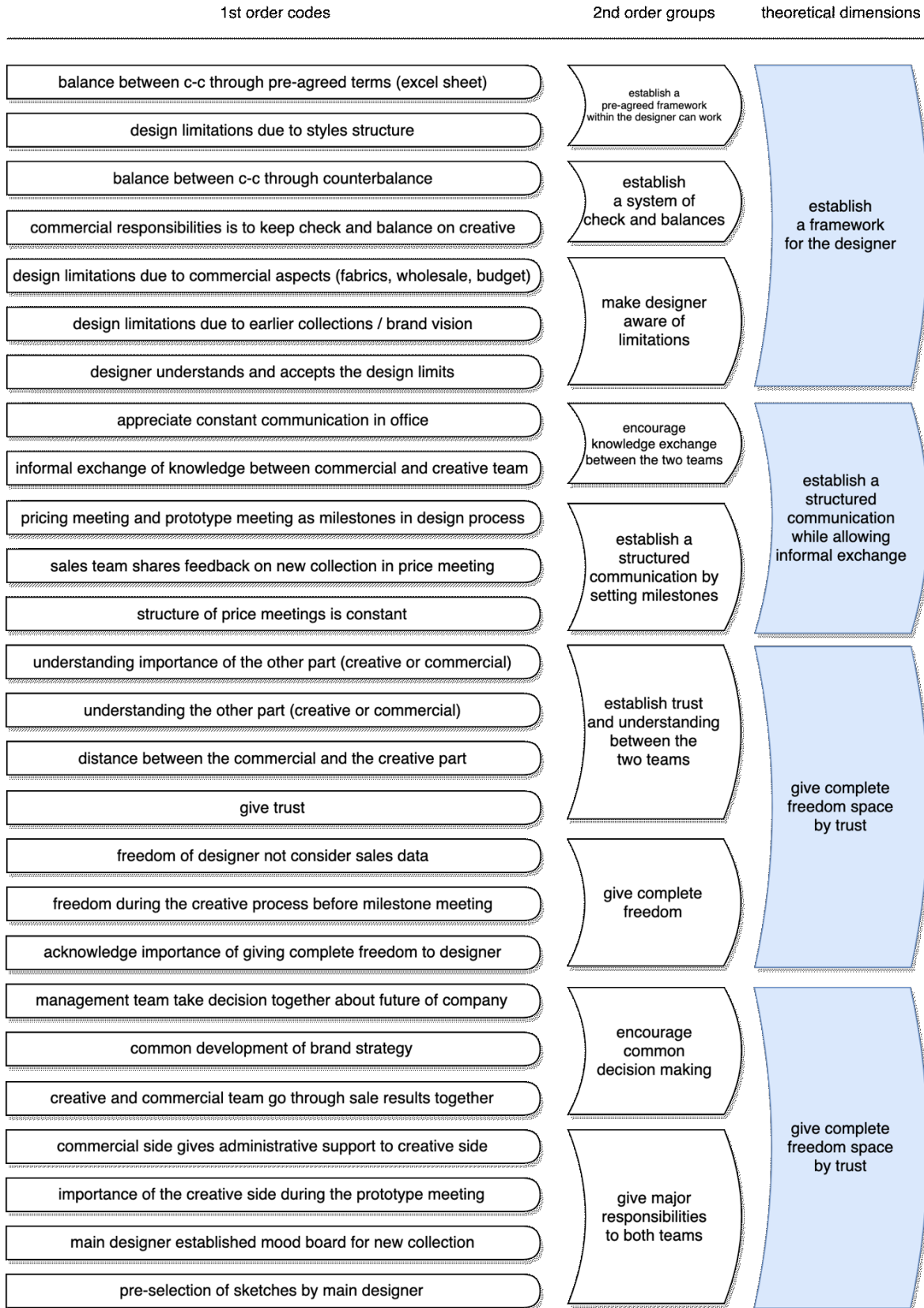


Figure 2 - Code structure of case company 15-items

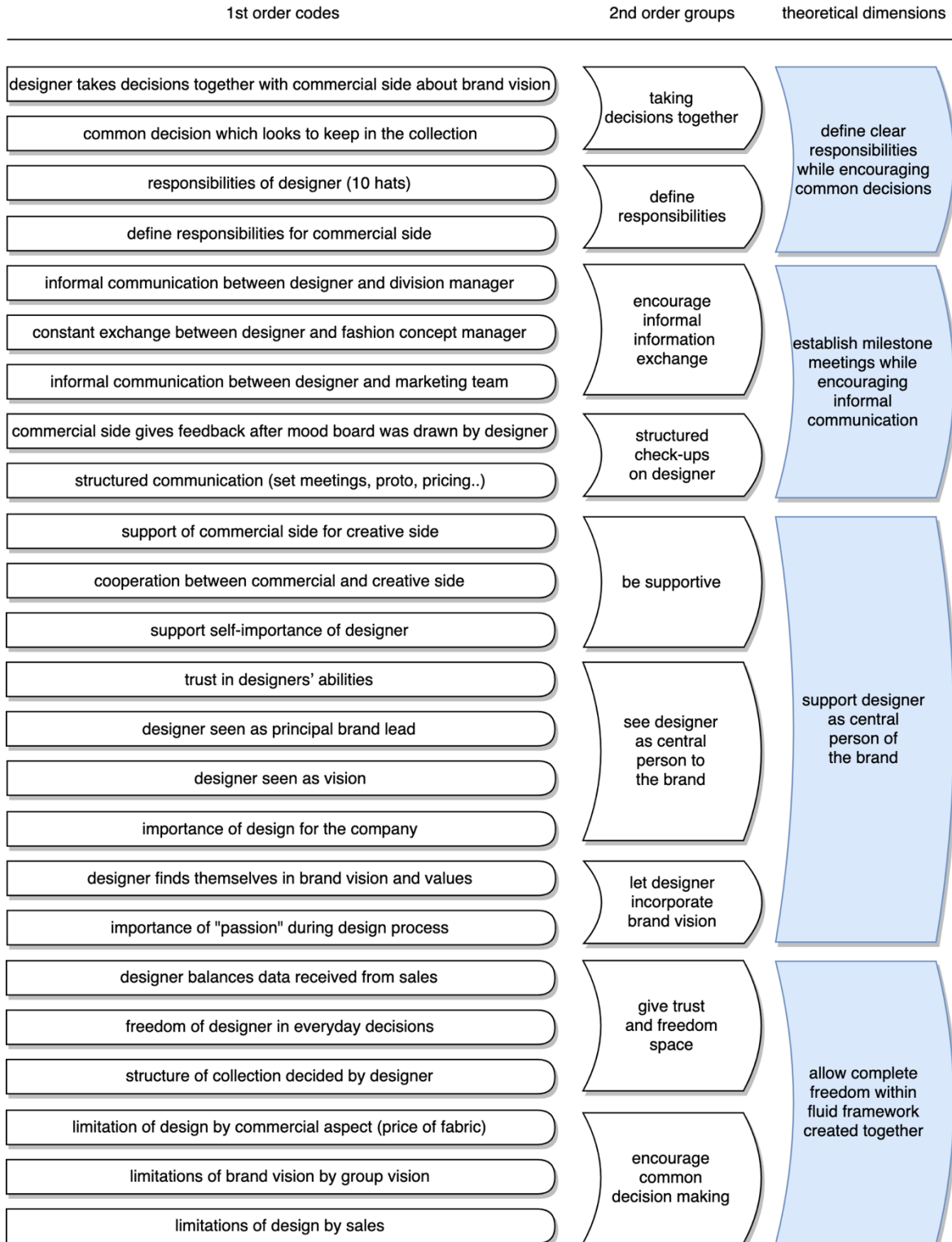


Figure 3 - Code structure of case company Meaning

### 3.5 Cross-case analysis

Analyzing data is the heart of building theory from case studies (Eisenhardt, 1989), therefore, after conducting three within-case analysis and becoming familiar with each case as a stand-alone entity I moved on to derive patterns across the cases. To avoid leaping to pre-mediated conclusions, I decided to search for similarities and differences between the cases by comparing the theoretical dimensions constructed in each case study. The comparison of the theoretical dimension was carried out based on the definition of the theoretical dimension and the codes included in each theoretical dimension.

Comparing the codes contained in the theoretical dimensions, proved as very helpful, as the wording of the theoretical dimensions itself slightly changes within each case study, as each case study was conducted separately. The slight difference in wording is part of the qualitative analysis, however, constitutes one of its weaknesses, as the wording can be interpreted in many ways. Lastly, using the definition of the theoretical dimensions combined with the singular codes within the theoretical dimension proved to be a logical and stable method to compare the theoretical dimensions.

Figure 4 shows an example of the comparison of the codes. It shows the codes of the theoretical dimension “establish a structured communication while allowing informal exchange” for case company 15-items, the theoretical dimension “establish milestone meetings while encouraging informal communication” for case company Meaning and the theoretical dimension “balance structured and informal communication” for case company Kalevala. In order to compare the codes, I had to take into account the context-specific peculiarities. In this example, we can see that I compared the weekly meetings of case company Kalevala and the milestone meetings of 15-items and Meaning. I did so because the concept of the meetings proved to be the same, the recurrence of the meeting was just different due to the yearly calendar the companies follow. However, from a leadership perspective, I argue that the recurrence is less important than the content of the meetings, therefore I establish those meetings as similar.

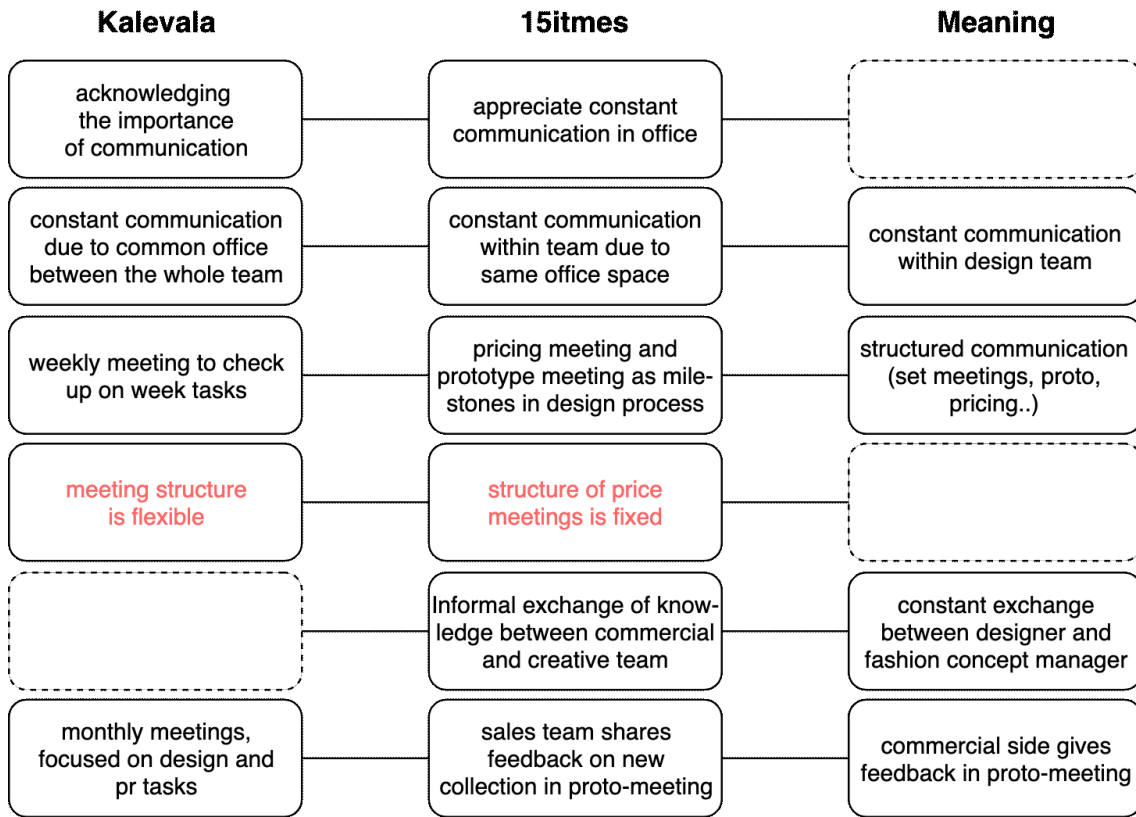


Figure 4 - Cross case analysis example

As visible from Figure 4 most of the codes within the theoretical dimension can be found in all three case studies. Minor differences are neglectable due to contextual differences in the company. As a qualitative researcher, I acknowledge the importance of context-specific differences, however, I will omit those differences in order to achieve abstraction and a greater understanding of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, I will discuss the importance of contextual adaptation of the leadership practices in my findings to avoid altering the findings and to acknowledge the duality of being situationally grounded and at the same time seeking a sense of wider understanding.

The comparison of the codes and definitions of the theoretical dimensions has yielded three different leadership practices. As the final goal of the content analysis is to build a model to describe the phenomenon in a conceptual form (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007), I decided to map the differences and similarities of the cases visually in Figure 5.



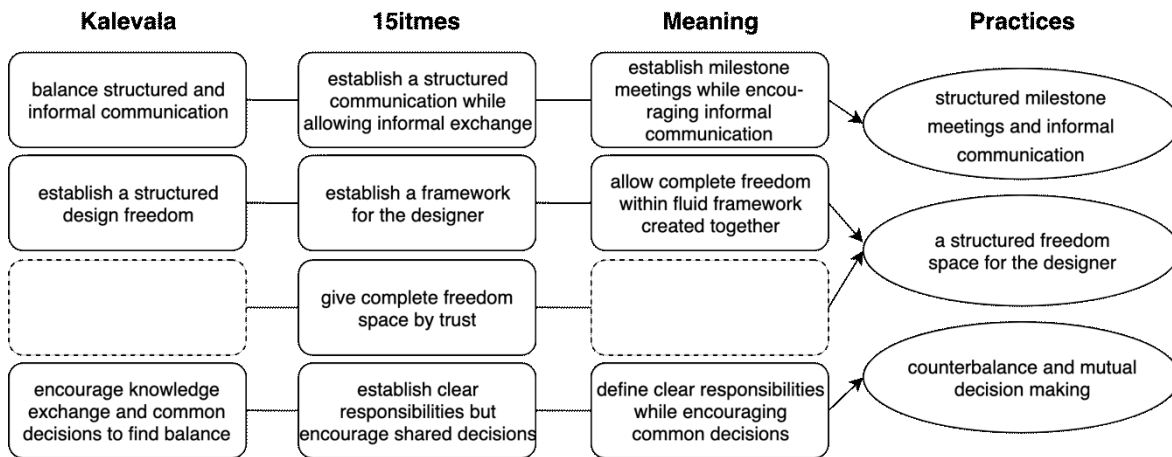


Figure 5 - Comparison of the theoretical dimensions

As a result of the cross-case analysis, I formulated three major leadership practices to align the creative and commercial aspects of the company. Hereby, all three leadership practices are represented in all three case studies and will be described more in detail in the next chapter.

## 4. Findings

In this chapter I introduce the findings of the study. The findings will describe the theoretical dimensions elaborated during the analysis of the data. Hereby each theoretical dimension represents a leadership practice for which I found evidence in the case companies. The three constructed leadership practices do include multiple smaller practices which in combination allow achieving the formulated leadership practice. In this chapter, I will explain what these leadership practices include and bring examples from the case companies.

Furthermore, this chapter proposes answers to the research questions of this Thesis. All three sub-chapters can be seen as a response to the first research question, while the second and third research questions are answered by the sub-chapter “a structured freedom space for the designer”. However, I propound that all leadership practices described in this Thesis, have to be present in order to achieve a successful alignment of the creative and commercial aspects within a company. Disregarding one of these leadership practices could diminish the effectiveness of the other leadership practices. This statement is supported by the fact that all three leadership practices have been detected in some way in all three case companies. Moreover, the leadership-as-practice view sees organizations as systemic and practices as interconnected and interdependent, supporting my claim. In conclusion, I want to highlight that the practices seem contextually bounded and therefore, they should be seen as concepts which have to be adapted to the specific context of the company, rather than as one-fits-all solutions.

### 4.1 Structured milestone meetings and informal communication

The way the creative and the commercial counterbalances communicate within the company can favor or impede the alignment of the creative and commercial company aspects. In all three case companies, I could observe a mixture of structured and unstructured communication flows according to the different phases in the design process. Hereby times of continuous information exchange alternate with times of complete quietness. Detecting both structured and informal communication I decided to formulate a leadership practice which encompasses both because the data has shown that the balance

between the two communication streams is as important as the streams itself to achieve the alignment of the creative and commercial team. This is highly visible in case company Kalevala where the team is currently trying to establish the right communication structure by finding a balance between informal communication and meeting structure.

*KA-C: now we try to find a structure where everybody is able to concentrate but also able to communicate easily... It's about finding a balance with that right now.*

The unstructured communication flow is constituted by informal interactions between the creative and the commercial teams. Hereby, I noticed an informal communication flow in all case companies. However, all companies have found their way to engage and support informal communication. In Kalevala, we find the team working in an open office which favors informal communication, while in Meaning the lead designer (Me-D) and the fashion concept manager (Me-C) had established a close relationship which allowed them to interact daily and be an example for the rest of the team. Moreover, in case company Meaning we find a flat organization structure which supports informal communication. Lastly, in case company 15-items we find the team working in different offices, however, an open-door culture and a flat organization structure uphold the informal communication.

*Me-D: we have very good cooperation with him (Fashion Division Manager), his door is always open, and we talk daily but not of course only those design things, but what is going on generally on retail business and in this fashion business here in Finland- it is a flat organization somehow, we talk with each other a lot and we compare our opinions*

*15-S: How I communicate with the design team? By just coming in their office. It's a family-like work environment, everybody goes to talk to everybody*

*KA-C: we basically talk every day - it is very hard to separate a specific time in the structure about when we talk about something*

*Me-C: we come together and exchange information and then go – we are very close, working there together, it's not like separate processes*

The interviews show that informal communication was appreciated by all interviewees as it allows quick information exchange. Moreover, it helps to achieve mutual understanding

based on reciprocal respect due to the exchange of knowledge. Hereby, it seems that mutual understanding is the first step towards the alignment of the commercial and creative aspects of the fashion company, as it might initiate a social meaning-making process between the teams, which could lead to a new logic of practice appropriated for the cooperation between the creative and commercial team. Therefore, supporting and engaging in informal communication, by structuring the working space accordingly and initiating and engaging in informal communication, should be a primary goal of leaders of fashion companies.

*15-2-C: I think the constructive debate among people that trust themselves that have a mutual respect for one another - I think that's the best way to get to the optimal result*

*KA-D: the communication is an important part and you have to learn your communication*

On the other hand, all interviewees highlighted the fact that too much unstructured and constant communication bears the risk of constant work interruptions and unstructured work-procedures. Therefore, all three case companies displayed structured communication. In Kalevala, this structure is achieved by monthly meetings to discuss design themes and weekly meetings to discuss commercial themes. These meetings have still a fluid agenda, as the young company still tries to find the perfect balance in the meetings. However, the team already agrees on the importance of these structured meetings to align their work and therefore align the commercial and creative aspects of the company. In 15-items and Meaning, which follow the classical fashion cycle, the meeting structure is represented in prototype, sales and pricing meetings, according to the steps within the fashion cycle. Hereby, also the content of the meeting varies according to the fashion cycle, as in each meeting the current main focus of the cycle is discussed. These milestone meetings allow the two teams to align their work during the whole collection process. Weekly or monthly meetings between the commercial and creative side are not deemed necessary, such as in-between the milestone meetings, each team works on their tasks. If information exchange is necessary in-between the meetings it happens on an informal basis. In conclusion, structured meetings are helpful in aligning the commercial and creative aspects of a company as they force the two sides to present information on

time, however, they seem only successful if their timely structure and content are supportive of the working schedule.

*15-O: The first is the pricing meeting when all the prototypes and samples are ready then it's the first time actually the business side will see it. And then we give feedback, decide on the prices and also if something needs to be skipped from the sales.*

*Me-D: next step when we check what I have been doing and how the collection is looking is the proto meeting and there we go all the collection, all colors and fabrics and prints and silverware and so on and also the prices.*

*KA-C: We have a monthly meeting for the product development. And that's the place where we plan and think ahead about the product and also plan if we need to take new meetings to take something further.*

In conclusion, both formal and informal communication seem vital for an alignment between the commercial and creative team. Exchanging thoughts and opinions fosters the understanding of the reciprocal counterpart, allowing both a mutual understanding of the company goals and reciprocally respect and trust to emerge. Establishing together a communication structure, which supports the established working schedule, in this case, according to the fashion cycles or not, while engaging in informal communication seems to form the basis for the alignment of the creative and commercial company aspects. Finally, I formulated two parts of the leadership practice “structured milestone meetings and informal communication” accordingly: The first part includes a meeting structure which supports the working schedule of the team and meeting content which allows the team to exchange thoughts on the current topic. Hereby, the topic can change according to the fashion cycle or stay permanent such as in a direct consumer strategy. The second part includes informal communication between the commercial and the creative team, which can be achieved by a flat organization, appropriated office spaces and informal communication examples set by the team leaders.

## 4.2 Counterbalance and mutual decision making

Closely related to communication is the division of responsibilities and tasks between the commercial and creative side. The task division may seem obvious given the opposing nature of the two teams, however during all case studies, the importance of establishing responsibilities between the two teams emerged. Clearly defining task and responsibilities seems to eliminate the risk of counter-posing decisions and neglecting of tasks. The division of responsibilities in 15-items went that far, that the commercial side could not describe what exactly the creative side was doing within their responsibility, showing again the importance of trust between the two teams.

*15-C: then there is obviously the creative process itself, which I have nothing to do with, which quite frankly I do not know much about it, because it is not my thing, because that is what the design team is doing*

With responsibilities come goals, which here need to be counter-posed as the company needs to be successful from a design and commercial perspective in order to be successful. However, as most fashion companies are founded by a designer, a creative-oriented personality, the risk of omitting the commercial relevance in a fashion company is very high, as the lead designer can have an intimidating role on the rest of the team. Therefore, a culture of counterbalanced forces based on a psychologically safe environment where team members do dare to speak up is essential and it is the role of the commercial leader to set an example in being the counteracting power to the designer in order to avoid one-sided or commercially non-viable decisions. Hereby, the commercial side needs to counterbalance depending on the knowledge of the lead designer. For example, in Meaning we find a lead designer with high commercial understanding and experience; therefore, a smaller commercial counterweight is needed. However, the counterweight is still represented by the fashion concept manager and the division manager. In conclusion, I named the first part of this leadership practice counterbalance in accordance with the quote of the interviewee.

*KA-C: I am the one pushing this limit to KA-D. You know say that we should have this and that by then and then start planning the design processes that it can be actually done and prototyped and tested.*

*15-C: there needs to be a counterbalance, because in many cases in companies like this the founder is also the creative director, the designer right, and I think there is a risk if that person becomes too powerful. And nobody can or dare to sort of challenge that person.*

On the other hand, within all the case companies the significance of taking decisions together seems evident, as taking decision together request confronting each other and trying to understand the opposed part. Aligned with the informal communication of the first leadership practice it seems that taking decision together increases the mutual understanding, allowing again to align the creative and commercial part. Moreover, if a decision is taken together it seems easier for all the members to accept the decision and to work towards it. Mutual decisions rank from crucial decisions of defining the brand visions, to decisions of which styles to keep in the collection, to decisions taken daily.

*15-O: We have let's say, when we order sample fabric you do not just get 4 meters for one sample, you might end up with extra fabric, and then we decide we do this style from this extra fabric which otherwise it would not end up in production, but because they are essential for the collection and we have the extra fabric then we do it. So it's a lot of negotiations about things.*

*15-C: it was driven very much by the strategy that we decided on together*

*Me-C: but everybody knows what they should do and if they don't know the team decides together what they do and so it's a very good process*

*KA-C: I mean there have been times when we thought "Oh my god we have completely different goals" but then when we discussed and got to the bottom we understand that yeah we actually do still have the exact same goal and that is the point of the whole thing. We need to, the company needs to have its goal and everyone needs to stand behind them.*

In conclusion, the second leadership practice includes counterbalance based on opposing goals and a psychological safe environment, and mutual decisions based on constructive confrontation and mutual understanding. I choose to merge two seemingly distinctive practices within one leadership practice as the cases have shown that mutual decision can

be taken only if both company aspects are represented with the same intensity. Therefore, it seems that the second leadership practice is only helpful in aligning the creative and commercial company aspects if both parts are present. Finally, it looks like, that thanks to the first and the second leadership practice all three case companies have achieved mutual understanding between the two sides, allowing them to trust and respect each other and therefore align their work – creative and commercial - towards a common goal.

### 4.3 A structured freedom space for the designer

Structure and freedom may seem like two counter-posing concepts; however, they might allow two counter-posing aspects like creative and commercial to align. This sub-chapter represents the most important answer to my research questions. The leadership practices described in the previous sub-chapters build the fundament for collaboration within a company and probably are useful within most industries. However, this sub-chapter poses a crucial answer to leading creativity.

The general belief is that creativity works best if limited instead of completely free and this study shows that how the limitations are set does decide on how successful they are. In the three case companies of this Thesis, three different ways of setting limits can be detected. However, they all had two things in common: the limits were mutually decided on between the commercial and the creative lead; the core of the structure is free.

In case company Kalevala, the limitations to the design freedom are set by the company vision, the creative vision of the designer, the trash materials sourced and the price range. Moreover, the creative and commercial lead decide together when a new bag should be created and made available and with it set a time frame to the creative process. In case company 15-items, we find a stricter structure. The structure is represented by an excel sheet who determines the style structure of each collection. The style structure dictates the amounts of coats, trousers, t-shirts and the price section they must fit. Moreover, the design is limited by the material, the brand vision, the commercial calendar, and the established customer personas. No style structure can be found in Meaning, as the commercial leaders trust the lead designer to decide for each collection which style structure to choose. However, the fashion concept manager does keep an eye on the style



structure while setting the limitations in price segments, brand vision, group vision and calendar drops.

*Me-D: So for the design process, I have to say I am quite free to make the collection, I never get any exact figures or numbers, regarding collection structure I create it myself*

*15-C: But the one that we try to be very particular with it is the total number of styles in a collection, it's always a fixed number, so if we vary we vary within the collection but not in a major way.*

*Me-D: the sales affect everything that we are doing – I am not just sitting in an office and trying to create something nobody has seen, it is of course, it has to be true to Meaning identity and values and how we have described our target group.*

Deciding together on the design structure allows the commercial and creative side to establish a framework within which they work and to align their efforts towards a common goal. Moreover, establishing a certain structure for the creative work helps avoid discussion in later milestones and assures that the creative ability of the designer is working towards the established commercial goal, represented by brand vision, customer personas and price ranges.

*15-C: to create a very simple system - ground rules if you like - how many pieces in a collection, try to use an analytical framework for diffusing potential arguments, so, if you agreed that there are 80 pieces in a collection, and you sort of written it down, then there is not much to argue about it afterward – you are running the company in a bad way if you end up with 120 pieces*

Based on these cases it seems that how to set the structure depends on the company and the personalities involved. Some personalities, like the lead designer in Meaning, have experience in commercial positions omitting the need for a clear structure. On the other hand, some companies, like 15-items, prefer to have a clear style structure as the collection structure is part of their company vision. Nevertheless, all three case companies have at the core of their design structure a physical, mental and temporary space of complete freedom for the designer. This freedom is for example represented by the fact that the

commercial lead takes no part or a very small part in the creative process itself. Once established the structure, the lead designer can move freely within this space. He/she is even allowed to infringe the limits if he/she is convinced to reach success by doing so. For example, in companies 15-items and Meaning, the lead designers ignore sales reports establishing the style as “too early to understand”.

*15-C: the creative work needs to be managed but there needs to be a core to it which needs to be completely free of interference from the commercial part right.*

*Me-D: I process this information in my head, because sales are always looking back, only at this moment and I am designing the future – so I have to think about if this is only because maybe that style was too early, or is it really too uncommercial for our target group, or was it the price that was not working or what was the reason for that.*

*15-D: I have noticed sometimes that people, especially like a sales team, they are always thinking what has been selling well, and for them sometimes it's a little bit difficult to see the future, which is our work, as a designer.*

As mentioned above, the freedom space for the designer is not only physical and mental but also temporal. This fact is especially visible in case company Kalevala, as they are still a small team and all team members incorporate many roles. However, both interviewees state the importance of finding time for the designer to immerse in her design space and work on her designs. Therefore, it seems that time schedules need to be set to achieve commercial success, however, have to take into account the time needed for creative work. Lastly, it could be that allowing the designer the right amount of time to work creatively increases the feeling of appreciation for design which probably supports the creativity of the designer.

*KA-D: So what I see is really important is to understand the role and importance of design. And that means give time to it. Because design is not something that you just make, it has to be processed and it's a process in the head of the designer, that gathers the influences and so on, it's not copying of course, because it has to be unique.*

*KA-C: So it happens side by side with all the other tasks, but we try to find slots for her where she can really go into her design world and take time to think about the new design.*

In conclusion, the data suggests that how much structure to give to a designer, depends on the brand, the designer, his commercial understanding and how strong the commercial counterpart is. However, it appears that a mutual decision about the structure within which the designer can work and the possibility for the designer to move freely within that structure, allowed the case companies to align the creative and commercial aspects of the company.

#### 4.4 Summary of the findings

In this last sub-chapter, I will combine all the findings to highlight the interdependence and interconnectedness of the leadership practices. Moreover, I will introduce the constructs of temporal and conceptual alignment, which I elaborated to describe in more in detail the alignment between the commercial and creative aspects of a fashion company. Hereby, temporal alignment means that both teams of the company work in parallel and temporally coordinated to achieve the goals of the company, while conceptual alignment means that both teams understand, support and work towards the same company vision.

Figure 6 illustrates all the leadership practices elaborated in this Thesis including the supportive practices, organizational structures and behavioral attitudes they are based on. Hereby, the Figure clearly depicts the interconnectedness of the leadership practices. For example, the informal communication of the leadership practice “structured milestone meetings and informal communication” seems to support the formation of mutual trust between the commercial and creative team (connection 2). The same mutual trust needed for the leadership practice “a structured freedom space for the designer” as the data suggest that in order to give someone freedom and autonomy you need to trust them. A further example is the practice of taking mutual decisions (connection 3). On one side it is a crucial practice within the leadership practice “counterbalance and mutual decision making”, on the other side it is a supportive practice to achieve a framework for the designer needed in the leadership practice “a structured freedom space for the designer”.

Both examples show how interconnected the leadership practices elaborated in this Thesis are and how difficult it can be to separately describe them.

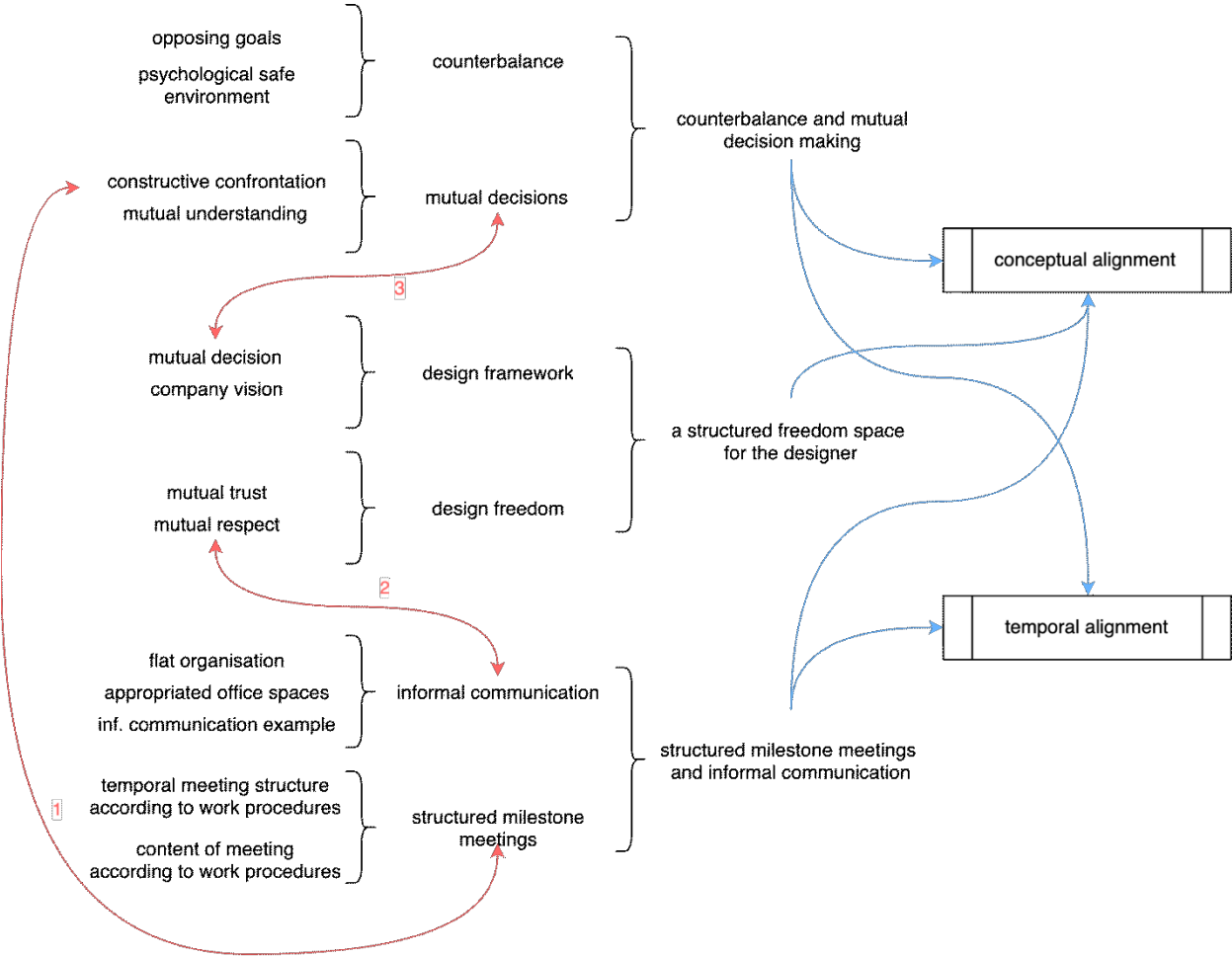


Figure 6 - Interconnections of the findings

Finally, Figure 6 illustrates the alignments which seem to be achieved by the leadership practices. The leadership practice “structured milestone meetings and informal communication” together with the leadership practice “counterbalance and mutual decision making” allow the creative and commercial team to achieve temporal alignment. Hereby, temporal alignment indicates the temporal coordination between the commercial and creative team, which can be achieved through mutual decision making of working schedules and milestones and by continuous information exchange through informal communication. Temporal alignment may seem less important than contextual alignment, however for a business to succeed the time-to-market can be as crucial than the product innovation. On the other hand, contextual alignment may be achieved through all the three

leadership practices described in the Thesis. Hereby, each leadership practice supports the conceptual alignment in a different temporal and contextual way. For example, mutual decision making allows for an alignment already during the creation of the company vision, while the framework for the designer may help to keep the alignment during the whole design process.

## 5. Discussion

This Thesis was motivated by the need to detect leadership practices which support the alignment of the commercial and creative aspects within a fashion company. This chapter integrates the findings from the empirical part with the academic literature by answering the research questions, offering practical implications, discussing the limitations of the study, and outlining further areas of research.

### 5.1 First research question

How do leaders of fashion companies align the creative and commercial aspects within the company?

The answer to the first research question can be found in all the three leadership practices described in the findings chapter. However, this sub-chapter will discuss the leadership practices “structured milestone meetings and informal communication” and “counterbalance and mutual decision making”, as the third leadership practice “a structured freedom space for the designer” will be discussed as the answer to the second and third research questions in the next sub-chapters.

As discussed above the first leadership practice “structured milestone meetings and informal communication” allows the creative and commercial team to constantly align their activities temporally while fostering creativity due to knowledge exchange. Hereby, the alignment is based on a mutual understanding between the two teams. The mutual understanding emerges due to informal communication, as informal communication can initiate a new social-meaning-making process and through it a new logic of practice can evolve, which incorporates both the creative and commercial logic of practice. The importance of communication between the two counterposed teams is supported by many studies, which state that creativity is more likely to occur when people with different backgrounds share their thinking (Amabile & Khaire, 2008; Coman & Bonciu, 2014). Moreover, the shared knowledge allows the individual to evolve and elaborate different realms of knowledge, which again fosters their creativity (Amabile & Khaire, 2008). Hereby, the importance of informal communication is highlighted by De Fillippi, et al. (2007) as it seems to spark innovative ideas. Finally, the combination of structured milestones and

informal communication seems crucial in securing the knowledge exchange without hindering the workflow. The findings align with the literature, as on one hand Coman and Bonciu (2014) states that a flat organization and ongoing information exchange do foster creativity, while on the other hand Galloway and Haniff (2015) and Marshall and Rossman (2006) both present studies that show the need of structured working schedules and project management tools in the creative businesses. Nevertheless, no study can be found where the importance of the combination of the two communication flows is described. Hereby this Thesis can add new findings to the literature.

Part of the communication is the leadership practice “counterbalance and mutual decision making”. For the creative and commercial team to align, it seems there must be a balance between the two teams. This balance can be unstable due to the prominence of the lead designer in most fashion companies; therefore, it is the task of the commercial leader to act as a counterweight to the creative lead. However, this counterbalance should not instigate rivalry between the two teams, instead, the commercial leader and the lead designer have to set an example for collaboration and mutual decision making within the company. In particular, it seems that mutual decision making supports the alignment of the commercial and creative team. Hereby, the most important alignment in fashion companies can be found in the company vision. By establishing together, the company vision, both the commercial and creative lead agree on the company goals and targets and commit themselves to them. Hereby, we can find a stronger alignment of the commercial side to the creative side, as most company vision of fashion businesses do arise from a creative view. No study regarding the importance of the company vision in fashion companies could be found, however in literature we can find proof of the importance of being able to take part in decision making for creativity and employee retention (Coman & Bonciu, 2014) and the importance of distance and cooperation between two leading entities in creative businesses to avoid the negative effects of resource contamination while gaining the positive effects of resource complementarities (De Fillippi, et al., 2007). Therefore, this Thesis proposes counterbalance and mutual decision making as essential leadership practices to align commercial and creative company aspects.

In conclusion, the answer to the first research question can be supported both with literature and the findings. However, the findings open a new viewpoint on the answer, as

it is the first study which analysis this problem from a leadership-as-practice point of view, while former studies used leadership styles or competences as theoretical lenses.

## 5.2 Second research question

Which practices enable the leaders of fashion companies to channel the creative intuition of fashion designers in the same direction as the commercial gain?

The answer to the second research question can be found in the leadership practices “A structured freedom space for the designer”. While the first research question concerns the general alignment of commercial and creative company aspects where this Thesis could detect a stronger alignment of the commercial side to the creative in the elaboration of the company vision, the second research question focuses more on the creative aspect aligning with the commercial goals.

To achieve the alignment of the creative intuition with the commercial goal this Thesis proposes a framework structure within which the creative team can work freely. This framework can or should be made up of commercial as well as creative boundaries, such as price ranges, style structures, deadlines, and company vision. Hereby, these boundaries should not be imposed from the commercial team on the lead designer but should be elaborated on a mutual decision basis, which aligns with the findings in the first research question. The importance of boundaries for creative work can be found in Ibbotson and Darsø (2008). By studying orchestra directors, they established creativity as a boundary phenomenon, which occurs where resistance is encountered. However, Ibbotson and Darsø (2008) state that it is the leader’s capability to understand when restricting and letting emerge. Moreover, they identified a difference in constraints and targets, describing targets as unfeasible for creative purposes as they are mostly expressed in commercial terms. Correspondingly Mumford, et al. (2002) speak of idea structuring, stating that leader activities should concentrate on planning, timing, and objectives of creative projects instead of focusing on the specific conduct of the work. The framework proposed in this Thesis would achieve the same purpose of guidance with respect to the creative and organizational merits of the work.



In conclusion, channeling creative intuition is an act of balance. On one side a commonly established structure within which the creative team should work seems necessary, on the other side an environment where the infringement of the structure for the sake of creativity is allowed should be present.

### 5.3 Third research question

Which practices allow the leaders of fashion companies to reduce the risk of suppressing the artistic motivation by commercial pressure?

One of the highest risk when working with creatives is the over management of creativity, which can lead to suppressing the artistic motivation (Amabile, 1998). Discovering how to reduce this risk is thus the third research question of this Thesis, as the alignment of the creative and commercial aspects should not mean the suppression of one of the two. While the first research question explained how the suppression of the commercial side can be tackled with a counterbalancing weight of the commercial leader, the suppression of the creative part can be tackled with the leadership practice “a structured freedom space for the designer”.

The constructed leadership practice to avoid suppressing the artistic motivation of the design team in fashion businesses is the establishment of a complete freedom space. As discussed above a structure within which the design team should work should be commonly decided on, however, once this structure is established the commercial team should allow the creative team complete freedom to move within the structure or even infringe the structure if necessary. This freedom space can be compared to job autonomy, which has been discovered as a driver of creativity on the workplace (Li, et al., 2018) supporting the findings of this Thesis. Furthermore, this freedom space allows the two teams to keep distinctive identities and separate activities, which allows them to work efficiently while avoiding interference and diminishing resource contribution (De Fillippi, et al., 2007).

In conclusion, the findings of this Thesis do align with previous findings of the literature, however, they go further as they do not only state what fosters creativity in employees but

elaborate leadership practices which allow reducing the risk of suppressing already displayed artistic motivation with commercial pressure.

## 5.4 Practical implications

The practical objective of this Thesis was to provide knowledge and holistic understanding regarding the alignment of commercial and creative company aspects within a fashion business context. The goal was to understand how these companies approach and lead creative work to achieve commercial success: what are the leadership practices which support the cooperation between the commercial and creative team resulting in commercial and creative success. The practical contribution of this Thesis is a better understanding of these leadership practices. Besides the three leadership practices described in this Thesis and the interconnectedness of those, I would like to highlight further practical implications which support the alignment of commercial and creative company aspects.

Firstly, I would like to highlight the importance of contextuality of the findings. All three leadership practices could be detected in all three case companies, however, in all three companies the practices were adapted to the context and expressed through different behaviors. Accordingly to the context is the importance of the people involved. Hereby, I would like to highlight the importance of mutual trust and respect between the two main leaders of the company, the CEO and the main designer. It seems that a fashion company can only be successful if those two people find an appropriate way of collaborating which then is reflected in the respecting teams. Therefore, the selection of an appropriated main designer or commercial leader may be seen as a crucial practical implication to support the alignment of commercial and creative company aspects within a fashion business context.

Secondly, I would like to introduce a fourth finding, which was not included in the main findings due to the inability to define it as a leadership practice. Moreover, this finding was only strongly represented in case company Meaning, while I could observe lighter representations of the finding in 15-items and Kalevala. The finding describes the prominence of the main designer and the supportiveness of the commercial leader. Hereby, the prominence of the designer was very strong in Meaning due to the extensive commercial and creative experience of the main designer. In this case, both commercial

leaders played a very supportive role to the creative leader, allowing the creative leader to incorporate the brand and be very possessive about the collections and the brand, even supporting the amalgamation of the designer and the brand itself. Moreover, I have experienced the prominence of the designer, who focus on “I have done” and the supportiveness of the commercial side.

*Me-C: it is always been, before and now, very designer driven so the designer is the mother of the brand and the soul – so the brand is communicated via Me-D*

*Me-D: I am running my own business kind of, but it means, as I said, that there must be also the understanding of the whole process*

The same possessiveness for the brand from the lead designer can be found in Kalevala and 15-items. In both cases the designer has founded the company on their own, setting the ground rules for the company vision, and their creative vision still imprints the company vision. However, in these two cases, the commercial leader has established a more prominent role and does take credit for the success of the company, even if the face of the brand stays the designer. Nevertheless, in all companies, the awareness of “needing-each-other” is strongly represented. Neither of the designers expressed the belief to be able to make it on their own and acknowledges the need for a more commercial perspective on the company to be successful.

*15-D: I actually founded 15-items almost 10 years ago – I want to create a complete wardrobe like a best possible wardrobe for women*

*KA-D: So Kalevala was kind of the answer to my question, How could actually I work as a designer, how could I continue as a designer.*

This practical implication is also supported by the literature, as the prominence of the designer can be seen closely related to intrinsic motivation, which is seen as a driver of creativity (Li, et al., 2018). Hereby fostering the prominence feeling of the lead designer, by encouraging his feeling of possessiveness of the fashion collection or supporting the lead designer in being the face of the company can be compared to servant or authentic leadership which both have been described as adequate in leading creativity (Yoshida, et al., 2014; Zubair & Kamal, 2015). Moreover, this finding can be supported by Ibbotson and

Darsø (2008) who describe the leading of creatives as “management by walking around”, by a leader who is not only physically present but also mindfully conscious about the creativity displayed.

In conclusion, the balance between commerce and art should be the main goal within a fashion company and request continuous balancing acts. The balancing act starts with the selection of a business partner and consequently with the selection of employees and ends by the daily activities within the company. Hereby, it is crucial to remember that each context requests different balancing acts, however, it seems they all do start from mutual understanding and respectful conduct between the teams and are based on the self-awareness of the paradoxical demands on becoming and being a world-famous and commercially successful fashion company.

## 5.5 Limitations of the study

Applying the leadership-as-practice lens to fashion business provides a step forward in the literature concerning the leadership of creative employees. As such, it has some limitations. Firstly, each researcher enters a study biased by his/her own knowledge (Ketokivi & Choi, 2014), which bears a risk, especially in the qualitative analysis as the researcher is the main instrument of data collection. For this Thesis, the knowledge bias was relatively low, as my knowledge about the fashion business was minor when I started the research. However, the biases increased after every case company as after each interview my knowledge increased and first ideas formed. The researcher bias risked was mainly tackled by temporal distance between the case interviews, however, also by a self-aware approach to the single cases. Nevertheless, this limitation was not completely eliminable.

Secondly, the research method of this cross-case study was thematic interviews, which do include multiple biases which can bear limitations to the study. On one hand, interviewees might be unwilling or uncomfortable to share information, on the other they might be unaware of recurring practices in the company (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Especially the unawareness of intuitive practices is a major limitation to this Thesis as discovering leadership practices is the major goal of this Thesis. However, the focus described previously on psychological safety, seen as a key factor in willingness to help (Vuori, 2017),

and allowing themes to emerge during the interview does delimit the risk of interview biases.

Thirdly, the leadership-as-practice literature is relatively young and not yet fully established, leaving the definition of leadership practices slightly incomplete. Therefore, I struggled with understanding the theory fully and spent a lot of time uncovering an appropriated definition of practices to be able to detect the practices in the case companies. The existence of multiple definitions in both the leadership-as-practice view and the phenomenon of creativity forced me to spend multiple weeks reviewing the literature and disclosing suitable definitions. Hereby, even if I am convinced of the definitions I have chosen the study is limited by these definitions which could not be suitable in a different context. Moreover, a different definition of practices or a different personal understanding of practices could have led to the discovery of more or different leadership practices. This limitation to the Thesis was constricted by choosing the most established definitions if possible or the most suitable for the context. Nevertheless, the omission of leadership practices stays a limitation to this study. Furthermore, the differentiation between behavior and practices could not yet be fully defined as it is difficult to differentiate if behaviors arise from practices or practices are formed from behaviors, therefore, it could be that I partly described behaviors as leadership practices

Fourthly, my focus on the commercial leader does pose a limitation to this study, as the main designer could induce further leadership practices I was not able to detect by focusing on the commercial leader. Nevertheless, this limitation remains minor, due to the definition of leadership practice which does take into account all the practices occurring within the team and therefore, also includes the actions of the main designer.

Lastly, the generalizability of the findings is limited due to the contextual characteristic of cross-case studies. Parallels do exist between the case companies of this Thesis and other SME fashion companies, however applying qualitative research result to cases outside those studied can present problems (Yin, 1984). Nevertheless, the generalizability of the findings was never the main concern of this Thesis and as such aligns with the as-practice view which concentrates on the contextuality of the findings. However, three cases studies do represent a defendable amount of cases to allow the findings to be generalized within such a close context as the fashion business. If these finding can be applied to all cultural

industries or other industries needs further empirical evaluation and was not the goal of this Thesis, nevertheless, similarity can be expected, due to commonalities in the people and work of creative ventures (Mumford, et al., 2002).

Despite the concerns and limitations, the insights found in the Thesis are based upon a structured analysis, genuine interviews and a meticulous selection of the case companies. In my view, I was able to elaborate on several useful implications for research and practice in fashion companies.

## 5.6 Theoretical implications and areas of further research

The theoretical objective of this Thesis was to provide a deeper understanding of leadership practices in fashion companies, which allow the alignment of commercial and creative aspects within the company. The academic literature regarding leadership in the fashion business is emergent but scarce and mostly focused on managerial capabilities and leadership styles. This study has contributed to two different literature streams. On one hand, it contributed to the leadership-as-practice literature by examining the existence of leadership practices in the fashion businesses, on the other hand, it has contributed to the creative leadership literature by widening the field from leadership styles and competencies to leadership practices. While the strict focus was intentional it would be beneficial to follow-up with a larger, broader investigation of the fashion business or other creative businesses. Conclusively, this Thesis opens up new avenues for further research.

Firstly, the same research question could be further analysis as this Thesis only includes three case studies. By widening the number of case companies, the findings of this Thesis could further be validated or invalidated. Moreover, alongside a qualitative research a quantitative research could be conducted, to achieve a complete overview of the phenomena.

Secondly, the research could be widened to different cultural industries. As all those industries are based on the commercialization of creative abilities, the same findings could be revealed. On the other hand, these new findings could be interesting for the fashion industry itself. In conclusion, this could offer insights that are generalizable to all industries and therefore open further avenues for future research.

## 5.7 Concluding remarks

This Thesis examined leadership practices in a fashion business context. The objective was to provide a holistic understanding of the phenomenon: how is the alignment between creative and commercial company aspects achieved in fashion companies, which leadership practices do support the alignment. A large body of literature regarding the fashion business, creativity, as-practice view, and creative leadership was synthesized, and based on that, definitions for creativity and leadership practices were elaborated for this Thesis. In the empirical part, case companies' working practices were observed and leadership practices were constructed based on the data collected in thematic interviews. The main findings of the Thesis incorporate three leadership practices: "Structured milestone meetings and informal communication"; "Counterbalance and mutual decision making"; "A structured freedom space for the designer". Finally, the findings of the study were discussed with relevant literature, and further recommendations were elaborated which have not been included in the main findings as they were not identified as leadership practices.

The fashion business context represents a dual context, as it encompasses both art and business, which respectively encompass different goals. How these sometimes counterposed goals are balanced and aligned does decide on the success of a fashion company. Therefore, this Thesis focused on the alignment of the creative and commercial company aspects and elaborated leadership practices which do support the alignment.

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# Exhibits

## Appendix 1: Interview themes

### General questions

- Please describe your role in the company?
- How would you describe your typical day at work?
- Who do you work most with?
- Are there people you disagree with? - Who do you “fight” with, who do you challenge?
- These activities you describe do you think they are creative or business tasks? Why?
- Do you daily interact with the “other” (comercial/creative) side?
- How would you define commercial and creative?

### Possible further questions questions:

- What different activities/practices are there in the copmany?
- Which one would you classify as c/b? —> link to tension?
- What do you think is the most vital company process/role?

### The Design process

- How would you describe the activities involved in the creation of a new collection?
- Who/where is the starting point?
- Who has a leading role, who supports?
- Who makes final decisions when arguments arise?
- Who reports to whom?
- Who is involved in process?
- Is there a process map?
- Are you part of this process and how?
- Do you think you have a leading role? What actions does these leading role require?
- Who does support you? Who do you interact most with?

## The business process

- How does the company operate outside of the design process?
- Aligned with fashion cycles?
- Defined by design choices, or interferes with design choices?

## Tensions and Visions

- Do you think there are tensions between c/b?
- Example?
- How do you feel about it?
- What do you do when tensions arise?
- Does the design depend on you company vision?
- Who defined vision?
- Where visible in company?

## Appendix 2: The data structure

Case company Kalevala

Code	Code Group 1	LAP
acknowledging the importance of communication	encourage continuous communication	balance structured and informal communication
constant communication due to common office between the whole team		
meeting structure is flexible	establish structured communication	
monthly meetings, focused on design and pr tasks		
weekly meeting to check up on week tasks		
Acknowledge importance of design freedom	allow design freedom	establish a structured design freedom
trusting the design competences and giving the design part complete freedom		
design for a specific client	establish design limits (structure)	
design is limited by brand vision		
design is limited by commercial time schedule		
establish design focus	establish importance of design	encourage knowledge exchange and common decisions to find balance
make time for design work		
talk about different viewpoints to find balance between commercial and creative side	taking decisions together	
commercial and creative part take decisions together about collections		
creating together the final vision of the brand		
designer vision as basis for brand vision	trusted control	
commercial and creative part checking up on each other		
commercial part checking up on design part		
creative and commercial part being aware of importance of each other		
having trust in the capabilities of the other (commercial/creative) part		

Case company 15-items

Code	Code Group 1	LAP
balance between c-c through pre-agreed terms (excel sheet)	establish a pre-agreed framework within the designer can work	establish a framework for the designer
design limitations due to styles structure		
balance between c-c through counterbalance	establish a system of check and balances	
commercial responsibilities is to keep check and balance on creative		
design limitations due to commercial aspects (fabrics, wholesale, budget)	make designer aware of limitations	
design limitations due to commercial calendar		
design limitations due to commercial calendar causes re-design of collection		
design limitations due to earlier collections / brand vision		
design limitations due to established customer personalities		
design limitations due to size of company (time shortage)		
designer understands and accepts the design limits		
appreciate constant communication in office		
constant communication within team due to same office space		
Informal exchange of knowledge between commercial and creative team		
informal interaction between design and sampling team		
informal interaction between design and with sales		
pricing meeting and prototype meeting as milestones in design process	establish a structured communication by setting milestones	
sales team shares feedback on new collection in price meeting		
sales team shares feedback on new collection in prototype meeting		
structure of price meetings is constant		
understanding importance of the other part (creative or commercial)	establish trust and understanding between the two teams	give complete freedom space by trust
understanding the other part (creative or commercial)		
acknowledge importance of giving complete freedom to designer	give complete freedom	
freedom during the creative process before milestone meeting		
freedom in schedule within milestones		
freedom of designer not consider sales data		



freedom of designer to withhold information		
distance between the commercial and the creative part	establish trust between the two teams	
give trust		
commercial and creative side taking decision together	encourage common decision making	establish clear responsibilities but encourage shared decisions
common development of brand strategy		
creative and commercial team go through sale results together		
management team (c and c) take decision together about future of company		
commercial side gives administrative support to creative side	give major responsibilities to both teams	
designer eliminates 10-20% of collection in prototype meeting		
establish clear responsibilities		
importance of the creative side during the prototype meeting		
main designer established mood board for new collection		
pre-selection of sketches by main designer		
tasks assigned to the commercial side		

Case company Meaning

Code	Code Group 1	LAP
constant communication within design team	encourage informal information exchange	establish milestone meetings while encouraging informal
constant exchange between designer and fashion concept manager		
designer hungry for information		
informal communication between designer and marketing team		
informal communication between designer and division manager		
providing outside/ commercial inputs for designer	structured check-ups of commercial side on designer	
commercial side gives feedback after mood board was established by designer		
commercial side gives feedback in proto-meeting		
fashion concept manager overlooks designs		
structured communication (set meetings, proto, pricing..)	be supportive	
commercial as supporter of creative		
commercial side "Interrupted" by creative side		
cooperation between commercial and creative side		
support of commercial side for creative side		
support self-importance of designer	let designer incorporate brand vision	
designer finds themselves in brand vision and values		
importance of "passion" during design process	see designer as central person to brand	
"possessiveness" for collection from designer "my"		
designer presents own collection		
designer seen as principal brand lead		
designer seen as vision		
importance of design for the company		
trust in abilities of other side (c-c)		
trust in designers' abilities	give trust and freedom space	allow complete freedom within fluid framework created together
designer balances data received from sales		
division manager not part of proto-meeting		
freedom in designing the collection		
freedom of designer in everyday decisions	remind designer of design limitations	
structure of collection decided by designer		
limitation of design by commercial aspect (price of fabric)		
limitation of design by trends		
limitations of brand vision by group vision		
limitations of design by sales		
limitations to design by brand vision/customer personas		

designer takes decisions together with commercial side about brand vision	taking decisions together	define clear responsibilities while encouraging common decisions
designer takes decisions together with commercial side about which looks to keep in the collection		
price decisions in proto-meeting		
taking decisions together (team thinking)		
responsibilities of designer (10 hats)	define responsibilities	
define responsibilities for commercial side		