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An examination of strategic leadership in a dynamic context:

The case of the German automobile manufacturer, BMW

by

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"We do not have to go to knowledge to obtain an exclusive hold on reality. The world as we experience is the real world".

Dewey, J. (1929, p. 235).

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this research to my two children, Meret Cäthe and Clemens

Merlin. I hope they will enjoy learning and academic studies as much as I do.

Acknowledgements

Abstract

BMW was first founded in 1916 and has more than 100 years of history within the global automotive industry (Lechner, 2020). There have been many events that have presented the business with extraordinary challenges (Krüger, 2019), but the current challenges BMW face are different. Following an extensive period of prosperous development and flourishing commercial success, the business is fundamentally redefining BMW (Zetsche, 2019). Simultaneously, many changes are occurring from substantial application of new technologies to innovative competitors, investments for electrification of the cars, sustainability policies, and changing consumer preferences are forcing BMW to reconsider their business models and leadership approaches (Cornet et al., 2019; Donkin, Binvel, & Stemmler, 2016; Krüger, 2019; Mohr et al., 2013; Telang, 2018; Zetsche, 2019).

It is essential to understand required adjustments to the traditional approach to leadership at BMW, which has its origin in a more command-and-control mentality. Now the role of senior executives has become a substantial critical success factor in the organisational transformation (Greer & Carter, 2013 Becker, 2019; Cornet et al., 2019). The apparent research question raised is how do BMW senior executives experience this unprecedented and challenging situation and choose to perform their role accordingly.

This study examines strategic leadership by illuminating relevant contextual relationships which influence leaders' actions within a specific context. The research offers a novel approach to studying leadership practice by employing a single case study drawing upon the philosophy of pragmatism. The attention is towards the description of the complexity and contextuality rather than decreasing or

disconnecting it. By conducting eighteen interviews with BMW senior executives and nine interviews with external consultants the study captures multiple voices and perspectives. The examination provides a comprehensive and detailed description of the occurring problem and accordingly what practical solution can be applied. In this regard the recognition and conceptualisation of context and its dependencies have not been an essential part of most leadership research (Fairhurst, 2009; Iszatt-White, 2011; Johns, 2001, 2006; Oc, 2018; Porter & McLaughlin, 2006). Nevertheless, the focus on leadership in a specific context provides an advantageous insight into the leadership practice—because leadership and its effectiveness are in large part dependent upon the context (Osborn, Hunt & Jauch, 2002; Moir, 2018; Poser, 2017; Wang, 2018).

The study shows how senior executives perceive the specific dynamic context within the changing automotive industry. The conclusion of the examination is that the senior executives consider the current business changes and employ a combination of ambidexterity and meaningful action towards an envisioned outcome. The examination of the strategic leadership shows that an approach to leadership in the dynamic context comprises of an application of this ambidextrous attitude. This approach deals with the critical organisational and business-related legacies and simultaneously implement a new way to lead—which copes with the dynamic changes in the industry.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

"A problem well put is half-solved."
(Dewey, 1938, p. 108)

The automotive sector is one of the key economic industries in Germany, and the German automotive industry is recognised as a global leader. Likewise, Germany and its domestic car manufacturers are world leaders when it comes to high-tech automotive products (Germany Trade & Invest, 2019). This economically important sector is currently suffering greatly after many years of record sales and profit—car manufacturers have little to celebrate at present (Becker, 2019; IMSA, 2018; Singh, 2019; Thomas, 2019; Towers-Clark, 2019). The reason is that the automotive industry is in a dramatically tense transformative situation which some have called unprecedented (Badtke, 2019; Cornet et al., 2019). These companies, which are so important for the German economy, have to invest many billions of euros in electric drives, battery technology, and networking of their cars. At the same time, markets have shifted, consumer behaviour has changed, and new competitors have appeared (Engemann & Kuri, 2019; Singh, 2019).

From the perspective of a senior executive, leading an automotive company was never a comfortable task owing to business complexity, cost pressure, diverging markets, digital demands, and regulatory pressure on safety and environmental issues (Gao, Kaas, Mohr, & Wee, 2016; Singh, 2019). However, in this new world, an applied leadership approach must respond to a number of additional, more complex, and often more contradictory situations (Smith, Erez, Jarvenpaa, Lewis, & Tracey, 2017).

In addition, the convergence of revolutionary trends in technology is changing the automotive industry as a whole. Fundamental new technologies, sustainability policies, and changing consumer preferences are forcing the automotive industry to rethink its business models (Cornet et al., 2019; Donkin et al., 2016; Mohr et al., 2013; Telang, 2018). In particular, digitalisation and related business models have revolutionised other industries, and the automotive industry will be no exception.

In this respect, an oft-cited example from a different industrial sector is the Eastman Kodak Co. which demonstrates the characteristic pattern of a company that failed to comprehend the significance of technological transitions (Shih, 2016). Another example is Nokia, which has also become known for its inability to anticipate the future. The company became a victim of tremendous success and, it ignored impending changes, innovations, and competitors (Mauri, 2017).

In the automotive industry, the same threats are imminent. For instance, Dr Herbert Dies, Chairman of the Board of Management of Volkswagen AG, stated in 2019 that Volkswagen was affected by the worst disease a company can catch in times of technological change, a *standstill* (Starnick, 2019). Ulrich Schumacher (2014), Opel Group's Vice President for Human Resources and Labour Director, observed that the industry model has changed irrevocably and that the pace of change is relentless (as cited in Donkin et al., 2016). Along the same lines, Michael Cole (2014) Chief Operating Officer, Kia Motors Europe, reflected that dynamics in the industry and business environment require increasing flexibility and agility (as cited in Donkin et al., 2016). In this situation, the emphasis is on the actions a senior executive can take in order to cope with these developments and the rising demand for transformation. A derivative consequence is an alteration of the applied approach to leadership.

1.1   Practical Need and Demand

Based on this scenario, with its ongoing transformations, there emerges a considerable need to cope with the new requirements. Therefore, an appropriate adaptation of a novel leadership approach is the consequence because senior executives have to lead the company through this tremendous industrial transformation. In this situation, with its significant disruptions, the challenge is that from the perspective of leadership, what worked yesterday barely works today and will probably fail tomorrow (Krüger, 2019; McClain, 2019; Zetsche, 2019).

In principle, the future success of the automotive industry will depend on its ability to adopt innovations and changes that might come from outside the industry (McKinsey, 2016; Mohr et al., 2013; Towers-Clark, 2019). These interdependencies have a dramatic impact on the approach required to run an automotive company successfully now and in the future (Cairns & Wright, 2018; Donkin et al., 2016; Krüger, 2019; McClain, 2019; Zetsche, 2019). Likewise, Maggioni, Thiele, Rivard, and Turner (2016) pointed out that with this situation, replete with new facets based on increasing complexity, accelerating change, and slowing growth, the leadership mindset must change.

This raises questions about how the leadership approach must change. In particular, the challenge is to face this unavoidable transformation of the industry while preserving and creating a sustainable leadership model and culture.

1.2 Problem Identification

Based on the expressed overarching business scenario and according to practical requirements, an associated problem is evident. Important to this relationship is that a practical request to improve the leadership approach has a low level of applicability and practical value if the corresponding context is viewed in a disconnected manner (Uhl-Bien, Avolio, & Cavarretta, 2009; Snowden, 2016). There is a need for a deeper combination of the new requirements arising from the business scenario with a suitable approach to leadership (McKinsey, 2016). In such a complex and dynamic environment, a rather static-context-free approach to leadership has questionable applicability. Especially against the background of this specific business situation, there is the characterisation of a novel and extraordinary dynamic along with the disruption of established business models (Cornet et al., 2019; Singh, 2019).

Given this understanding of the problem, the solution requires an approach to leadership that considers the influence of context on actions of leaders. By observing and exploring context dependent actions, this research is interested in understanding leadership as actions that are performed in and influenced by a specific context. This is not a claim for causality or that there is a fixed and static dependent relationship or outcome. Instead, the relationship between the need for business transformation, changes in leadership approach and outcomes is viewed as a contextually influenced relationship where leadership approaches are shaped, rather than determined by contextual variables.

To visualize this relationship, Figure 1.1 portrays the postulated interdependency between the *Business transformation* on the one side and *Performed dependent action* on the other side.

Figure 1.1

Interdependency of business transformation and action
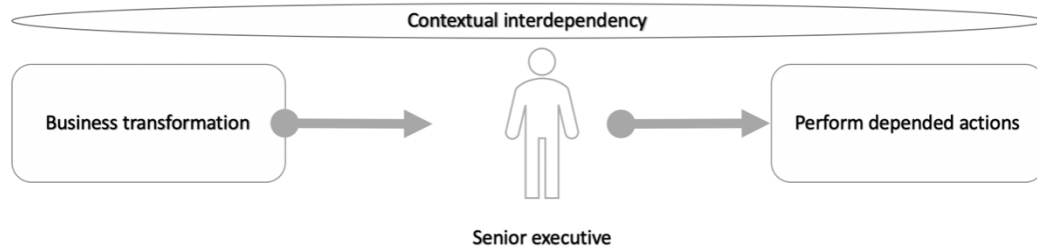
Note. Leadership actions are as a result of a largely subjective interpretation of environmental changes, organisational requirements and individual adaptations. This characterised interdependency is a process of influence rather than a deterministic one.

1.3   Research Approach

The problem identification expressed the occurrence of business disruption and its consideration as a dominant contextual condition. A resolution to this is an anticipated improvement of the approach to leadership as a dependent effect. The anticipation is that the perceived and experienced context as a dominant condition is a corresponding trigger for the appropriate kind of approach to leadership and, finally, the outcomes (Johns, 2001, 2006). A reasonable observation is that the consideration of the relationship between contextual conditions and the approach to the leadership provides applicable value (Abowd et al., 1999; Fischer, Dietz, & Antonakis, 2017; Johns, 2006; Oc, 2018; Porter & McLaughlin, 2006).

The assumption is that the envisioned business future necessarily entails an understanding of different levels of contextual conditions. Hence, considering the context is beneficial when it includes not only a wider perspective but also local and

specific conditions. Such a collective perspective has the advantage of including both macro- and a micro-characteristics (Zaccaro, 2007). Senior executives, especially, are expected to perform effectively in the given contextual condition (Holenweger, 2017; Sharma & Kirkman, 2015).

Consequently, an important line of inquiry from a practical point of view is how a senior executive in this disruptive situation recognises and addresses the contextual dependencies and acts accordingly (Noman, Awang Hashim, & Shaik Abdullah, 2018). There is increasing concern from certain researchers that neglecting all or a part of the contextual dependency causes a problem for the advanced development of an understanding of leadership (Day & Antonakis, 2018; Iszatt-White, 2011; Moir, 2017; Oc, 2018).

This research approach addresses the circumstance regarding the understanding of macro and micro-characteristics and their interdependencies in the leadership approach. The perception is that the influence of the leadership approach applies through various contextual aspects (Harrison, 2018; Osborn, Uhl-Bien, & Miloservic, 2014). Understanding how senior executives recognize and address the surrounding issues and dependencies with regard to their approach to leadership and the resulting actions has so far been an undeveloped question in the literature (e.g., Osborn et al., 2014). Scholars like Osborn (2002), Hunt (2009), Noman (2018), and Oc (2018) have characterised context more at the system level instead of the specific conditions facing a senior executive or in combination. This gap, as holistically indicated by Bonardi, Hitt, Vera, & Withers (2018), occurs because a combination of strategic leadership and contextual perspectives is often ignored.

The usual theoretical approaches have focused on trait and behaviour-based perspectives that addressed interpersonal dynamics outside the influential nature of

contextual dependency (Antonakis, 2017; Iszatt-White, 2011; Moir, 2017; Oc, 2018). In contrast, this relatively novel research approach embraces an assessment of contextual dependency as a framing, influencing, and inseparably constituent component of leadership.

1.4   The difference from this research to others

This study is noticeably distinct from other research in this domain. An indisputable issue in leadership research is that there has been no convergence toward a reasonable number of leadership theories (Latham, 2014). Much of contemporary knowledge about leadership consists of narrow descriptions of leader effectiveness, which suffers from a detachment to the specific context where leadership occurs (Iszatt-White, 2011; Oc, 2018; Osborn, Uhl-Bien, & Miloservic, 2014). The orientation of this study is that context displays itself as an essential element in the identification of a suitable leadership approach.

Since the establishment of leadership studies, the dominant research agenda was established on the primary application of an objectivist, positivist, and quantitative paradigm (Bryman, 2004; Day & Antonakis, 2018; Klenke, 2016). This study applies a combination of differentiating aspects that sets it apart from traditional quantitative approaches. This research dedicates itself to the growing interest in qualitative research in the field of leadership (Myers, 2019). An increasing appreciation can be attributed to the importance of describing complexity and contextuality rather than decreasing or disconnecting it (Creswell, 2009). The position here is that qualitative case-related research can provide an in-depth understanding of leadership practice (Belsky, 2004; Creswell, 2009) and enhance our understanding.

This study explores the understanding of leadership by illuminating relationships, which affects the applied leadership actions within a specific context. Moreover, it embeds the research in a single case study with pragmatism as a novel and underutilized overarching research philosophy (Klenke, 2016). Additionally, the combination of two major leadership research streams (contextual and strategical) is beneficial by revealing the importance of a contextual understandings and reflect a distinct approach (Creswell, 2009; Moon and Blackman, 2014).

1.5 Theoretical Background

Generally, leadership is an important research theme in social sciences, particularly in the domain of human resource management (Harrison, 2018; Vugt & Rueden, 2018). Leadership happens on all scales of human cooperation, from intra-household decision-making to the management of complex organisations (e.g., Couzin, Krause, Franks, & Levin, 2005; Harrison, 2018; King, Johnson, & Van Vugt, 2009; Kirchgässner &Wolters, 2017). In a traditional research approach, context was treated as a matter that limited the scope of research and threatened its validity (Bricki & Green, 2007; Goleman, 2000; Harrison, 2018; Hersey & Blanchard, 1996; Pinnow, 2011; Thompson & Vecchio, 2009).As such, the recognition and conceptualisation of context and its dependencies have not been an essential part of most research efforts (Fairhurst, 2009; Iszatt-White, 2011; Johns, 2001, 2006; Oc, 2018; Porter & McLaughlin, 2006). Likewise, context was treated as a moderating variable rather than an indispensable component (Iszatt-White, 2011; Morrell & Hartley, 2006).

Besides the limited recognition and conceptualisation of a contextually dependent perspective, very few discussions of leadership account for leadership

behaviours at the higher levels of the organisation (Zaccaro & Klimoski, 2001). In this regard, the dominant theory of strategic leadership focuses on individuals with overall responsibility in the organisation (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000; Finkelstein, Hambrick, & Cannella, 2009; Greer & Carter, 2013). On the other hand, contextual leadership theory is concerned about the influences of context on leadership (Dinh et al., 2014; Gardner, Lowe, Moss, Mahoney, & Cogliser, 2010; Lauritsen & Ayman, 2018; Livingston & Lusin, 2009; Oc, 2018). Hence, a combination of these theoretical streams offers a rationale for an amalgamation of these two theoretical positions. It is also beneficial for knowledge development because leadership research in general requests a conceptualisation in which anticipated findings from dissimilar perspectives can be combined and integrated (Day & Antonakis, 2018).

1.6   Research Context

The research context concerns the senior executives of the German premium automotive brand *Bayerische Motoren Werke* (BMW). BMW is a unique automotive company because it focuses all its brands on the premium segment (BMW Group, 2018, 2019). The company represents the kind of internationally oriented automotive manufacturer that has grown to be a global industry leader in the 20th century (Donkin et al., 2016; Singh, 2019; Telang & Karren, 2017; Towers-Clark, 2019).

From a retrospective standpoint, the predominant approach to leadership was characterised by a more command-and-control mentality (Cornet et al., 2019). However, with the emphasised transformations of the automotive sector, it is indicated that this approach will change accordingly (Donkin et al., 2016; Maggioni et al., 2016; Mohr et al., 2013). The uncertain and unpredictable business landscape confronts

BMW senior executives with enormous challenges which require a change in how leadership is executed compared to established behaviours. It is essential to recognise that this change will not wait until the BMW executive organisation is completely ready (Schwab, 2017).

Change is one of the unambiguous aspects of business as well as life in general (Ansoff, Kipley, Lewis, Helm-Stevens, & Ansoff, 2019; Martinet, 2010). Consequently, there is a rationale for asking the question of how an applied and new approach to leadership should be expressed and executed. A prerequisite for this is that such an approach must adequately reflect contextual dependencies. The result ensures that the executives establish a method that sustainably secures the company. The difficulty is in improving the organisation and leadership approach accordingly, especially since BMW's origins are rooted in a business model that is over 100 years old (Donkin et al., 2016; Maggioni et al., 2016).

1.7   Research Philosophy

Accompanying the research approach, the philosophy of this research is *pragmatism*. This stance is relatively novel in leadership research (Klenke 2016; De Waal, 2005; Goldkuhl, 2012; Rorty, 1989). With this in mind, Duram (2012) characterised a pragmatic study as suitable to address problems from various domains, like those from a social or environmental perspective, and allow an investigation into human experience.

This approach explores the variety of choices individuals identify as applicable to a problem. Hence, pragmatism is concerned with action and change along with the interaction between knowledge and action (Duram, 2010; Goldkuhl, 2006, 2012).

Pragmatists share the view that there are manifold interpretations of events, and different concepts can be used to explain the observed phenomena (Biesta & Burbules, 2003; Rescher, 2016). Thus, knowledge receives its significance from its ability to solve a stated problem (Antoft & Salomonsen, 2007; David Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). Therefore, pragmatism is complementary to the present turbulent business world; it is principally suited for research in the domain of practical considerations of leadership and context (Bryman, 2004; Bryman, Stephens, & Campo, 1996; Johns, 2001; Klenke, 2016; Oc, 2018).

1.8   Research Question

The principal identification of the problematic situation underscores the relevance of this research within the domain of leadership practice. It considers contextual characteristics in conjunction with anticipated outcomes and the related adjustments to the leadership approach. Based on these remarks, the research question is expressed as follows:

> How do senior executives perceive the current industry shift and which actions should be taken to improve the approach to leadership?

1.9   Aim and Research Objectives

This research aims to critically examine leadership in situ as conducted by senior executives at BMW. To achieve the aim the study has specific research objectives:

1. To conduct a critical review of the academic literature to assess the association between strategic leadership and contextual leadership.

2. To capture the experiences of leadership within the dynamic context of BMW from both directly employed senior executives and non-employed external senior consultants.

3. To identify critical aspects of the dynamic business environment which help explain the approaches to leadership adopted by senior executives at BMW.

4. To recommend enhancements in practice for senior executives at BMW.

1.10   Structure of the Thesis

This thesis has seven chapters. Its structure is unified and focused on providing a solution to the stated research problem (Perry, 2002).

Chapter Two explores and reviews the current literature with nuances pertaining to contextual and strategic leadership and how they can be united within an entangled view. The chapter identifies a research gap, provides insights into how to bridge this gap, and develops a conceptual framework.

Chapter Three describes the research philosophy of pragmatism and the consideration of truth.

Chapter Four presents the research methodology—how the research was conducted and the research approach. It describes how data were collected, and presents the sampling strategy, data analysis, and data interpretation.

Chapter Five presents the research findings, which are discussed further in

Chapter Six. The discussion in Chapter Six includes an analysis of the findings, a presentation of the problem, and the corresponding solution.

Finally, Chapter Seven offers the conclusion of the thesis, reflecting on the aim, objectives, the research question, and main findings.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to examine contemporary knowledge, including substantive findings, as well as theoretical and methodological contributions. Furthermore, it informs the study design by proposing a developed conceptual framework (Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Ravitch & Riggan, 2011). From this literature review, a knowledge gap is identified, and a resulting research question is derived (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). This is of significance in association with the study. Consequently, in this section, numerous aspects are integrated and guided by a developed overarching and framing expression.

The study of leadership and, more concisely, of strategic leadership, concentrates on executives who have broad responsibility in their corporate entities (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000). In particular, the focus is on characteristics in terms of what they do, how they do it, and how this affects organisational outcomes (Finkelstein et al., 2009). In this specific domain, research has been carried out for decades, but it is still a convoluted topic and the challenge continues to be comprehending this domain (Bhattacharyya & Jha, 2018; Carter & Greer, 2013; Wang, 2018). It is remarkable that the consideration of contextual characteristics in relation to strategic leadership is not explored very far (Day & Antonakis, 2012; Harms, Wood, Landay, Lester, & Vogelgesang Lester, 2018; Iszatt-White, 2011; Liden & Antonakis, 2009; Oc, 2018). This is despite the derivation of a conceivable requirement that executives continually adapt to their firm's surroundings. This means not only where the company is at present, but also where the company plans to be in the future (Day & Antonakis, 2018; Worthington, Britton, & Thompson, 2018).

As initially stated, the theoretical perspective of this research is on the individual at the higher hierarchal level of an organisation, and this circumstance is considered by strategic leadership theory (Finkelstein et al., 2009). Likewise, Boal and Hooijberg (2000) asserted that strategic leadership tends to be concerned with the people who have an overall responsibility for a company or organisation. However, an argument has been put forward for more consideration of dependencies under specific business conditions (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000; Liden & Antonakis, 2009; Porter & McLaughlin, 2006; Van Wart, 2012). The assumption is that context is an expected irreducible construct with leadership to emphasise the fact that leadership practices need to consider context and is that leadership is contextually embedded (Iszatt-White, 2011; Liden & Antonakis, 2009; Noman, Awang Hashim, & Shaik Abdullah, 2016; Oc, 2018; Osborn et al., 2014; Snowden, 2016). This construct is defined by the term *leadership in context*.

Starting from the previously established association between context and strategic leadership, the scope of this review is primarily based on Osborn et al. (2014), Antonakis (2018), and Klenke (2016) with a focus on four key areas of prevailing importance:

- **Leadership and a contextual extension**—discovering leadership from different angles and exploring the relevance of a contextual extension for the approach to leadership (Harrison, 2018; Northouse, 2016).

- **Strategic leadership**—investigating the explanation, limitations, and the framing of strategic leadership theory (Bass & Bass, 2008; Finkelstein et al., 2009; Hitt, Haynes, & Serpa, 2010)

- **Conceptualisation of contextual leadership**—investigating an approach to describe context and the dependencies (Hannah, Uhl-Bien, Avolio, & Cavarretta, 2009; Oc, 2018; Osborn et al., 2014).

- **Integration of strategic and contextual leadership**—developing an arrangement of strategic leadership and context in an integrated and conceptual manner (Zaccaro, Green, Dubrow, & Kolze, 2018b).

Figure 2.1 portrays the framework of the literature review and the corresponding focus areas. The overarching and framing expression is the introduced term *leadership in context*.

Figure 2.1

The aspects and focus of the literature review
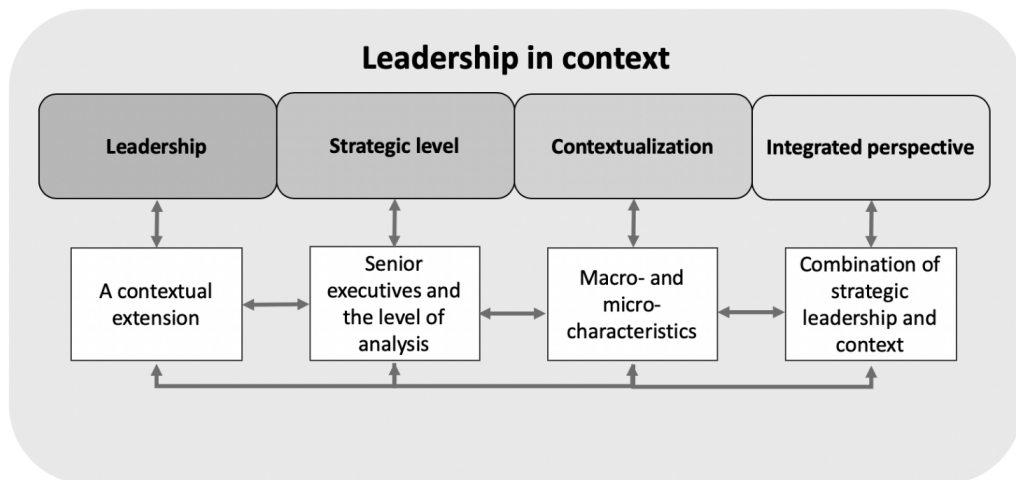
Note. The arrows indicates that the four different perspecitves form a united view on leadership in context.

2.1 Leadership in context

As visualized in Figure 2.1, the overarching and guiding term of the literature review is the term, leadership in context. The rationale for this expression is grounded in the expected relationship between context as an influencing circumstance and the actions that are performed consequently (Porter, 2016; Greer & Carter, 2013; Moir, 2018; Iszatt-White, 2011; Northouse, 2016). This view is consistent with the interpretation by Rousseau and Fried (2001). Their interpretation posits that context and contextualisation represent a combination of observations, including facts, events, and viewpoints that are relevant to the execution of leadership (Rousseau & Fried, 2001). Figure 2.2 depicts this anticipated relationship.

Figure 2.2

Anticipated relationship of context and senior executive
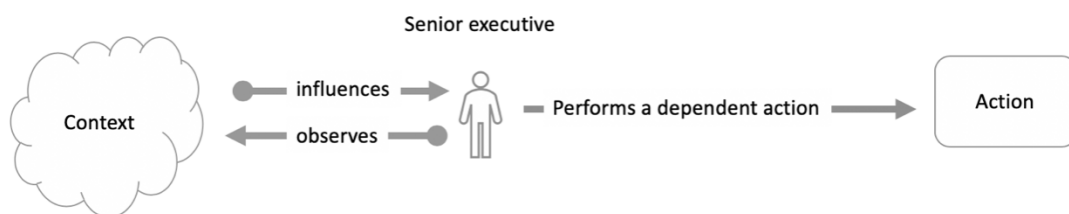
Note. The senior executive is influenced by the observed context and performed a dependent action accordingly.

2.1.1 *The issue of a final definition of leadership*

Researchers have proposed varying and different concepts of leadership (e.g. Boal & Hooijberg, 2000; Bryman, 2004; Yukl, 2006; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). It is widely recognised that leadership can be expressed as an universal phenomenon which remains complex, posing challenges in seeking to explain it (Bass & Bass, 2008; DeRue, 2011; Rosenhead, Franco, Grint, & Friedland, 2019). In this regard Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003) positioned the argument that a comprehensively accepted definition for leadership is practically impossible and furthermore it would hinder contemporary ideas and creative ways of thinking (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003; Harrison, 2018). In practical terms there is no best, single or ultimate response just based on a simple relationship (action and reaction)—leaders have the possibility to choose appropriate actions given the specific context in which they operate.

2.1.2 *Notions on leadership*

As previously discussed, numerous studies have attempted to explain leadership through various notions. A massive amount of research in recent years has been devoted to the analysis and comparison of different leadership styles (Harrison, 2018; Greer & Carter, 2013). Most of those works dealt with transactional leadership (Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Berson, 2003; Bass, Waldman, Avolio, & Bebb, 1987) transformational leadership (Bass & Bass, 2008; Bass et al., 2003), and charismatic leadership (Conger & Kanungo, 1987). Meanwhile, more recent work addresses the styles and approaches that include authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005), servant leadership (van Dierendonck, 2011), and responsible leadership (Waldman &

Galvin, 2008). Other new perspectives include spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003), paradoxical leadership (Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003), stewardship (Block, 1993), connective leadership (Lipman-Blumen, 2000), self-sacrificial leadership (Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1999), chaos and complexity theory (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001; Schneider & Somers, 2006), shared leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2003), ethical leadership (Brown & Treviño, 2006), authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Markow & Klenke, 2005) integrated leadership (Morse, 2010), entrepreneurial leadership (Harrison, 2018), full-range and distance leadership (Poser, 2017), and environmental leadership (Egri & Herman, 2000).

All these research efforts have helped to improve the understanding of how different factors influence leadership. Nevertheless, little of this research has been conducted with an exclusive perspective on strategic leadership in combination with contextual dependency (Crossan, Vera, & Nanjad, 2008; Greer & Carter, 2013; Hitt, Haynes, & Serpa, 2010). Yet, research in strategic leadership is essential because the specific role of an executive has become more critical, because the demands of that role have increased through the complexity in the business (Day & Antonakis, 2018; Greer & Carter, 2013; Ireland, Camp, & Sexton, 2002; Wang, 2018). Based on this demand, increased attention to the context in which leadership occurs and is performed is needed (Oc, 2018; Osborn et al., 2014).

2.1.3 Situational circumstances

A number of the leadership theories previously mentioned are based on an idea that either distinctive traits or practised behaviours allow an individual to lead successfully (Halaychik, 2016; Northouse, 2016). The impact of situational

circumstances has frequently or entirely been ignored. One of the first and most noteworthy theories seeking to address this weakness was *Fiedler's Contingency Theory* (Fielder, 1978). The argument is that successful leadership is contingent upon matching an appropriate individual's leadership style with a particular situation (Villoria, 2016). Fiedler´s contingency theory expressed that there is no single best leadership style that can be applied that will ensure success in every situation (Halaychik, 2016; Northouse, 2016).

Nevertheless, the most significant criticism related to Fiedler's contingency theory is that it does not allow leaders an opportunity to succeed in environments where the accurate situational factors do not exist or are not fully defined (Houghton & Yoho, 2005; Sharma & Kirkman, 2015; Villoria, 2016).

Another contingency related theory is the *Hersey-Blanchard Situational Leadership Theory* (Hersey & Blanchard, 1996, 1982; Thompson & Vecchio, 2009). This theory recognises that situations can affect leadership outcomes, and leaders must take a broader view of their surroundings (Halaychik, 2016; Northouse, 2016). Also, the Hersey-Blanchard Situational Leadership Theory relies on a leader's ability to know and adjust to the maturity level of followers.

Both theoretical approaches support the argument that there is a dependency between the situation and the leader. However, the theories fail to provide insights in terms of applied leadership actions in dedicated contexts (Oc, 2018). Moreover, they neglect the description of context as the circumstances in which an event is situated.

The expressed limitation in the perspectives *of Fiedler Contingency Theory* and *Hersey-Blanchard Situational Leadership Theory* justifies further exploration of contextual leadership. With the contextual perspective the examination and consideration of influences which lessen or enhance the impact on leadership practices

can be extended (Zaccaro, Green, et al., 2018). In this regard, the leadership in context perspective provides an access to explore how leadership takes place in specific contextual settings (Day & Antonakis, 2012; Liden & Antonakis, 2009).

The issues raised in this section provides a rationale for a further review; the additional sections of this chapter will elaborate on this.

2.2 Contextual Dependencies

Taking contextual relationships into account is essential for determining the meanings that participants extract from the experiences and how they act accordingly.

Figure 2.3 elaborates on Figure 2.2 and include the representation of a dependent action and its consequences.

Figure 2.3

Specific contextual dependencies
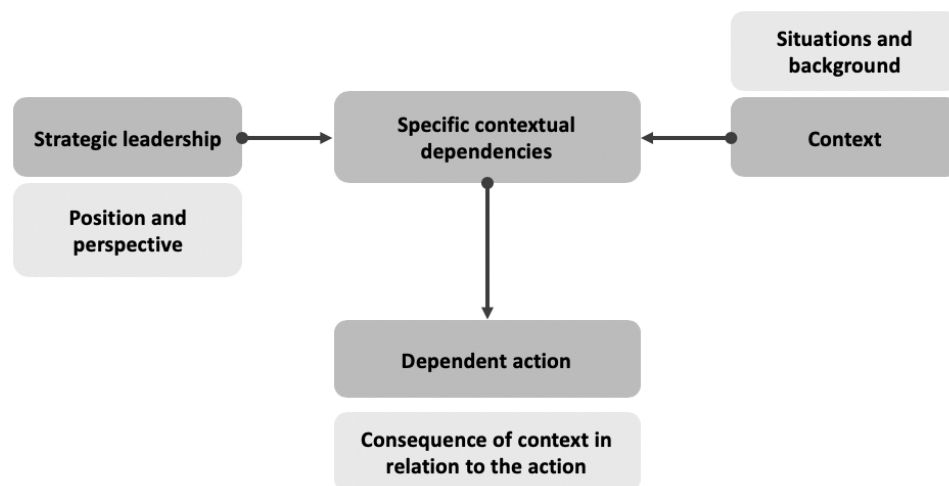
Note. The main point expressed here is that both perspectives create a larger entangled perspective of the specific dependencies that are consequential for subsequent action.

The concept of leadership in context expresses this integration and the relevant relationship. For leadership research, the approach to contextualisation helps to integrate different aspects and it specifies the contextual perspectives of actual leadership practice (Crossan, Vera, & Nanjad, 2008; Osborn, Hunt, & Jauch, 2002; Waldman, Javidan, & Varella, 2004). In this regard, strategic leadership provides a description of position and perspective, with contextualisation delivering a description of the situation and the influential features of the circumstances.

2.3   Aspects of Leadership

After deriving the term leadership in context, this subsection examines leadership from existing positions to discover general perspectives. According to Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber (2009), leadership encompasses many elements. The level of academic effort to study leadership (e.g., Harrison, 2018; Antonakis, 2017; Bass & Bass, 2008) is not surprising given that it is a universal human activity. The relevance for practice is assessing how leadership is not about just leading in organisations, but the leading of organisations (Hooijberg, Hunt, Antonakis, & Boal, 2007). In other words, leaders are ultimately responsible for what happens to the entities they lead. In addition, Yukl, George, and Jones (2009) stated that leadership is responsible for the outcomes of the organisation and has a connection to business ethics, morality, and the standards and beliefs in an organisation.

This review has found a wide variety of theoretical conceptions to explain the complexities of leadership (Antonakis et al., 2011; Bass & Stogdill, 1990; Day & Antonakis, 2012). The explanation of leadership must also consider traits, behaviours, influences, interaction patterns, role relationships, and the occupations of an

administrative position and process (Yukl & Chavez, 2002). Northouse (2016) defines leadership as a process whereby an individual influence a group to achieve a common goal. Yukl (2010) expands on this definition and notes that the influence includes the understanding of, and agreement with, the goals and objectives, as well as how to achieve them (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). Kouzes and Posner (2006) treated leadership as a dynamic process, where leaders mobilise others. They list five practices concerning the dynamic process: Means, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). Likewise, Antonakis (2004) perceived leadership as an influencing process. In this characterisation, a unit comprises a leader, the followers, and the influencing process.

Furthermore, this explanation includes the leader's dispositional characteristics, behaviours, follower perceptions, and attributions. On the contrary, House, Javidan, Hanges, & Dorfman (2002) define leadership as a behaviour reflecting the quality of understanding. Similarly, House et al. (2002) defined leadership not in a processual sense but more as the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others. This influence contributes to the effectiveness and success of the organisation. Lastly, Katz and Kahn (1978) explain leadership as influence over and above unconscious compliance with the routine directives of the organisation.

After the elaboration of the term leadership in context and the different nuances of leadership in this section, the next section considers the linkage between context and leadership.

2.4   Connecting Leadership and Context

Besides the different aspects of leadership it is important to recognize that the consideration of context is fundamental for leading a business (Harrison, 2018; Kahai, Sosik, & Avolio, 2003; Lauritsen & Ayman, 2018; Poser, 2017). The rationale for this observation is at a guiding level, and leadership is needed to complement organisational systems as initially articulated by Katz & Kahn (1978).

Thus, leadership resolves complex tasks and social problems (Bhattacharyya et al., 2018; Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010). In practical terms, through a contextual dependency that reflects the relationship of significant changes in regard to leadership behaviour, the essential expression is based on the accelerated development of innovative technologies and increasing globalization that dictate a particular and appropriate approach to leadership (Hitt, Haynes, & Serpa, 2010).

Therefore, a key role of leadership is to improve organisational relationships between individuals and orientate oneself in a dynamic environment (Poser, 2017). Accordingly, effective leadership relies on functioning leader-follower relationships and a consideration of the environment and derived dependencies (Kahai et al., 2003). At a strategic level, leadership is required to direct and guide organisational and human resources toward strategic objectives and ensure that organisational functions are aligned with dependencies (Fleishman et al., 1991; Wang, 2018; Zaccaro & Klimoski, 2001). Moreover, leadership is necessary to ensure the coordinated functioning of the organisation as it interacts in a dynamic setting (Bhattacharyya & Jha, 2018; Katz & Kahn, 1978).

In contrast to the derived importance of context, dependencies were neglected for many years in leadership research. That has recently changed, based on a

frequently repeated appeal for greater consideration of context (Gaudine, 2001; Johns, 2006; Rousseau & Fried, 2001). Several lines of evidence suggest that attention has recently turned towards the evaluation of contextual dependencies that impact leadership and its outcomes (Day & Antonakis, 2018; Oc, 2018). Several studies have postulated a correlation between leadership and context (Bamberger, 2008; Hannah, Uhl-Bien, Avolio, & Cavarretta, 2009; Lauritsen & Ayman, 2018; Osborn, Hunt, & Jauch, 2002; Osborn et al., 2014; Porter & McLaughlin, 2006; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). Other studies primarily examined whether situational or contextual factors lessen or enhance the effect of leadership practices, and they explored the impact of specific contextual settings on leadership (Day & Antonakis, 2012; Dinh et al., 2014; Fairhurst, 2009; Gardner et al., 2010).

With regard to context and leadership, an increased interest in the contextual perspective has arisen in recent years (Ayman & Adams, 2012; Hannah, Uhl-Bien, Avolio, & Cavaretta, 2009; Oc, 2018; Osborn, Hunt, & Jauch, 2002; Porter & McLaughlin, 2006). The obvious practical rationale is that executives have to adapt to the circumstances they face. Executives must monitor external and internal environments and formulate a strategy based on the strengths and weaknesses of their organisations as well as the opportunities presented by the situation being addressed (Antonakis & House, 2014).

For the purpose of this practical request, a justification emerges to conceptualize context in relation to leadership. Hence, the next section will take this assessment a step further and explore a conceivable extension with an embedded contextual consideration in the approach to leadership.

2.5   A Contextual Extension to Leadership

As discussed earlier, a description of leadership can focus, amongst other attributes, on a traits perspective, as shown in Figure 2.4 (Northouse, 2016).

Figure 2.4

The trait-based definition of leadership
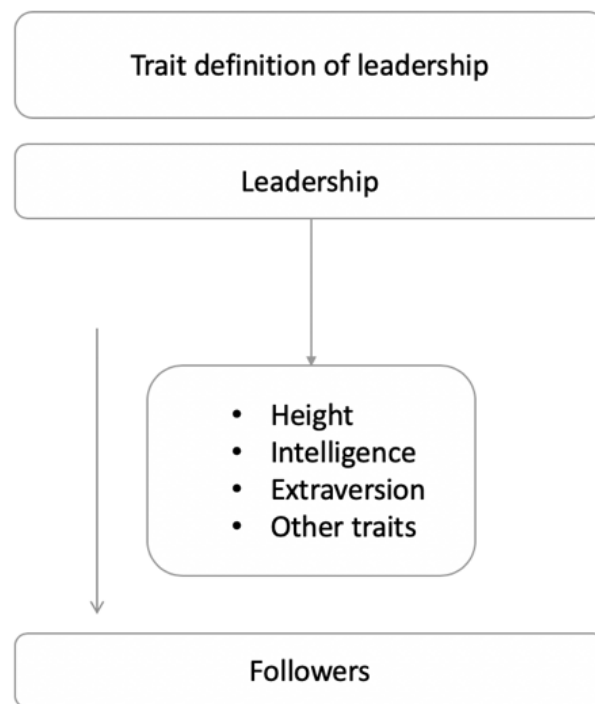
Note. According to Kotter, 2008

A different orientation is to focus on the process of influence on the situation or contingency as in Figure 2.5 (Northouse, 2016).

Figure 2.5

The situational-bases description of leadership.
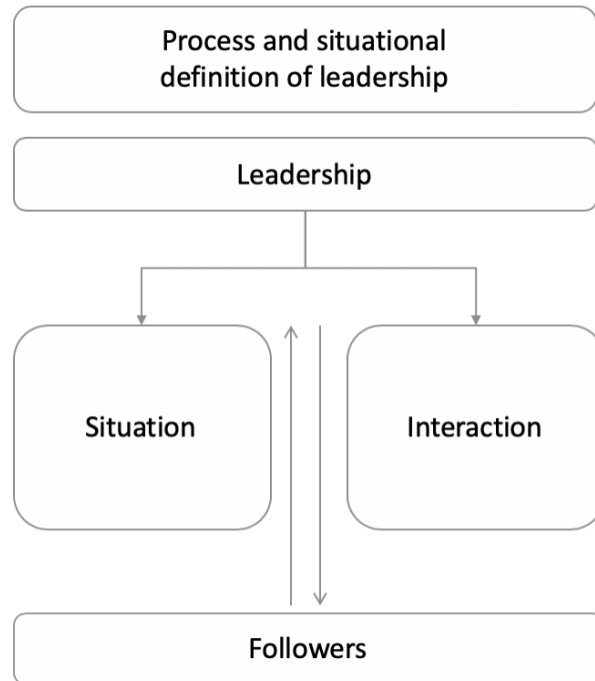
Note. According to Kotter, 2008.

The proposed derivative to these two representations is from the stated requirement to monitor the surrounding and connected circumstances. For leadership in context, this monitoring reflects a contextual extension to the aforementioned leadership representations. Besides traits and process, the context is, therefore, an important annexe to the description of leadership and extraordinarily relevant (Poser, 2016; Antonakis, 2017). Consequently, an extension, is according to Bass (1990), that the views on effective leadership are dependent on contextual issues.

Figure 2.6 illustrates this addition to the leadership representations by the incorporation of contextual aspects of the macro- and micro-characteristics.

Figure 2.6

Leadership represented through contextual extension
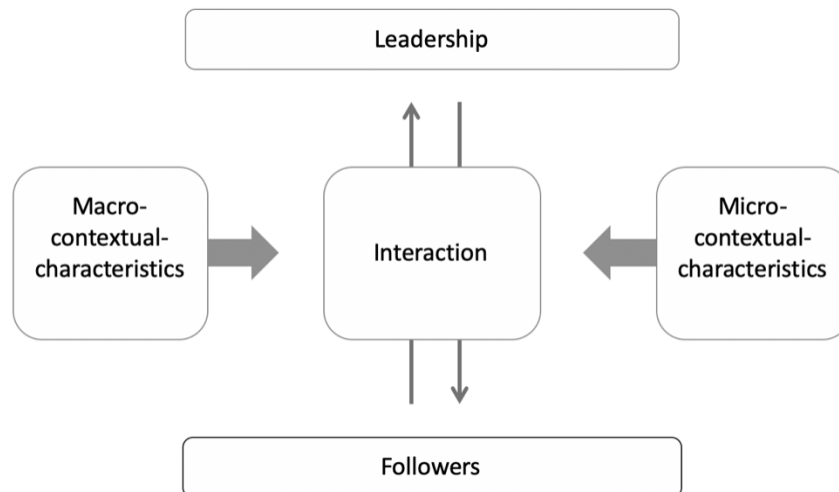
Note. The contextual extension also reflects Liden & Antonakis' (2009) argument that leadership is rooted in context and is an interactive event.

An important reflection from the current literature is that context helps to understand why a phenomenon and the behaviour and actions associated with it are taking place. The application of context in the description of leadership distinguishes this approach from a more situational view. In this regard, context includes the surroundings, circumstances, environment and background or settings (Janiesch, 2010). These terms define, specify, and clarify the meaning of an event, and the event itself, much more comprehensively than an isolated description of just a situation. A situational assessment is that which is positioned vis-à-vis the surroundings (Janiesch, 2010). This critical reflection shows the difference from a situational leadership

approach with its limited dimensions (Day & Antonakis, 2018; Hersey & Blanchard, 1996; Northouse, 2016).

The derived connection between context and leadership is imperative and provides the reasoning for why a specific context affects the type of leadership that emerges and whether it will be effective when seeking the anticipated outcome. The assumption is that there exist correspondences and dependencies between the senior executives' actions and context (Antonakis & Day, 2018). Likewise, from a practical articulated requirement, as stated at the beginning of this section, executives are obliged to monitor the external and internal environments and formulate a strategy accordingly.

The contextual extension portrayed in Figure 2.6 is widely recognised by scholars, and there is increasing awareness of the possible moderating effects of contextual issues in terms of leadership (Poser, 2017). Kelley and Kelloway (2012) noted that without explicit consideration of the context, leadership is hard to integrate. This means that context needs attention. To understand context, one must study its moderating effects (Abernethy, Bouwens, & van Lent, 2010; Liden & Antonakis, 2009). This position also derives from Poser's (2017) assumption that for a more in-depth description of leadership, one must describe the context.

2.6   Conceptualisation of Leadership in Context

As explained in the previous section and shown in Figure 2.6, there is an anticipated representation of leadership through contextual extension. To supplement this argument about contextual extension, this section examines conceptualisation and provides an understanding of the term, leadership in context.

Northouse (2016) noted that more than 65 different classification systems of leadership exist. This resonates with the observation that the field of leadership has been approached in numerous ways (Bass & Bass, 2008). Many of these conceptualisations follow the early expressed systematic research on leadership and are centred around the leader (Ford, 2010). The primary focus has been on specific universal traits and behavioural styles according to the explanation that some leaders are more effective than others (Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014; Lord, Day, Zaccaro, Avolio, & Eagly, 2017). According to Oc (2018) and Osborn, Hunt, and Jauch (2002), there has been a failure to find such universal traits. Inconsistencies in trait theory have led researchers to pay attention to what leaders actually do and not what they inherently possess (Harrison, Burnard, & Paul, 2018).

Therefore, a conceptualisation derived from Figure 2.6 emphasises the level of analysis that reflects the location where leadership actions happen and the context that influences the performed action (Van Wart, 2016). Each unit comprises two elements: Micro-characteristics associated with action and task (Van Wart, 2016) and macro-characteristics related to the broader background (Yammarino, 2013; Yammarino & Dansereau, 2008; Yammarino, Dionne, Schriesheim, & Dansereau, 2008).

There is an important supposition behind Figure 2.7 which offers the view toward a contextually dependent approach. This indicates that leadership changes as the context changes (Osborn, Hunt & Jauch, 2002). To complete the conceptualisation of leadership in context, then, it is possible to say that: Leadership is a concept where a process of influence occurs and an action is performed accordingly to the context to guide a group or individuals toward an objective (Stogdill, 1997; Lussier & Achua, 2001; Northouse, 2010; Yukl, 2010; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). Figure 2.7 details this dependent construct.

Figure 2.7

Conceptualisation of context
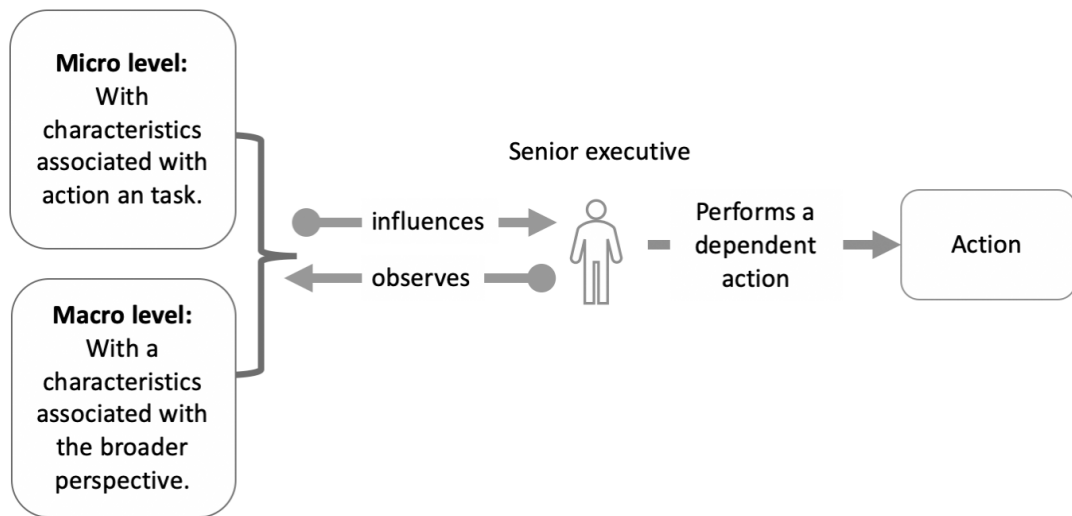
Note. The extended perspective on the macro and micro-level-characteristic is added for the conceptualisation of context.

2.7 Strategic Leadership

After the conceptualisation of leadership in context, this review moves to a second key area and explores strategic leadership. This theory examines the behaviour of individual executives in the higher ranks of a corporate or organisational hierarchy.

The literature offers several perspectives on the definition of strategic leadership (Greer & Carter, 2013). Peter Drucker (Drucker as cited in Cohen, 2009) points out that it is critical for leaders to be adept at looking, listening, and analysing the organisation and the world around it. There is usually a smaller group of people at the top of an organisation who can dramatically affect organisational outcomes (Wang, 2018; Bhattacharyya & Jha, 2018). Senior executives make large and small decisions,

and they shape the guidance by which organisations hire, mobilize, and inspire others to make decisions (Wang, 2018; Bhattacharyya & Jha, 2018). They represent the organisations when dealing with external constituencies and they accomplish tasks under conditions of uncertainty (Bredeweg, Linnebank, Bouwer, & Liem, 2009).

Consequently, one of the major challenges is that the situations that executives face are not knowable; they are only to some degree interpretable (Wang, 2018). As a result of this complexity, a rationale exists to develop an overarching framework. Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) provided an early contribution to strategic leadership theory in the literature (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000; House & Aditya, 1997). This theory focuses on the top of an organisation (Avolio, 2007; Bennis, 2007; Van Wart, 2012).

Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) elucidated the aspect of leadership that addressed a leader's strategic decision-making capabilities. These included the role of leaders in setting up the mission and vision of the organisation and providing direction. This theory holds that leadership in organisations consists of senior executive employees (Hambrick, 2007). The study of executive leadership and, more concisely, of strategic leadership, concentrates on executives who have overall responsibility.

The term strategic leadership implies the management of an overall enterprise, not just a small unit; it also implies substantive decision-making responsibilities, beyond the interpersonal and relational aspects usually associated with leadership (Finkelstein, Hambrick, & Cannella, 2009). Strategic leadership, in general, is a "perennially unfinished project" (Iszatt-White, 2011, p. 409). A part of this theory is rooted in the upper echelon theory, which will be covered in the next section.

2.7.1 *Upper-echelon theory*

One predecessor to strategic leadership theory is the theory of upper echelons (Carpenter, Geletkanycz, & Sanders, 2004; Finkelstein, Hambrick, & Cannella, 2009b; Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Nielsen, 2009). Upper-echelon theory focuses on executives who have responsibility for larger units in an organisation, like divisions and departments (Hambrick & Mason, 1984), based on the principle that "ultimately, they account for what happens to the organisation" (Hambrick, 1989, p. 5). This theoretical approach involves leaders higher in the hierarchy of an organisation (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Vera & Crossan, 2004). The fundamental idea of this theory is captured by Hambrick and Mason (1984), who said an organisation reflects its top managers. The theory acknowledges that individual top managers heavily influence organisational outcomes by the choices they make, and these, in turn, are affected by the senior executives' characteristics. Hambrick and Mason (1984) further postulated that the characteristics of the upper echelons and their strategic choices help to explain an organisation's performance. The upper-echelon theory proposed that the specific knowledge, experience, values, and preferences of top managers affect their assessment of the environment and the strategic decisions they make. Basically, strategic leaders have to define goals, clarify a path for tasks, create favourable situations, and provide psychological and structural support so that subordinates identify opportunities in the external environment (Bass & Avolio, 1994). The focus of this theory is on the executive leadership roles and processes at firms (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996). In this theoretical approach, a general consensus appears such that environmental characteristics or external dependencies, particularly those that

represent uncertainty for the company and its senior executives, will have implications (Carpenter et al., 2004).

In addition, the research suggests that the internal context also creates a host of relevant contingencies, often emanating from strategy and structure (Carpenter et al., 2004; Poser, 2017). It must be stressed that leadership theory refers to leaders at any level in organisations (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009), whereas strategic leadership extends the original upper-echelons theory and deals with the investigation of individuals at the top of organisations (Greer & Carter, 2013; Hambrick & Pettigrew, 2001; Vera & Crossan, 2004; Yukl, 2013).

2.7.2 *Characteristics of strategic leadership*

Besides the theoretical framework, there are certain characteristics highlighted. First, as emphasised, senior executives are responsible for the whole company or a large part of it. They have substantive decision-making responsibilities beyond the interpersonal and relational aspects usually associated with leadership (Kets de Vries, 1994; Kotter, 1988). Furthermore, this overall responsibility is also a reflection of the relation to organisational outcomes (Finkelstein et al., 2009).

Strategic leadership is concerned with the entire scope of activities and strategic choices of the individuals in relation to the organisation (Greer & Carter, 2013). In general, a strategic leader faces contradictions and trade-offs during decision-making and undertakes decisions at a broad level (Finkelstein et al., 2009; Lewis & Heckman, 2006). Such decisions involve variable elements and different dependencies (Fiegenbaum, Hart, & Schendel, 1996). The different dependencies dwell on the competitive landscape, industry characteristics, and market dynamics

(Bierly, Kessler, & Christensen, 2000). The requirement in this relation appears to be figuring out a path that can accommodate the different dependencies as much as possible.

Strategic leadership is "unapologetically oriented toward furthering the organisation's exclusive interests" (Worden, 2003, p. 33). Patterson (2016) argued that "strategic leaders see beyond the flurry of everyday activity. They see the bigger picture" (p. 60). Stowell and Mead (2016) explained that "strategic leaders focus on the future by allocating resources wisely and channelling the collective efforts of people in the organisation in order to seize opportunities, head off threats, and achieve better results down the road" (p. 4). Beatty and Quinn (2010) noted that "strategic leadership is a complex process of thinking, acting, and influencing" (p. 1). Strategic leadership involves the decision-making and actions that leaders take to "make adjustments and affect changes to help move the organisation into an uncertain future" (Stringham, 2012, p. 182). Morrill (2007) underscores that strategic leadership is "essentially a matter of practice" (p. 107) of integrating strategy and leadership.

The anticipated linkage to context is rooted in the attitude that strategic leaders must be able to see both the macro- and micro-dependencies of the organisational environment and form a deep understanding of how every component of every view interrelates and influences the whole (Wang, 2018). This required perspective connects back to leadership in context.

2.7.3 *Leadership in context and strategic leadership*

As explored in the previous section, context comprises different dependencies that influence strategic leadership. One of the key roles of leadership is the

enhancement of organisational relationships among individuals (Poser, 2017). Effective leadership relies on functioning leader–follower relationships (Avolio, Kahai, & Dodge, 2000; Avolio, Sosik, Kahai, & Baker, 2014; Kahai et al., 2003). In this regard, an earlier assessment by Bass and Stogdill (1990) pointed toward the assumption that effective leadership is dependent on context. To further analyse this earlier assessment, from a practical point of view, a strategic leader drives innovation and maximises team performance, ultimately enhancing an organisation's long-term growth and success (Greer & Carter, 2013; Iszatt-White, 2011; Wang, 2018; Zaccaro, Green, et al., 2018).

The core principle of strategic leadership is the behavioural element of strategy formulation (Greer & Carter, 2013; Zaccaro, Green, et al., 2018). Montgomery (2008) calls strategy a complex task performed by leaders. The perception of business conditions shapes the formulation, mapping, execution, and evaluation of a strategy. This selection of critical issues drives attention toward time and resource allocation (Najmaei, Quazi, & Behnia, 2017). Strategic leadership notes the relevance of a contextual extension and that considering context is important (van Wart 2011, Bhattacharyya & Jha 2018; Wang, 2018). Moreover, from a practical viewpoint, the current business exists in a knowledge era and is characterised by a competitive landscape driven by globalisation, technology, deregulation, and democratisation (Werhane & Painter-Morland, 2011).

Many organisations deal with this new landscape by redefining organisational structures, changing the way employees work, and adjusting leadership to the new requirements. Therefore, the application of strategic leadership is modified in relation to the specific context that continuously evolves and changes (van Wart, 2011; Bhattacharyya & Jha, 2018). The senior executive must lead the entire organisation

using a holistic approach (Bhattacharyya & Jha, 2018). For this leadership approach, the impact emanates from external and internal conditions. It is anticipated that ignorance of these complex, volatile, and interactive conditions can affect the outcome of the leadership process negatively (Worthington et al., 2018).

2.8   Combined View of Context and Strategic Leadership

The assessment of the examined literature on strategic leadership theory shows that there is a reasonable argument for a combined consideration of contextual dependencies. According to Goldsmith, Govindarajan, Kaye, and Vicere (2002), the characterisation of effective leaders is represented with the appropriateness of behaviour and context. To understand this effectiveness, it is necessary to comprehend the context (Asrar-ul-Haq & Anwar, 2018). Moreover, from a practical perspective, as the business environment becomes more dynamic and complex, organisations are challenged to survive and succeed in the marketplace (Kirchgässner & Wolters, 2017). This provides the rationale for combining leadership in context and strategic leadership.

As indicated, business environments have become complex, but the expectation is that senior executives can lead in such a turbulent and dynamic environment (Marques & Dhiman, 2017). In other words, leaders have to deal with complex, contextually dependent environments in an integrated manner (Day et al., 2014). There is a dependency between context and leaders. On the one hand, according to Mack, Khare, Krämer, and Burgartz (2015), firms in the current business environment are subject to many external and internal dependencies. All these dependencies are highly dynamic and interrelated while influencing each other. On

the other hand, Wang (2018) stated that driving an organisation forward with decision-making that takes into account the organisational typology, its culture, strengths, and limitations are reflected by the contextual dependency. These two sides indicate the relevance of a combined view of context and leadership. This view is based on the understanding of context as the surroundings, circumstances, environment, background, or settings that determine, specify, or clarify the meaning of an event or other occurrences (Antonakis, Bastardoz, Liu, & Schriesheim, 2014; Dinh et al., 2014)

2.8.1 *The problematic view of context*

The previous section detailed the explanation of the relevance of a combined view of context and leaders. Nevertheless, an assessment of the concept of context is problematic in many ways (Kovala, 2014). According to Coulter (1994), the term is one of the most widely used and heavily abused terms in the social sciences. The same observation was made by Dervin (2003), who explained that context is so often used and less often defined. However, when it is defined it varies quite significantly (Dervin, 2003; Kovala, 2014). More specifically, its analytical strength suffers from the fact that it encompasses such a vast array of different components (Kovala, 2014).

From a leadership perspective, the description of context is concerned with the influence that may alter leadership and leadership effectiveness (Day, 2000; Fiedler, 1978; House, 1971; Osborn & Marion, 2009; Porter & McLaughlin, 2006; Purvanova & Bono, 2009). Nevertheless, there is still a demand for a contextually dependent explanation of leadership in terms of effectiveness in particular contexts versus others (Hannah et al., 2009; Northouse, 2013, 2016). In contrast, some traditional approaches to leadership theory development (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982; Goleman, 2000) view

context as restricting the range of research or even threatening its validity—that it is not an integral part of that which is being researched. Context was seen as a moderating variable (Morrell & Hartley, 2006) rather than an inseparable component (Iszatt-White, 2011). Leadership models often seemed to focus on the entity of the leader, if not abstracted from context at least independent of it (Fairhurst, 2009; Iszatt-White, 2011; Pye & Pettigrew, 2005).

2.8.2   *Connections between leaders and circumstances*

To further discuss the inseparable property indicated in the previous section, contextual dependencies are thought of as connecting elements between leaders and their circumstances. The derivation of contextual dependencies offer an additional specification for the description of context that can explain the moderation in terms of type of leadership and its effectiveness in certain environments (Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003; Bligh, Kohles, & Meindl, 2004; Liden & Antonakis, 2009; Lord, Brown, Harvey, & Hall, 2001; Osborn, Hunt, & Jauch, 2002; Osborn & Marion, 2009; Porter & McLaughlin, 2006; Shamir & Howell, 1999). This understanding of contextual dependencies contrasts with context-free observations.

From an interim assessment of the literature review, it can be stated that leadership does not take place in an isolated and disconnected location (House & Aditya, 1997; Oc, 2018). This assumption is based on the observation that applied leadership is always rooted contextually. In this respect, the explicit identification of context-dominant dependency supports the notion of applied leadership. A general connection to this argument is that research recognises the importance of the contextual perspective for an approach to leadership process and its outcomes (Day,

2018; Oc, 2018; Osborn et al., 2014; Schneider & Somers, 2006; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007).

With the exploration of dependencies and behaviourally related expressions in the approach to leadership, this research takes the generic perspective further. There is a necessary coping with a likely disconnect between the theoretical perspective and practical application. This is also in conjunction with the holistic point of view from Antonakis (2018) that future research needs to consider more thoroughly the role of the situation and context.

Finally, speaking of the aforementioned conjunction, it is evident that traits remain relatively stable but leaders' behaviours vary across different contexts (Dinh et al., 2014; Zaccaro, 2007; Zaccaro, Dubrow, & Kolze, 2018; Zaccaro, Green, et al., 2018).

2.9   The Impact of Context on Leadership

After assessing the relationship between leaders, context, and contextual dependencies, this section explores more deeply several features of the influence of context. Regarding terms in the literature about leadership, for instance, there is the issue of context in the manner of situational features (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982) or contingency features (Fiedler, 1978; Vroom & Jago, 2007).

2.9.1   *Context is intertwined with leadership*

The first feature is that context is related to leadership and that context has an impact on leadership (Day & Antonakis, 2012; Liden & Antonakis, 2009). Accordingly, context is a subject intertwined with leadership. For both Bass & Avolio

(1994) and Avolio & Gardner (2005) context is an important dependency, but one that can be circumvented by astute leadership. This reflects a more leader-centric approach.

Liden & Antonakis (2009), Fiedler (1967, 1978), and House (1971) refer to context as an alteration of the impact of leadership on various criteria, often expressed as a contingent relationship involving leadership, context, and criteria. This exposes a more situational approach. On the contrary, Osborn (2002), Fairhurst (2009), Uhl-Bien (2006), and Oc (2019) describe context as a dominant aspect that establishes boundary conditions on the type of leadership displayed and on the effectiveness of leadership. This reflects a contextual and embedded approach.

2.9.2   Context is dependent on the position

There is another perspective that context is differentially dependent on position. Osborn et al. (2014) stipulated there are three types: Nested, pervasive, and hybrid. The nested view locates leadership in a hierarchy and considers commonly observed properties or behaviour-pattern of individuals occupying a formal managerial position or role (Osborn et al. 2014). This is different from the pervasive view, which sees leadership as located in organisations (Osborn et al. 2014). There is also a hybrid view which encompasses both the nested and pervasive views, thereby incorporating the importance of leadership in a hierarchy (Osborn et al., 2014).

2.9.3   Adjustment and alignment of leadership

The last aspect is the adjustment and alignment of leadership through the context. Bacharach (1989) emphasised that leadership is always rooted contextually, and for a better understanding, the explicit descriptions of boundaries are relevant.

Shamir & Howell (1999) built on this perspective, saying that the study of leadership must reflect not only leaders' personal characteristics and behaviours but also the situation which influences leadership emergence and effectiveness. Boal & Hooijberg (2000) suggested the idea that some theories of leadership appear context-free as a result they do not consider how environmental and organisational context influences the process. Osborn, Hunt, & Jauch (2002) took dependency into consideration where leadership and its effectiveness, in large part, are dependent upon context. Oc (2018) concluded that those who study leadership have long recognised the importance of context for the leadership process and its outcomes. Consequently, modifying the context changes leadership accordingly.

2.9.4   *Conclusion of the contextual impact on leadership*

The various aspects in the previous sections underscored that the literature provides various approaches to and discussions about leadership and context. The obvious picture is that the current literature is far from providing an integrated perspective of context where leadership is concerned. Some of these descriptions, in terms of typologies, generate a further level of abstraction and theoretical under-determination. Based on this review, there is still a need to decide what type of context it is or was.

It would be beneficial for leadership research, therefore, to explore the orientation to the applied and conducted actions as an inseparable dependency in relation to context.

2.10   Contextual Leadership Theory

The academic discourse surrounding the notions discussed in the previous section form a basis for another consideration in contextual leadership theory. To illustrate the main components, Oc (2018) introduced a framework based on the contributions of Johns (2002). This theoretical framework serves as the foundation for further consideration of the suggested inseparable dependency of action on context (Holenweger, 2017). Figure 2.8 presents John's (2006) framework with the conjunction and relationship of context and leadership.

Figure 2.8 Framework for the combination

Framework for the combination
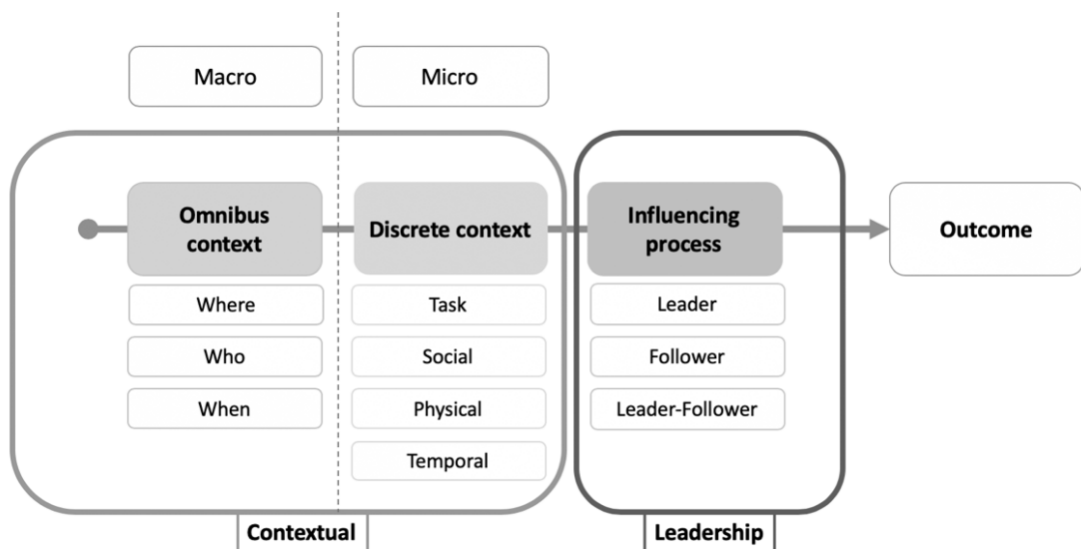
Note. The Figure 2.8 is adapted from "*Contextual leadership: A systematic review of how contextual factors shape leadership and its outcomes*" by Oc, 2018, The Leadership Quarterly 29 (2018) pages 218–235.

Contextual leadership has been researched by scholars (Day, 2001; Day et al., 2014; Hunt & Jauch, 2002; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007; Schneider & Somers, 2006), and it was recently reconsidered by Oc (2018) and Holenweger (2017). In terms of contextual leadership theory Johns (2006) presented a framework with the possibility of sketching the effect of context on leadership behaviour using two different bases, omnibus-contextual characteristics and discrete-contextual characteristics.

The consideration of discrete and omnibus contextual characteristics is applied to the discussion of micro- and macro-contextual characteristics. The explanation of omnibus and discrete are congruent with macro and micro, therefore this review contends that these terms can be substituted for each other.

Moreover, the dependency in the framework shows that contextual characteristics are essential and as a result there is an anticipated influence on the type of leadership that is possible and applicable (Liden & Antonakis, 2009). Therefore, the influential process part of the framework represents the linkage between context and leadership (Sternberg & Vroom, 2002).

2.10.1 *Macro-contextual-characteristics*

To explore these concepts further, this section investigates the macro contextual characteristics. They represent a broad consideration of the context, which is "an entity that comprises many features or particulars" (Johns, 2006, p. 391).

This subsection responds to questions about the contextual characteristics that include the where, who, and when as salient dimensions (Whetten, Felin, & King, 2009). The macro-contextual-characteristics provide the necessary information

concerning the elements of a given context. According to Oc (2018), the macro contextual characteristics serve as an influence that affects the leadership process and its outcomes. Hence, these characteristics can moderate the relationship between leadership and outcome (Carter, Armenakis, Feild, & Mossholder, 2013; Spreitzer, Perttula, & Xin, 2005; Waldman, Ramirez, House, & Puranam, 2001).

Furthermore, research in terms of macro contextual characteristics examines how context changes the nature of examined relationships, in particular the relationships between different leadership styles and leadership effectiveness (Carter et al., 2013; Dinh et al., 2014; Spreitzer et al., 2005; Waldman et al., 2001). A significant dimension of the macro-contextual-characteristics is the location where leadership takes place (Oc, 2018). Considering that organisations coexist in a social landscape with other entities and frequently interact with one another (Whetten et al., 2009), the where-dimension is expectedly the most studied contextual dimension of leadership (Oc, 2018).

2.10.2 Micro-contextual-characteristics

Like the previous section, this section explores the terms further and investigates micro contextual characteristics. The description for these micro-contextual-characteristics is "specific situational variables that influence behaviour directly or moderate relationships between variables" (Johns, 2001, p. 393). This view involves a narrower consideration of specific contextual dependencies. This includes the task, social aspects, and physical perspective as its salient dimensions.

Of relevance, the literature on task-related aspects of micro-contextual characteristics in relation to leadership is comprehensive (Oc, 2018). This resonates

with the situational theories of leadership. These kinds of theories established the potential effects of task on the effectiveness of leadership. The assessment was essential based on research conducted four decades ago, primarily the contingency theories of leadership of Fiedler (1978), the path-goal theory, House & Mitchell (1974), and the normative leadership theory of Vroom & Yetton (1973).

With those theoretical contributions, leadership effectiveness was determined to be a function of leadership style and contextual issues. This assessment is still valid in more contemporary research (D'Innocenzo, Mathieu, & Kukenberger, 2016; Greer & Carter, 2013; Oc, 2018; Porter & McLaughlin, 2006; Sharma & Kirkman, 2015; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007; Wang, Waldman, & Zhang, 2012; Willis, Clarke, & O'Connor, 2017).

2.10.3 Combined view of macro- and micro-contextual characteristic

Based on the conducted review, with such an assertion, it is conceivable that the interaction between macro and micro-contextual-characteristic shapes the approach to leadership and subsequently the outcomes. An evident assumption is that these contextual characteristics lessen or enhance the impact on the leadership approach reflected in the applied practices (Day & Antonakis, 2012; Liden & Antonakis, 2009). This also provides a method to explore leadership executed in a specific place and in a specific contextual setting. Figure 2.9 details an example with the aspect of where interacting with task characterisation.

Figure 2.9

The connection of macro and micro characteristics
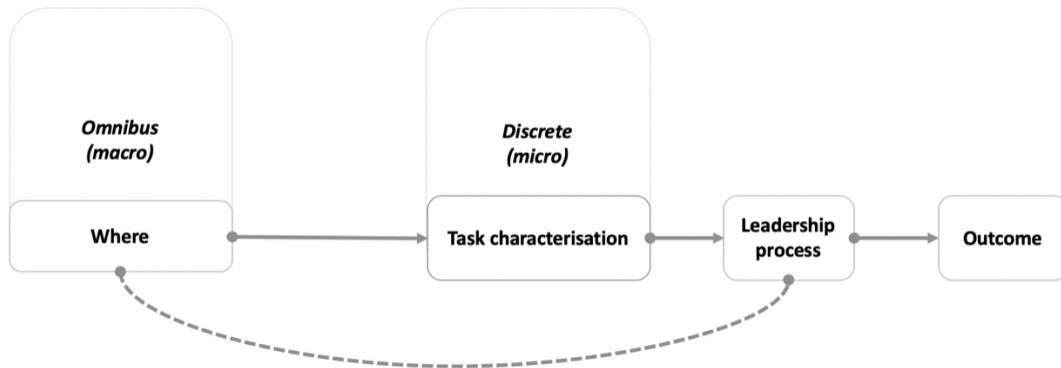
Note. The interaction between omnibus and discrete contextual factors shapes the leadership process and subsequently the outcomes.

This relationship subsequently shapes the leadership process and outcomes. This positioned dependency also shows that changes in where shapes the micro contextual characteristics (Oc, 2018). As a result, it triggers the leadership process and outcomes. With respect to this indicated connection, this shows also a dependency which reinforces the importance of the indistinguishable bound of context and, explicitly, strategic leadership (Wang, 2018; Iszatt-White, 2010). In this regard, context plays an essential role in strategic leadership (Greer & Carter, 2013). As stated, the assumption is that leadership is embedded in context and is not an independent property of the individual. Therefore, context is incorporated and has a significant part being played in the explanations of the how leadership is executed (Osborn, Hunt & Jauch, 2002).

The combined view is a necessity for the consideration of the approach to leadership, especially in disruptive business scenarios but also should be included in practical applications. This perspective examines the view on both sides as an

interactive effect of the macro and micro contextual characteristics and dependencies, describing the environment in which leadership exists.

2.11   Combination of Contextual and Strategic Leadership Theory

Based on the introduction of the combined view in the previous section, there is a demand and rationale for deeper integration of strategic leadership and contextual dependency. Wang (2018) posited the context in strategic leadership is relatively underexplored. In this respect, some time ago, Cappelli & Sherer (1991) portrayed context as "the surroundings associated with phenomena which help to illuminate a phenomenon, typically factors associated with units of analysis under investigation" (p. 56). The organisational and business characteristics serve as contextual dependencies for individual executives and the external environment provides context for organisations.

However, e.g., Sahu and Bharti (2009), Boal and Hooijberg (2001), van Wart (2011), Wang (2018), Northouse (2016), and Antonakis & Day (2018), among others, suggested that leadership is a process that contains some anticipated contextual variables. These variables can be, for instance, the leader characteristics, traits, leadership behaviour and style, group member characteristics, and the internal and external environment (Sahu & Bharti, 2009). This kind of description of an internal and external environment requires a deeper explanation. A characterisation of this is partly neglected and a rather broader statement is beneficial for the exploration of influences in the leadership process.

Based on the anticipated ignorance, the researcher follows Carter & Greer´s (2013) generic argument that the emphasis should be more concerned with integrative

and combined theories. An integrative approach as indicated in the previous section according to Carter & Greer (2013) is applicable and relevant when the study of leadership is conducted at a strategic level. This is aligned with the perspective of other researchers such that there is a demand to generate more sophisticated and integrative leadership theories that are based on a sound methodology that span different streams together (Avolio, 2007; DeRue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humohrey, 2011). According to Avolio (2007) and Hunt & Dodge (2000), the evolution of leadership theory and practice has come to a point where a more integrative view on leaders at strategic levels should be considered when building theories (Hunt & Dodge, 2000). This assessment provides the rationale for a deeper combination of contextual dependencies and strategic leadership.

2.12   An integrated View of the Characterisation of Context

The previous section offers a rationale for the explicit exposure of the relationship between contextual characteristics and strategic leadership. That includes the consideration of the encompassing macro- and micro-characteristics. In detail, the reasonable observation is that anticipating or envisioning the future necessarily entails understanding multiple levels of context (Wang, 2018). On one hand, the theoretical underpinnings show that contingency theory claims there is no best way to organise a corporation, to lead a company, or to make decisions (Bolden et al., 2003). Instead, a course of action is contingent and depends upon the internal and external situation (Hamann, 2017). On the other hand, the situational leadership theory proposes there is no single preferred style of leadership (McCleskey, 2014). Effective leadership is

task-relevant, and the most successful leaders are those who adapt their leadership style.

Figure 2.10 portrays this indicated isolation and articulates the advantage of an integrated view where the characterisation of context includes the aspects at a broader system level but also the specific conditions.

Figure 2.10

Integrated view of outcomes, dependency, and characteristics
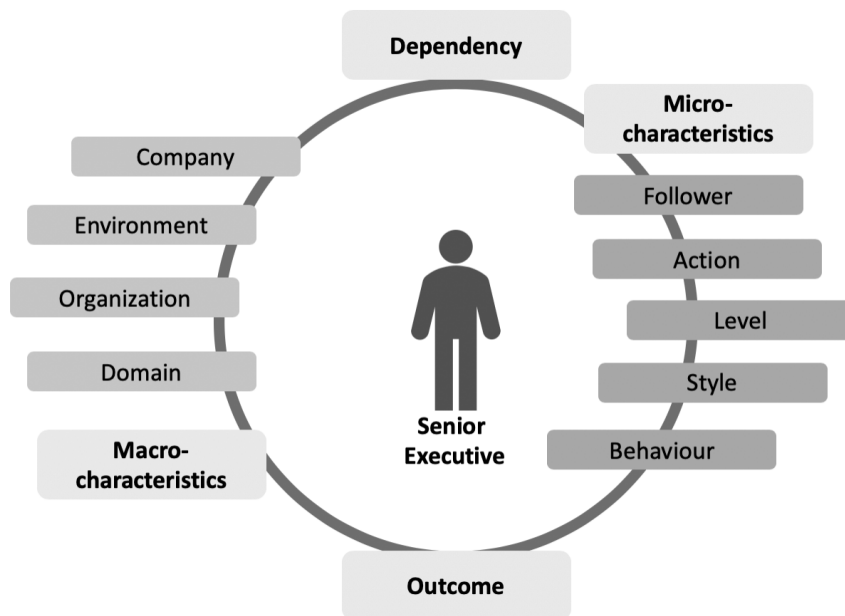
The two positions highlight the assumption that in different business situations, leaders act differently with different skills, behaviours, and styles (McCleskey, 2014). As stated, the important component to this assumption is that context represents the time or place in which leadership takes place and this is a significant dependency regarding the approach to leadership (Oc, 2018; Osborn et al., 2014; Schneider & Somers, 2006; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). According to Oc (2018) and Iszatt-White (2011),

the great majority of studies in leadership research have examined the effects of discrete contextual aspects in isolation from each other.

2.12.1 Leadership process and the integrated view

The integrated view depicted in Figure 2.10, in conjunction with the introduced term, leadership in context, considers how leadership is a process. Therefore, the current section evaluates the integrated view in line with the processual observation in leadership (Pierce & Newstrom, 2003). The basis for this examination is that explicitly, e.g., Antonakis (2018), Pierce & Newstrom (2003) and Northouse (2016), have been highlighted that it is significant to understand the leadership phenomenon as a process. Fischer, Dietz & Antonakis (2017) also emphasise that leadership research is a study of processes. In this respect, a process consideration is essential for uncovering and understanding the underlying dependencies (Fischer et al., 2017). Harrison (2018) shared the perception of evolvement from the focus of leadership abilities and behaviours to more a process of influence. In addition, this processual view incorporates specific outcomes and actions in a particular setting (Fischer et al., 2017; Lim & Ployhart, 2004). To bridge this argument and according to Day & Antonakis (2012), context is where the leadership process occurs. The emphasis of context in the processual expression of leadership appears to be a significant component for the definition (Bass & Bass, 2008). The integrated view proposes this connection between leader, outcomes, and the context. In particular and with a practical orientation, it considers the linkage between the macro-perspective, which explains where the business is (Quain, 2019), and the individuum-level, the micro-perspective (discrete), which establishes individual actions (Quain, 2019).

This entangled perspective on leadership adopts a balance that utilises both perspectives. The perspectives are equally connected, and the involved leader aims toward the anticipated outcome but is vice-versa also embedded in the context (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002; Antonakis & House, 2014; Quain, 2019).

This integration between micro- and macro-perceptiveness pushes for more attention to the connecting contextual aspects of leadership (Osborn et al., 2002; Waldman, Javidan, & Varella, 2004; Yukl, 2008). In contrast to the proposed processual and micro-macro contextually dependent perspective, some leadership theories have primarily focused on the domain of organisational behaviour, anchored in a more micro-oriented perspective (Waldman et al., 2004; Boal & Hooijberg, 2000; House & Aditya, 1997). By emphasising the micro-levels, the focus is on behaviours rather than the dependent strategic responsibilities. For instance, some time ago, Yukl (1999) noted the conceptual weaknesses of transformational and charismatic leadership theories, mainly because of insufficient attention to context. He continued that "the dyadic perspective should be replaced by a systems perspective that describes leadership in terms of several distinct but interrelated influence processes at the dyadic, group, and organisational level" (p. 301). The focus on the dyadic relationship promotes a weakness and as a result it unsurprisingly limits the consideration of context for the internal organisational environment (Crossan et al., 2008). Consequently, the integrated view provides a contextually dependent perspective on, equally, the macro- and micro-characteristics toward the leadership approach.

2.12.2 Integration of contextual and strategic leadership

In this section, the considerations to justify the previous argument of an integrated view continues. In this respect, an integrated view is based on a combination of macro- and micro-contextual dependencies as well as strategic leadership (Bonardi et al., 2018). This explicit link is an extension of the preponderant view on this issue. At the same time, this connection is aligned with the discussed contextual extension of the concept of leadership in Section 2.6. The removal of this limitation is important because it is assumed that the context is decisive for the emergence and manifestation of leadership processes (Dinh et al., 2014).

Generically discussed approaches for this removal are hybrid and integrated models (Zaccaro, 2007). According to Avolio (2007), a purposeful integrative approach brings elements from establishing leadership theories together, which supports a better answering of questions regarding leadership effectiveness.

Recent developments in leadership research have highlighted the need to include context, and as discussed previously in this chapter, this pushed forward the assumption that leadership happens in a context and with a practice-oriented relevance (Oc, 2018; Iszatt-White, 2011, Fairhurst, 2009; Pye & Pettigrew, 2005; Gronn, 1983; Boden, 1994). Boal & Hooijberg (2000) stated that "many of the new theories of leadership appear context-free" (p. 528).

Antonakis (2004) stressed that the dependency of context and leadership process had not received the right level of attention. Figure 2.11 illustrates that the task (micro/discrete) description and situation of the company (macro/omnibus) form a dependent structure with the embedded leader.

Figure 2.11

Example of a dependent structure
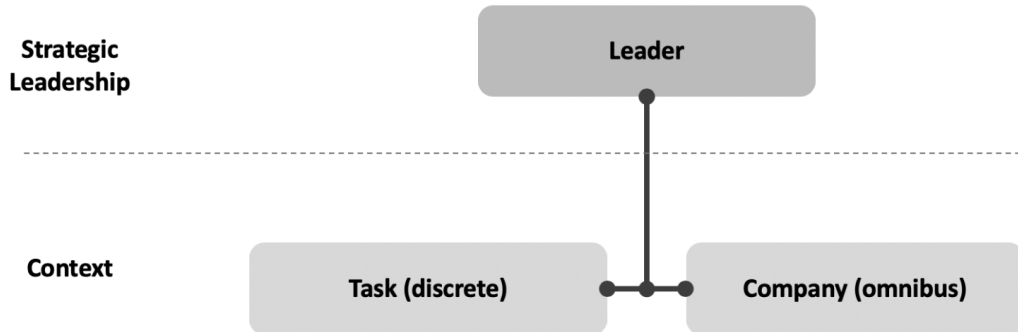
In summary, this research positioned strategic leadership in relationship and interdependency with contextual characteristics. A combined perspective provides the basis and encourages considering dependencies for the development of an understanding of leadership in context. Leadership is inextricably bound with the surrounding contexts (Oc, 2018; Osborn et al., 2002; Schoemaker, Krupp, & Howland, 2013). In addition, contextual dependencies affect leadership, and, from a practical perspective, the leader has an obligation to make sense of the surrounding context (Oc, 2018; Wang, 2018). The review shows that a gap in the current body of knowledge exists. A discussion of that gap is conducted in the next section.

2.13 The Gap in the Literature and the Research Question

The literature review has provided detailed insights into the contextual dependencies that have potential impacts on senior executives. From a practical perspective and as stated earlier, this new, uncertain, and unsolidified business landscape presents the automotive industry with extensive challenges that require a

more flexible, adaptive style of leadership (Donkin et al., 2016; Maggioni et al., 2016). In this new world, the market shifts and the approach to leadership must deal with a number of complex and usually contradictory situations (Smith et al., 2017).

The knowledge gap arises in the application of an approach to leadership within the current dynamic business disruption. Precisely with the request of the how a senior executive recognises and specifically addresses particular dominant contextual dependencies. This leads to the research questions of this study:

> How do senior executives perceive the current industry shift and which actions should be taken to improve the approach to leadership?

In principle, a senior executive may have knowledge and skills to act effectively in one situation but might not perform as effectively in a different situation as there are always different challenges across a variety of situations (Dinh et al., 2014; Kotler & Lee, 2008; Osborn et al., 2014; Rad & Yossein Yarmohammadian, 2006). As the current organisational environment becomes exceedingly dynamic, it is increasingly important to close this gap with a focus on strategic leadership in a specific context to provide insights for an improvement to the approach to leadership.

The gap reflects a neglected side of leadership research, a focus on the integration of contextualisation into the application of strategic leadership. The underlying assumption is partly expressed and resonates with existing literature concerning the observation that leadership and its effectiveness is in large part dependent upon the context (Osborn, Hunt & Jauch, 2002; Moir, 2018; Poser, 2017; Wang, 2018). When the context changes, the leadership changes accordingly. For this reason, various studies have stated that specific leadership patterns can be considered effective (Bamberger, 2008; Noman et al., 2016; Willis, Clarke, & O'Connor, 2017).

This brings back the stated neglected facet in terms of the how and the corresponding emergent consequences for the approach to leadership in the specified context. To visualize this facet Figure 2.12 shows the connected parts.

Figure 2.12

The anticipated integration of strategic leadership and context
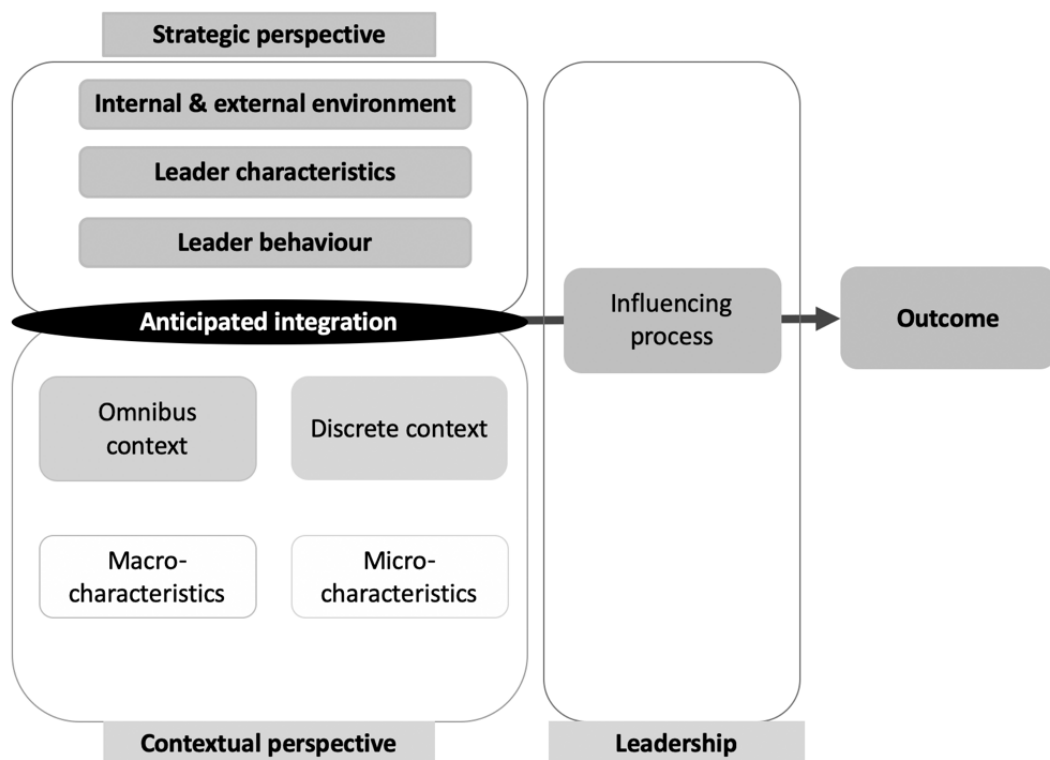
Note. Figure 2.12 describes the connection with the expression *anticipated integration*.

Figure 2.12 points out that the contextual perspective focuses on the description and conceptualisation of contextual dependencies, in particular on the omnibus and discrete, likewise with the macro and micro-contextual characteristics and the generic dependent influential process. On the other side, strategic leadership theory recognises the presence of the influential and dependent aspects of context but with only a limited

nuance of contextualisation. The anticipated integration takes the determined gap into account. Thus, macro- and micro-level aspects converge to affect leadership, and this presents a more complex view that is unnoticed by more simplistic expressions.

This study seeks to close the gap which arises from the absence of a combined approach to understanding applied leadership. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is no empirical research concerning industry-specific leadership in context.

2.14   Conceptual Framework for Leadership in Context

To close the identified gap, a conceptual framework plays a significant role in terms of the overarching setup. Generally, the purpose of a conceptual framework is to provide a system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that support and inform the research (Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2012; Miles, Huberman, Huberman, & Huberman, 1994; Robson, 2011).

The conceptual framework merges the components and informs the research design (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In addition, the conceptual framework refers to the contextualisation components and the description of the strategic leadership that is united toward a dependent action. The approach to leadership is thereby an orchestrated series of events that are systematically linked to one another. This is shown in the conceptual framework where the alignment between actions and objective occurs. The leader acts to move toward an achievement and is influentially connected to the micro- and macro-characteristics.

The conceptual framework refers, therefore, to the anticipated mechanism that explains the relationship between context and actions. It finally reflects an approach

to leadership with an emphasis on leadership in context. The conceptual framework sits well in the ongoing debate surrounding leadership research with the incorporated importance articulated by Fischer et al. (2017) that leadership research is a study of uncovering and understanding underlying dependencies (Fischer et al., 2017).

Based on the Figure 2.12 and the anticipated integration, Figure 2.13 depicts the conceptual framework of this study.

Figure 2.13

The conceptual framework
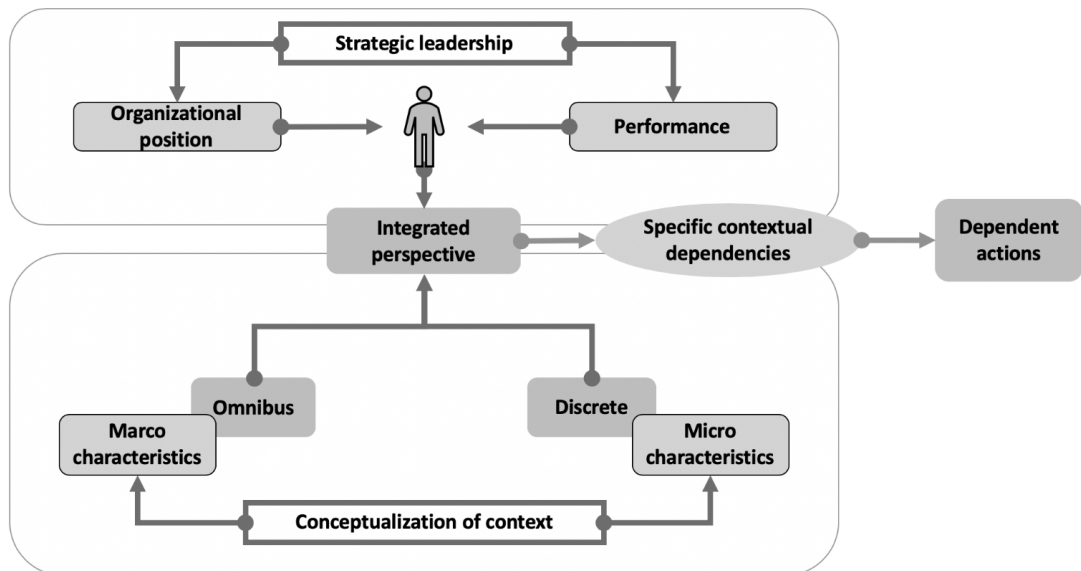
2.15   Chapter Summary

This literature review is expansive because of the presence of many diverse research streams, studies, schools, and perspectives in the field of leadership research. The study of leadership is complicated because there is very little agreement among researchers in terms of the real meaning (Harrison, 2018). According to Humphreys (2001), leadership is one of the most studied and least understood areas of the social

sciences. Most of the definitions are related to the traits, abilities, skills, behaviours, and relationships to followers (e.g., Harrison, 2018; Northouse, 2016). That shows that the field of study on leadership requires further development (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). The practical advantage of handling these demanding challenges emerges from occurring business transformation, which justifies a deeper exploration of context and the dependency on leadership. In this regard, the development of the conceptual framework reflects the indicated dependencies.

The conceptual framework provides a structure for the examination of potential effects between the contextual characteristics. This provides the rationale for the research question in terms of how strategic leaders cope with change in the business environment. This consideration provides an in-depth description of the context in which leadership actions occur.

The approach of combining contextual and strategic leadership theories is beneficial as recently noted by Bonardi et al. (2018), who emphasised the generic demand for a combined and integrated model that provides new insights into leadership. It is the aim of this study to contribute to the research about leadership with the perspective of leadership in context.

Chapter 3. Pragmatism as Research Philosophy

This chapter discusses the philosophical paradigm which underpins this qualitative guided study. Section 3.1 discusses this rarely used philosophical stance as an important perspective in leadership research (Emirbayer & Maynard, 2011; Klenke, 2016). Section 3.2 investigates pragmatic inquiry and meaningfulness. Section 3.3 explores pragmatism in qualitative research. Section 3.4 details pragmatism in conjunction with the consideration of truth. The chapter closes with Section 3.5 and the philosophical positioning as well as the concluding comments on the research philosophy in Section 3.6.

This chapter argues that *pragmatism* is an applied research philosophy and it is recognised as a credible research paradigm (Creswell, 2009; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). In relation to leadership in context, it is relevant to establish that any attempt to produce knowledge occurs in context (Morgan, 2014). Consequently, from this philosophical stance, a line of reasoning can be derived in terms of the experiences of senior executives. In general, experiences are based either on habit or active inquiry, but they always occur in a specific context (Morgan, 2014). For senior executives, in terms of expected contextuality, this means that the ability to use preceding experience to predict an outcome is fallible and probabilistic. Therefore, there is a presumption that the experience used should be related to present circumstances.

3.1   Pragmatism

Pragmatism is a philosophical tradition that originated in the United States in the late 19th century (Bacon, 2012; Volbers, 2012). The traditional definition of pragmatism is grounded in the emphasis of the practical consequences that follow

from the acceptance of a belief. At the core of the pragmatist stance is the linkage of experience and practice (Rylander, 2012). Likewise, pragmatism's primary emphasis is on the application of knowledge in practice. The recurrent application of practice explains the benefit of theories—this application is in the association, production, and reproduction of actions in a dynamic entanglement which provide new insights (Korte & Mercurio, 2017). Pragmatism and practice theories are complementary perceptions peculiar to the consequences of the concepts and outcomes of actions. Both perspectives offer valuable insights into the world. Moreover, pragmatism is a standpoint that can bridge the theory-practice gap (Korte & Mercurio, 2017). Hence, the expected outcome of this research is not to seek an absolute truth because the position of the researcher is that none exists (Goldkuhl, 2012; Salkind, 2010). It is rather to formulate practical advice for improving the approach to leadership.

Pragmatism is important in qualitative research and in research on leadership, but it has been largely underutilized (Klenke, 2016). The study of leadership is based on empirical and theoretical research, and the applicability for practice is a major criterion. Central to this criterion is an orientation toward action. The criterion of value is usefulness, which recalls different interpretations as having more or less value depending on their ability to serve a given purpose and enable applicants to accomplish relevant goals (Biesta & Burbules, 2003).

3.2   Pragmatic Inquiry and Meaningfulness

As an approach to the research, pragmatic inquiry is a procedure in response to complexities and problematic everyday experiences (Wakkary, 2009). Although pursuing pragmatism as a paradigm for social research is not entirely new (Gage,

1989; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009), the argument is that pragmatism can serve as a philosophical stance for carrying out leadership research (Klenke, 2016).

Pragmatism also stresses the importance of experimenting with new ways of living, searching for alternative and more liberating vocabularies, and opening up an array of possibilities for human action (Rorty, Rorty, & Richard, 1989). It has a focus on action and change and the interplay between knowledge and action (Goldkuhl, 2012). Pragmatists share, with a wide array of anti-positivists, the view that there are multiple interpretations of events, and different concepts and classification schemes can be employed (Wicks & Freeman, 1998; De Waal, 2005; Goldkuhl, 2012; Rorty, 1989, Klenke, 2016).

The projected fit has its rationale whereby pragmatism appeared on the qualitative landscape to consider the changing context of organisations, the workforce, and society (De Waal, 2005; Goldkuhl, 2012; Rorty, 1989). Pragmatism emphasised the knowledge and means of experience, and it is deeply concerned with the union of theory and practice (Ralston, 2013). Moreover, pragmatism is a convenient and applied research philosophy. Pragmatists reject the distinction between objective and subjective. For pragmatic reasons, there are differences between facts and values and different methods of inquiry appropriate to each (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). The dependency of the ability to serve the given purposes and enable people to accomplish relevant goals is the main difference from other paradigms (Biesta & Burbules, 2003).

Goldkuhl's (2012) perspective is depicted in Figure 3.1, which illustrates that, where positivism determines causalities, interpretivism constructs meaning, and pragmatism represents meaningful action.

Figure 3.1

Some of the different paradigms in social research
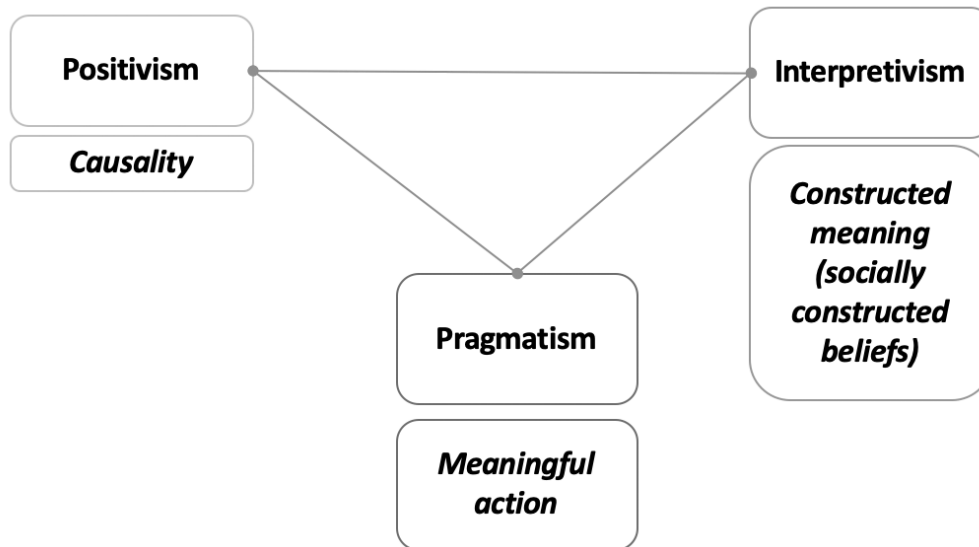
Note. Adapted from "*Three kinds of pragmatism in information systems research*", by Goldkuhl (2012), p. 4.

It is the belief of the researcher that problem-solving is sufficient when the problem-solving process creates a solution in a meaningful action through the deliberate application of experience, while the accumulation of new experiences simultaneously occurs. Knowledge should be useful for action and change (Yawson, 2014). These activities lead to the integration of the problem and the actor, the subject and the object, respectively, which allows pragmatism to reject existing dualisms. This view of meaning is mainly associated with the philosophers William James and John Dewey (Goldkuhl, 2012).

3.3 Pragmatism in Qualitative Research

Pragmatism in qualitative research represents an approach where a theory-based question is not the primary focus. The point is that pragmatism can address social and environmental perspectives, permitting researchers to investigate human experience, human adjustment to various processes, and the subsequent range of choice that individuals identify. Pragmatism allows open and comprehensive investigation as there are no theoretical constraints that limit the inquiries (Duram, 2010).

That position echoes the description of pragmatism from Rescher (2016) and the three significant positions: The first position is semantic in terms of the meaning of a concept derived from its use. Second is the epistemological position, which is based on the criterion of truth depending on an idea's successful implementation. The third is ontological—all knowledge is the result of action.

The researcher is therefore interested in intangible, value-related, and practical questions, and this is reflected by the how in the research question of this study (Klenke, 2016). The standpoint is that a pragmatist cannot be sure that past patterns of action will suit future problems. Dewey calls this *"practical fallibilism"* (as cited in Biesta & Burbules, 2003, p. 13). In terms of this research, that means that a legacy approach to leadership may not be appropriate in the postmodern world. Pragmatism does not assume stationary theories with reference to an explanation. Instead, the relevance of a theoretical contribution depends on its value and applicability (Biesta & Burbules, 2003).

The research philosophy indicates that knowledge is a contextual property that evolves through everyday practice and is measured by practical consequences

(Goldkuhl, 2012). Pragmatism is essential in qualitative research on leadership (Bacon, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Klenke, 2016). The main differentiation from other, more frequently used philosophical stances, like constructivism, positivism, and interpretivism, is that pragmatists place a premium on the value of practical knowledge. Constructivism, positivism, and interpretivism do not align with this value explicitly (Bacon, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Klenke, 2016).

Finally, as noted earlier, pragmatic research acknowledges that researchers' worldviews involve ethical and moral issues (Goldkuhl, 2006, 2012). Therefore, pragmatists go beyond the established trilogy of ontology, epistemology, and methodology and include axiology as a cornerstone in their paradigm (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2016; Klenke, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Symon & Cassell, 2012).

3.4   Pragmatism and the Consideration of Truth

The pragmatic concepts entangle truth and experience. The consideration of truth is part of the ongoing experience (Biesenthal, 2014; Rescher, 2016; Goldkluhl, 2012; Morgan, 2012; Bacon, 2012). For pragmatists, there is no single absolute truth; there are multiple truths and all of them are contextually dependent (Biesenthal, 2014). Therefore, pragmatism is a method for uncovering contextual truth.

Accordingly, with this view, a generalisation for explored experiences is not achievable because the gained knowledge and related truth are dependent and valid in the specific context (Biesenthal, 2014; Rescher, 2016; Goldkluhl, 2012; Morgan, 2012; Bacon, 2012). For pragmatists, truth is naturally contextual as the knowledge and beliefs surrounding scientific concepts, on which humans base their understanding

of the world, are true only so long as they bear practical consequences (Biesenthal, 2014; Rescher, 2016; Goldkluhl, 2012; Morgan, 2012; Bacon, 2012). In terms of practical consequences David Hume said "he still looked both ways before he crossed the street" (Hume as cited in Esq, 2015, p. 72). Pragmatism provides the rationale for investigation, which has no theoretical constraints to restrict inquiries (Duram, 2010). Finally, Duram (2010) and Rescher (2016) recommended that the application of a pragmatic approach is beneficial to understand complex and real-world problems.

The aim is to transform a problematic situation with a solution that contains an improvement to the approach of leadership in accordance with the context. So, for pragmatists, truth is naturally contextual. The related knowledge and associated beliefs about concepts, upon which the understanding of the world is based, can be true only as long as practical consequences exist (Biesenthal, 2014; Rescher, 2016; Goldkluhl, 2012; Morgan, 2012; Bacon, 2012). Consequently, pragmatic truth for the research topic must be investigated in correspondence with practical consequences and understanding the truth in terms of what works best in a given context (Goldkuhl, 2012; Salkind, 2010; Dewey, 1933; James, 1907).

3.5   Philosophical Positioning

When designing and conducting this study, the researcher was influenced by a specific paradigm and a set of assumptions that guided this inquiry (Creswell, 2018). In order to contextualise the research findings, the assumptions and the philosophical stance must be made explicit (Ellis, 2008).

In general, researchers within the social sciences have begun to pay significant extended attention to epistemological and ontological positions and their impacts upon

the design of research and analysis of findings (Benton and Craib, 2011). Based on the research philosophy a line of reasoning appears for the understanding of the choices in terms of the research strategy, formulation of the problem, data collection, processing, and analysis (Žukauskas et al., 2018). Thus, pragmatism must be seen as a credible research philosophy (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005; Tillman, Clemence, & Stevens, 2011).

Pragmatism as a research philosophy was developed, among others by Rorty in 1983 (Bacon, 2012). Creswell & Poth (2016) consider pragmatism a worldview philosophical basis that provides practitioners a liberty of choice regarding the applied methods, techniques and procedures which best meet needs and purpose (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The philosophical orientation is critical in framing the research process, the required transparency, and positioning of the conclusion of the research (Klenke, 2016).

Overall, it uses a qualitative paradigm—as opposed to a positivistic paradigm—under different assumptions concerning ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology, and it requires a different conceptualisation for the research process, the role of the researcher, and the researched (Klenke, 2016). The following subsection explains more fully the underlying ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology.

3.5.1   Ontology

Ontology addresses the paradigmatic question in terms of the nature of reality and performance of the research (Klenke, 2016). The qualitative approach to this research endorses a relativistic ontology that is always intersubjective, is socially

constructed, and shaped by context (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). According to Sandberg (2005), qualitative researchers maintain that perceptions are always coloured by the "specific historical, cultural, ideological, gender-based, and linguistic understanding of reality" (p. 45).

The researcher assumes multiple and dynamic realities that are context-dependent and embrace an ontology that denies the existence of an external reality (Symon & Cassell, 2012). Hence, qualitative researchers typically argue that there is no single unitary reality apart from our perceptions. Instead, they emphasize a relativistic ontology that endorses multiple realities socially constructed by individuals from within their contextual interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Klenke, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The essence of pragmatist ontology is action and change; humans acting in a world which is in a constant state of becoming (Goldkuhl, 2006, 2012; Gregory, Kehal, & Descubes, 2012).

3.5.2   *Epistemology*

Epistemology addresses the question of reality, which affects the beliefs about the nature of knowledge. Epistemology deals with the origin, nature, and limits of human knowledge, specifically focusing on the relationship between the knower and the known (Symon & Cassell, 2012). Epistemology also deals with ways of knowing and the researcher's belief system regarding the nature of knowledge (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Klenke, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Symon & Cassell, 2012). This researcher adopted pragmatism and is investigating leadership primarily avoiding theory-based questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Instead, this researcher is interested in the concrete and practical question articulated

to produce an answer that provides the insights into the actions of senior executives related to the context. This relationship is based on the pragmatist's view expressed by Bacon (2012) that knowledge is a "duplicate of reality" (p.8) (Bacon, 2012; Dewey, 1925; Rorty, 1980). The difference to the critical character of interpretive knowledge is understanding, while in pragmatism, constructive knowledge is emphasised (Goldkuhl, 2012). The role of knowledge here is the usefulness for action and change, which contrasts with interpretivism's claim that knowledge engages in itself (Rescher, 2016).

3.5.3 Methodology

Methodology addresses the request in terms of the shape of the study and how the world should be studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Klenke, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Symon & Cassell, 2012). In this regard, the methodology sets the boundaries and refers to how logic, reality, values, and what counts as knowledge inform research (McGregor & Murnane, 2010). From a pragmatist perspective, a fundamental idea is inquiry as a methodology—the methodology supports the creation of knowledge in the interest of change and improvement (Goldkuhl, 2012).

3.5.4 Axiology

Axiology refers to the role of values and ethics in research (Bryman, Bell, du Toit, & Hirschsohn, 2016). The values affect the approach by which the research is conducted and how the results are appreciated. The traditional scientific approach pursues research that is value-free and unbiased. However, all research is value-laden

and biased (Cederblom & Paulson, 2001). Moreover, values play a significant role in the study of leadership by describing the rationale and justification for action (Rescher, 2016; Klenke, 2016). By including axiology as a part of the paradigm, the researcher goes beyond the established trilogy of ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Klenke, 2016). The expressed how in the research question is a value-based question which cannot be addressed by an axiology-free approach. Because it asks, in a specific context, what is the observation by the senior executives and what actions are performed accordingly. The connected values cannot be derived from or explained based on facts. This leads to a different conception of what counts as a fact.

3.6   Concluding Comments on the Research Philosophy

This chapter contended that pragmatism presents a very practical and applied research philosophy which is oriented toward action. Likewise, pragmatic researchers frequently use theories to guide their analysis rather than apply a single generally accepted and prescribed method (Strang, 2015). In contrast positivists adopted the position that a result is time- and context-free (Cepeda & Martin, 2005; Day & Antonakis, 2018; Klenke, 2016).

To design an appropriate research strategy and to position the answer to the research question, considering the underpinning paradigm for this research is important. This derivation of this requirement is connected to Kuhn's (1963) statement that scientific theories are constructed around basic paradigms (Kuhn & Hawkins, 1963; Wray, 2011).

The subject of this research, in conjunction with the research philosophy, points toward the research methodology (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Merriam &

Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2015). Therefore, the next chapter will proceed with this perspective and explain the chosen research methodology.

Chapter 4. Research Methodology

Research is conducted to understand the practical articulated problem and develop an associated solution (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014; Quick & Wright, 2011). This chapter presents the development of the research methodology. It describes the strategy chosen to integrate the different components of this approach coherently and logically. Figure 4.1 provides an overview of the structure of the research methodology. The right side focuses on parts which frame the research methodology and the left side supplies the outline of the actual execution of the research; the limitations apply to the entirety of the research.

Figure 4.1

The structure of the research methodology
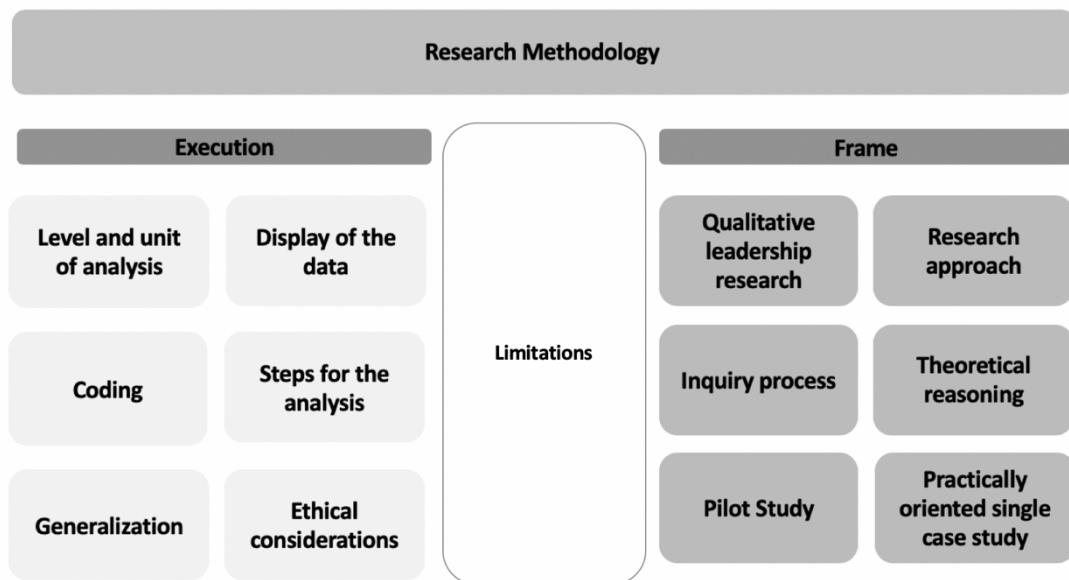
The components of the research methodology in Figure 4.1 and the associated strategy ensure that the research question is appropriately addressed (Crowe et al., 2011; Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Consequently, this chapter details the overall approach adopted to answer the research question and attain the research objectives. In this respect, Edmondson & McManus (2007) stress that robust research comes from asking the right questions and then choosing the appropriate method, not the other way around.

To discuss the chosen research methodology, this chapter commences with the dialogue of the research approach in section 4.1 and continues with section 4.2 as well as further consideration of qualitative leadership research in contrast to a quantitative approach. Section 4.3 describes the applied inquiry process, and Section 4.4 provided the explanation in terms of the theoretical reasoning. The conducted pilot study is discussed in Section 4.5. The remaining chapter continues with section 4.6 and the applied pragmatic case study design. Section 4.7 and the subsequent sections includes the explanation of the used data sources and the applied data analysis. Finally, the chapter ends with an assessment of the ethical considerations and limitations of the study in sections 4.14 and 4.15.

4.1   Research Approach

This section explores and justifies the study's research approach. From a broad perspective, induction refers to inference created from distinct instances or observed reality (Gill, Johnson, & Clark, 2010). The opposite is deduction, where the researcher tries to develop or modify a theory or construct from the sample data (Strang, 2015).

Both approaches fall short for the promise of qualitative research. An alternative is to develop a view, where the empirical observations and the set of theoretical propositions are together (Timmermanns & Tavory, 2012). This perspective exists as a tradition within pragmatism expressed by the pragmatist

Charles Sanders Peirce where abduction denotes to the "process of forming an explanatory hypothesis" (as cited in Timmermanns & Tavory, 2012, p. 23).

Peirce argued in the late 1800s that abduction is distinguished and necessary as a third form for a more complete understanding of the processes of inquiry (Locke, 2012). This study believes that it is beneficial to combine inductive and deductive reasoning. While a conclusion derived from empirical observation is inductive, arguments based on known references represent deductive reasoning (Strang, 2015). In keeping with the pragmatic paradigm, there are reasons for a combination of deductive-inductive (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012).

Some authors, like Timmermans and Tavory (2012), Aliseda (2006) and Dubois & Gadde (2002), argue that abduction is a "guiding principle of empirically-based theory construction" (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012, p. 167). Abduction highlights a form of reasoning through the perception of the observed phenomenon concerning another observed phenomenon (Dubois & Gadde, 2002, 2014).

As Peirce noted, neither induction nor deduction is particularly creative, because neither leads to new theories (as cited in Tavory & Timmermann, 2012). Theory generation requires a movement which leads away from the predetermined concepts and fosters the creation of new narratives about the phenomenon the research try to explain. Abduction occurs when research encounters observations that do not effortlessly fit existing theories (Reichertz, 2010).

The initial indication of an interaction between change and action provides the rationale for pragmatic research. The research approach finally seeks to better understand the situation and solve the stated problem (Duram, 2010). The researcher is interested in in-depth insights and moves from a complex problem to a theory of understanding in order to improve a given situation (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014;

Duram, 2010). In this regard, the pragmatic concept of knowledge and the way it is acquired and explained in a case study is attractive for the researcher (Fishman, 2013, 2017). Based on the assessment, the research approach is pragmatically oriented and grounded in Dewey ́s (1920) view on pragmatism and how knowledge exists independently of the knower. This perspective looks to an indeterminate circumstance as a characterisation for a problematic situation that results in an inquiry (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). With this inquiry, knowledge acquisition is the process of successfully solving a problematic situation. Knowledge is therefore necessarily experimental, and it is the only reflection on a successful problem-solving act that results in the essential knowledge, which implies that there is no pure a priori knowledge (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller 2014; Morgan, 2014; Bacon, 2012). The next section discusses the applicability of a qualitative orientation in contrast to a quantitative orientation.

4.2 Qualitative and Quantitative Leadership Research

This section presents the justification for the selection of a qualitative research approach. In principle, qualitative research provides contributions to the study of leadership in terms of significance and uniqueness (Bryman, 2004). However, the observations show that most leadership research is not fully committed to qualitative research. Qualitative research is a less used paradigm compared to the predominantly used quantitative paradigm (Klenke, 2016; Antonakis, 2018).

4.2.1   *Orientation of this study*

Conversely, the orientation and the underlying research question demand a more context-sensitive approach likely connected to qualitative research because the commitment to contextual understanding (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000; Bryman & Bell, 2015; Bryman et al., 1996). In this respect, qualitative methods focus on the lived experience of the research participants and their authentic voices (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Symon & Cassell, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Klenke, 2016).

This view of experiences appreciates, emphasizes, and promotes the role of context as an valid dependency (Klenke, 2016). Steiner (2002) noted that researchers usually reduce people to an abstract object, which means to detach the person and action from the connected contexts. This kind of approach causes difficulty when reintegrating gained knowledge into a sophisticated setting (Steiner, 2002). Of pertinence, Klenke (2016) stated that contexts shape the practice of leadership and determine what leaders can do in a given and specific context. This perspective provides a comprehensive explanation for the rationale for the application of qualitative leadership research in a specific context.

Conclusively, the orientation towards a qualitative method provides the researcher with a kind of conceptual map. This map of formerly uncharted conditions offers an effective approach to investigate different contextual dependencies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

4.2.2 Challenges of quantitative leadership research

A distinct situation is perceived such that quantitative research in leadership is facing challenges because there are limited theories built on correctly identified variables having proper definitions with tested causalities (Day & Antonakis, 2013, 2018). According to Weber (2004), the interest in qualitative research arises from an anticipated dissatisfaction with the type of information provided by quantitative techniques (Weber, 2004).

Some researchers contend that quantitative methods are ideal to test hypotheses with large samples. This permits the development of sophisticated causal models and allows for replicability across different settings (Antonakis, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In contrast quantitative methods are inadequate to understand the meanings senior executives ascribe to events in a specific context (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Bryman et al., 1996; Klenke, 2016). Yet, this exactly is the aim of this research—to explore those circumstances.

The assumption is that relationships and patterns in compound structures and processes are difficult to test. It is questionable to assume that a quantitative perspective can summarise all potential contextual dependencies (Osborn et al., 2014). A possible list of all likely dependencies would be overwhelming, and the valuation of this related outcome has limited practical value except the provision of a list of potentially relevant dependencies (Osborn et al., 2014).

4.2.3 Summary of the research approach

In summary, a quantitative approach has the characteristic of emphasising causality and variables while also being heavily pre-structured (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

In contrast, the qualitative approach of this study is concerned with the elucidation of perspectives in combination with contextual details (Bryman & Bell, 2015). A characterisation of leadership expressed in quantitative results often fails to lead to an understanding of the deeper structures (Bowen, 2009; Klenke, 2016). The selection of a qualitative approach for this research is justified with the rationale explained earlier. With this approach, it is possible to explore the dependencies in the relationship to the business disruption.

Likewise, the research focus on leadership in context also fits because of its concentration on an actual situation and not a disconnected abstraction. By investigating the dependent actions of senior executives, the attempt is to understand applied experiences based on executed actions which in turn are dependent on the context.

4.3   The Inquiry Processes

The inquiry process is a primary component of the research in pragmatism and concerned with understanding and resolving a problematic situation (Morgan, 2014). The inquiry process starts by acknowledging that a business change as a recognizable and relevant issue and problem. This alteration of the situation has an impact on the senior executives and the associated approach to leadership. This connection reflects the problem identification. Considering the nature of the problem generates the requirement to improve the approach to leadership. In this respect, the pragmatic orientation of the researcher seeks to improve the problematic situation of the senior executive to cope with the business disruption rather than test research hypotheses that are removed from their contexts (Antoft & Salomonsen, 2007; Duram, 2010;

Goldkuhl, 2012).For the operationalization of this research, Figure 4.2 depicts the inquiry process (G. Biesta, 2006; Morgan, 2014).

Figure 4.2

The inquiry process and its application
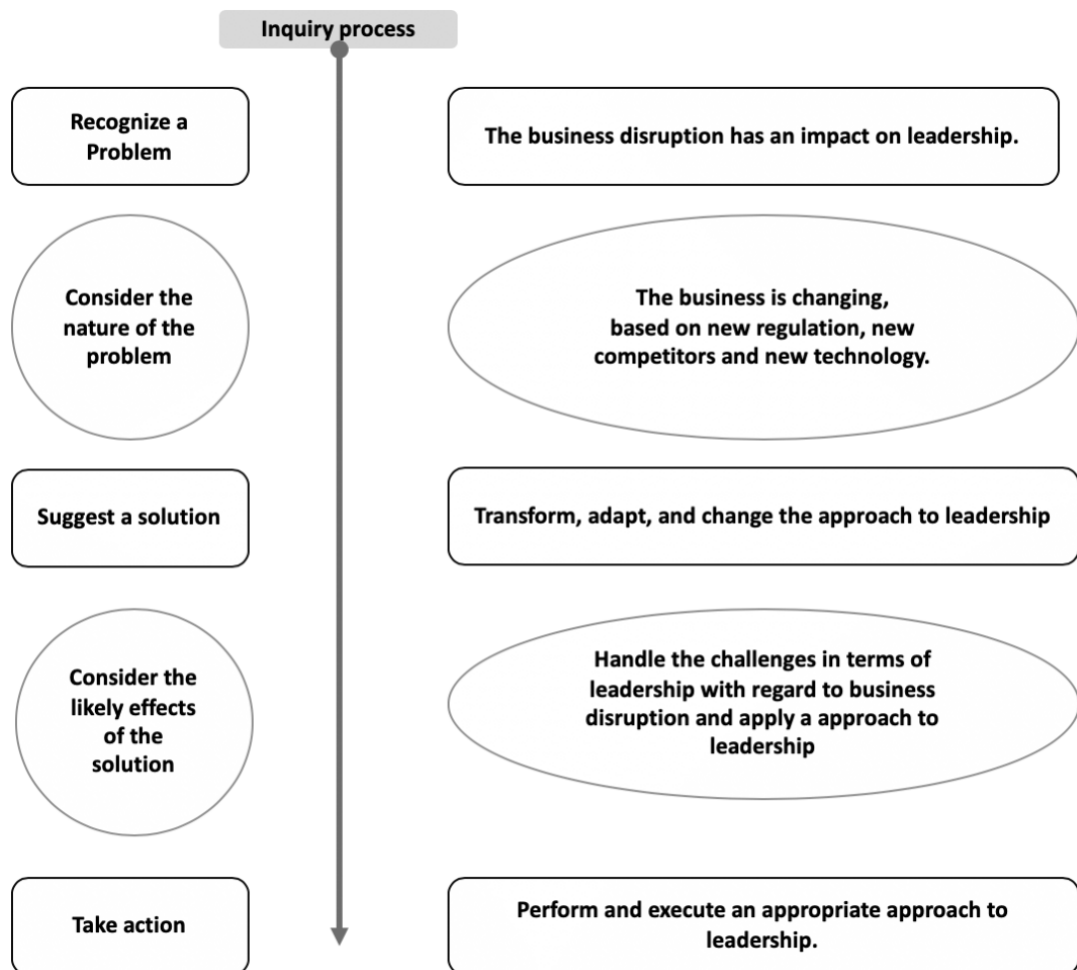
Note. The left side of Figure 4.2 shows the generic inquiry process adapted from "*Pragmatism as a Paradigm for Social Research*" by Morgan 2014, p.4. The right side is the application to the identified gap expressed in Chapter 2.

To settle this process of inquiry and justify the research approach, it is important from the point of view of qualitative pragmatism that action is based on experiences. Beliefs must be interpreted to generate dependent actions in a specific context, and actions must be interpreted to generate beliefs (Morgan, 2014). This context-dependency means that the ability to use prior experience to predict an outcome is fallible and probabilistic (Morgan, 2014). The risk is the possibility that prior experiences will not be enough to guide the actions in the given setting, or that what appear to be the safest assumptions will fail to produce the expected outcome (Morgan, 2014).

4.4   Pilot Study

The researcher conducted a pilot study with two senior executives from BMW and two external senior consultants from a selected external advisory firm. The participants were randomly selected based on accessibility and representativeness. The pilot study had two objectives: To provide theoretical alignment, and to test the proposed method for data collection and analysis.

For the first objective, it was essential to develop an understanding of the concepts, theories, and perceptions of the interviewees about the topic. The practice of experiences and the need to explore and employ further those experiences in action is a maxim of the pragmatic paradigm. Hence, the determination of the relevance of this study outside of the practice perspective was a fundamental characteristic of the pilot study. Maxwell (2012) stated that such early engagement with the research subject provides support for the development of the conceptual framework and involved theories.

The pilot study serves a similar function as in-prior research (Maxwell, 2012). Nevertheless, the pilot study focused more precisely on the concerns, theories, indicators, and preliminary insights and perspectives from the participants. This approach provided the researcher more than a source of additional concepts; it offered an understanding of the actual and practical meaning of leadership in context from participants directly involved in the leadership process. In this qualitative study, those meanings and perspectives constitute an essential aspect; they are not merely a source of theoretical insights—they are building blocks for the conceptual framework.

The second objective of the pilot study was to verify the research strategy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Tracy, 2010). In this regard, the pilot study was a small-scale version performed in preparation for the main study (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). The pilot study indicated that the execution of the main research was feasible in the allocated time and with the anticipated sample size. In particular, with respect to determining an appropriate sample size, it was important to conduct the pilot study before performing the full-scale research project (Hulley, 2007).

Furthermore, the pilot study was conducted to test the questions for the interviewees, the data collection and the data analysis processes conducted with network analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Tracy, 2010). In general, carrying out this pilot study did not guarantee success in the main study; however, it did increase the likelihood of success (Baxter & Jack, 2008). With this, the pilot study provided direction for the main study, but it was open to new perspectives and insights in the primary research. However, the pilot study could not provide definitive answers for the research question because of the limited number of participants.

4.5　The Pragmatic Case Study

A pragmatic case study is a tailor-made method for alignment with the proposed inquiry process (Fishman, 2017). The purpose is to explore and to develop a potential new approach to leadership in the specific environment of BMW. In that regard, the case study provides the foundation for the answer to the demands of a process of naturalistic inquiry that seeks an in-depth understanding of the specific context (Yin, 2009, 2012, 2017). This perspective supports the development of an answers to the research question by asking how senior executives cope in a specific context.

The engagement of a case study follows Klenke's (2016) recommendation to place the study of leadership in a situation where leadership exists. According to Yin (2017), a case study is a preferred approach to explore a potential answer to how and why questions. So, where the researcher has little control over the events, the focus is on a current phenomenon in a real-life context. The research approach of this study, the level and unit of analysis, and the research question fulfil these essential prerequisites for case study-related research. In keeping with this, Denzin & Lincoln (2011) postulated that a case study is a standalone qualitative research approach. The goal of understanding the complexity and details of the issues is the main occupation of this qualitative case study research design because it enables the researcher to preserve essential features of real-life occurrences (Aberdeen, 2013; Crowe et al., 2011; Gibbert, Ruigrok, & Wicki, 2008; Hyett et al., 2014; Siggelkow, 2007; Yin, 2009). Apropos of this, Creswell (2013) stated that a qualitative case study is an exploration of real-life, contemporarily bounded with detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information.

Besides this discussion of more generic behaviours surrounding the applicability of a qualitative case study, the following subsections consider the tailor-made case study in more detail.

4.5.1 Case study for leadership research

The first overarching theme is the assessment that a case study is relevant to the leadership research. In this regard, a case study design has particular importance for leadership research (Johansson, 2003; Klenke, 2016) as a case study aligns with situations in which it is impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context (Yin, 2015). This resonates with Yin's (2017) and Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) definition of a case as an empirical inquiry.

A inquiry seeks to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, where the borderlines between phenomenon and context may not be evident. Correspondingly, the senior executives represent the level of analysis and not the topic of the research (Grace, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). From this perspective, the level of analysis is where the collection and analysis of the larger body of data is performed (Strang, 2015). The aim of this study is to examine the function, but the pure function is not the case study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011; Creswell & Poth, 2016; Stake, 2005).

This qualitative case study enables negotiation and conversation with the knowledge gained from the participants. In this conversation, the interpretation is conducted by the researcher as an outsider to the specific organisation or context. As a consequence, the researcher can describe and explain the phenomenon in a new, creative, but still recognizable manner (Antoft & Salomonsen, 2007). The importance

of a case study in leadership is that this method is applicable for both practical and theoretical aims (Ebneyamini & Sadeghi Moghadam, 2018). The case study method is designed to address the research question and enable a researcher to carefully examine the data in a specific context (Hyett et al., 2014).

Besides the discourse, there is an important practical connection derived from the current environment with the growing frequency and magnitude of changes in technology (Voss, 2008). There is a rationale that leadership research should use a more field-based research method in this kind of environment (Ebneyamini & Sadeghi Moghadam, 2018). In this regard, the applicability of the case study provides the framework for the analysis and contributes to solving the problematic situation, connecting this method back to the overarching pragmatic paradigm (Ebneyamini & Sadeghi Moghadam, 2018).

4.5.2 *A single qualitative case study*

The preceding sections explored the application of a case study in leadership research. The purpose of this section is to explain the application of a single case study. As pointed out by Hyett et al. (2014), case study research is appropriate for carrying out qualitative research. Therefore, a qualitative case study must shape the approach in terms of the chosen paradigm, study design, and selection of methods (Crowe et al., 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2017).

As stated, a case study is identified as a standalone qualitative approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Hyett et al., 2015). The alignment of this research is with Stake's (1995) and Merriam´s (2019, 2016) understanding of a case study as an

investigation and analysis of a single case. In this scenario, the intention is to capture the complexity of the object of study (Stake, 1995).

Moreover, the rationale to apply a single case is justified by the focus on leadership in the context of the case of BMW. According to Siggelkow (2007) and Stake (1995), single case studies provide compelling data to test theories as long as unique features or attributes are available to meet the objectives. Easterby-Smith, Lyles, & Peteraf (2009) also recommended the use of a single case for a particular in-depth investigation.

According to Eisenhardt & Graebner (2007), the value-added comes from the combination of qualitative and case study research, thereby offering opportunities for theory-building from particular and unique cases. The objective is to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday situation in the environment of the case. Correspondingly, Yin (2017) emphasised that a single case represents a substantial contribution to knowledge and theory-building because this approach can confirm, challenge, or extend the underpinning theory.

Overall, the design of a single case study allows for conducting research of a sophisticated functioning unit and supports the investigation in the natural context with different sources (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2009, 2017). Lastly, this single case study shares with other forms of qualitative research the exploration of meaning and understanding. In this regard, the researcher represents the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, and the outcome is characterizable as descriptive (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

4.5.3 *Applying theory in the case study*

In conjunction with the discussion of the reasoning for this study, the corresponding aspect is the handling of the underscored theories. Maxwell (2013) pointed out that every research design needs some theoretical foundation for the studied phenomena, and this research is no exception. The rationale is that a theory can provide valuable initial guidance, but it also has limitations. Moreover, it is conceivable that theories support keeping the focus on the concepts embedded in the theory, which points to possible new topics and ways of research (Klenke, 2016; Maxwell, 2013).

As identified by Wang (2018), case studies can be valuable when combined with theory. Theories provide principles and explanations, they feature interrelationships among variables, and they provide the framework for understanding situations. Pertinent to this study, the call for more empirical research and theory development in the field of strategic leadership supports the importance of theory as a source for practice (Gardner et al., 2010; Greer & Carter, 2013).

Various theories provide the researcher with different lenses to view leadership in context along with the associated issues. This approach is particularly prominent in this case study because of the explicit purposes of conducting a study to build insights abductive from empirical material data. Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) argue that theory is emergent in the sense that it is "situated in and developed by recognizing patterns of relationships among constructs within and across cases" (p. 25).

In this pragmatic case study design, the theories to be examined reflect the starting point of the research. This is relevant and applicable because a basic assumption is that scientific inquiry begins with theoretical knowledge (Maxwell &

Mittapalli, 2012). Consistent with pragmatism, the purpose of this case study is to generate empirical knowledge in conjunction with theoretical knowledge.

Finally, the relationship to theory provides the ability to highlight some parts and leave others out of consideration (Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2012). There is an existing assessment that no theory can express and explain all phenomena (Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2012). The conclusion of this section is that the study considers theories and perspectives rather than being rooted entirely in established theoretical perspectives.

4.5.4 *Characterisation of the cases study*

The last aspect is to explain the characterisation of this case study. In this regard, the pragmatic case study incorporates an intrinsic-instrumental orientation (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2013). The case itself is of primary interest in the exploration; it is aligned with the overall pragmatic approach. The exploration is driven by the desire to know more about the uniqueness of the case, the experience, and related actions rather than building an unconnected theory or indicating how this case represents other cases (Mills et al., 2013).

An intrinsic-instrumental case has two major characteristics. The intrinsic-attribute, which is exploratory in nature, where the researcher being guided by the interest in the case itself rather than generalising across cases (Mills et al., 2013). The instrumental-attribute, is secondary to exploring a specific issue, building a theory, or redrawing generalisations. In an instrumental case study, the case becomes a tool to better comprehend another matter (Lalor et al., 2013).

The assumption is that the pragmatic case study of this research is both intrinsic and instrumental. This positioning of this case study in relation to the broader research offers the opportunity to understand the senior executives' characteristics in terms of the modifications to the approach to leadership in a specific context (Mills et al., 2013). An intrinsic–instrumental approach should avoid providing discourse about generalisable findings that would be challenging to represent if the cases were purely intrinsic (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Grace, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mills et al., 2013). This reflects the data analysis approach where the intrinsic case perspective captures the richness and complexity of the case and the instrumental case perspective aggregates data toward categories (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Grace, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mills et al., 2013).

To conclude, with the characterisation of the intrinsic-instrumental case study, the researcher is interested in the dependency within leadership in context and seeks therefore both a depth and breadth exploration.

4.6   Data Sources

A major feature of a case study is that different sources of evidence are combined to illuminate the case from different angles (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Blatter & Haverland, 2012; Mills et al., 2013; Yin, 2017). For this study, the rationale for using interviews as data sources is based on the assessment conducted prior to the adoption of the qualitative research approach. The researcher recognised the potential disadvantages of a qualitative approach, such as subjectivity and personal bias, and decided to resolve those disadvantages by using two sample sets (Grace, 2011).

One reason to use only interviews as the data source is grounded in the pragmatic orientation of this study, the goal of which is to gather the applied experiences of individuals affected by the occurring business transformation. Third-party data sources, like documents, webpages, and internal papers, are not capable of supplying this type of information (Bowen, 2009). Additionally, the rationale not to use corporate documents or external papers is based on the assessment that those documents are insufficient in terms of practical details (Bowen, 2009). Every document, whether inside BMW or outside it, is produced with a specific purpose, which is not fully aligned with the purpose of this current study. To apply documentary analysis would also be a contradiction to the pragmatic philosophy that underpins this research of experience, where each instance of inquiry is situated in a given context. For instance, corporate documents are created independently of this study's research agenda. Furthermore, access to documents, as Yin (1994) noted, can be deliberately blocked. Moreover, an incomplete collection of documents suggests "biased selectivity" (Yin, 1994, p. 80). In this case study, the available documents were restricted from disclosure by BMW corporate policies and procedures.

4.6.1   Two sets of participants

As stated, a major strength of the data collection was the opportunity to use different sources to increase the overall quality of the study. Easterby-Smith et al. (2009), Eisenhardt & Graebner (2007) and Hyett et al. (2014) offer a foundation for collecting specialised in-depth data. The strategy is reasonable for achieving an overall representation, and it strengthens the validity of the case study. The data sources are BMW senior executives from various branches and departments as well as senior

external advisors involved in consultancy for BMW. In detail, 18 interviews with senior executives were conducted. Participants were selected from different business units to mitigate subject bias and provide a broader range of perspectives. Then, nine interviews of senior advisors not employed by BMW, but deeply connected to the corporation, were conducted to achieve the additional level of bias mitigation. In this way, an examination from the points of view from multiple sources regarding the same phenomenon was achieved.

The approach using an internal and external set of participants was chosen to avoid an influenced perspective. This approach was applied to mitigate a potential risk that BMW senior executives may have a biased view due to a strong corporate dependencies and relationship. As case studies do not rely exclusively on multiple data sources, it is likewise important to include various separate sources (Yin, 2009).

4.6.2   Triangulation

To engage with the data gleaned from the two sets of interviewees, the study applied the triangulation procedure. Based on Turner & Turner (2009), triangulation is sufficient where data are gathered using the same method from different sources. Moreover, the use of multiple sources (interviewees) enabled the coverage of a broader range of understandings, and it allowed to use of triangulation in as much depth as possible while enhancing confirmation validity (Morse, 2011; Yin 2009, 2017).

The applied triangulation compared similarities and common views from the participants in terms of the developed categories. As recommended by Creswell (2013) and Denzin and Lincoln (2011), the triangulation technique provides further assurance of integrity, rigour, validity, credibility, and reliability. According to Klenke

(2016), the approach of this study helps to achieve a level of triangulation where different kinds of data are collected on the same phenomenon from diverse viewpoints.

4.7   Data Collection and Data Saturation

The previous section explains the reasoning for the two data sets serving as the underlying foundations for further analysis. The purpose of this section and the related subsection is to discuss two additional relevant topics.

4.7.1   Selection of the data collection method

The first issue is the selection of the data collection method and this was based on the preliminary assessment of the research question, which indicates a demand for an explorative approach. In this study, with the strong relationship to context and related dependencies, it is likely that a qualitative approach will be given preference (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2013). Despite the expressed position in terms of the usage of two sample sets and no further documentary analyses, various qualitative methods for data collection were revised.

The reason for selecting semi-structured interviews is based on the opportunity to have direct interaction with the participants and the possibility of encouraging the interviewee to expand and discuss attitudes as well as facts (Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, & Pedersen, 2013; Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). Interviewing has typically become the predominant method of data collection in qualitative research (Pierre & Jackson, 2014).

Moreover, there are sufficient reasons based on appropriateness to pursue an in-depth exploration of ideas and relationships not previously considered (Schwandt,

Lincoln, & Guba, 2007). According to Creswell (2013), Easterby-Smith et al. (2009), Hyett et al. (2014), Merriam (2016), and Yin (2012), face-to-face detailed in-depth interviews are the most regularly used data collection methods in qualitative case studies. The interviews were conducted as a one-to-one conversation (Hair, 2007). This approach seems promising according to the previous explanation of applicability when seeking to explore the research topic. Using in-depth interviews, the research question of this thesis can be addressed in a highly flexible way to gain the necessary insights from the two samples (Creswell, 2018).

The various approaches considered are found in Table 4.1, including the reasons for their rejection.

Table 4.1

Qualitative data collection methods considered and reasons for rejection

Data collection method	Reason for rejection
Closed Survey	Rejected for not offering deep insights and flexibility with no ability to integrate emerging themes (Cardon, Wincent, Singh, & Drnovsek, 2009).
Focus groups and interviews	Not applied because answers can be influenced by the conversation with others and possible differences in status (Ritchie, Lewis, & Ormston, 2013).
Direct observation	Excluded as the pilot study showed difficulties in accessibility to the daily

Data collection method	Reason for rejection
	operational business of senior executives (Jorgensen, 2015).

Note. This table represents a non-exhaustive list of all possible data collection methods.

4.7.2   *The appropriate number of interviews*

The second issue for interviews as data collection method is to ensure an appropriate number of interviewees. This copes with the requirement to justify the sample size decision in qualitative research (Boddy, 2016; Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). This decision relies on *data saturation* as a criterion for determining how many interviews are necessary (Boddy, 2016; Marshall et al., 2013). Saturation is the point during a study when adding another data element, such as another interview, does not yield new information (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). In other words, redundancy in participants' responses negates the need to collect additional data (Latham, 2013; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). The data saturation occurs among relatively homogeneous populations, which is the case with the two types of data (Boddy, 2016).

For this research, data saturation was reached after 18 senior executives and nine external advisors were interviewed. After that, no new information emerged from the data (no new codes appeared after the first 23 interviews). For this research, data saturation (where no new codes appear) was reached after conducting 23 interviews. To ensure that data saturation had been reached, four more interviews were conducted, giving a total of 27 interviews. To stop after 27 interviews is in accord with the

recommendation from Marshall et al. (2013) that single case studies should generally feature 15 to 30 interviews. Nevertheless, four more interviews were conducted to confirm the perception that saturation had been reached (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006; Marshall et al., 2013). Limits to the amount of time and access to the BMW senior executives were additional reasons for the limited number of interviews.

4.8   Development of the Interviews and Execution

The next aspect is the set of questions which were constructed in the form of general statements, with follow-up questions for further probing (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Saunders et al., 2012). The questions were designed to provoke responses in which the participants could recount a wealth of information, exploring and unravelling issues in a nondirective and unbiased way (Harris & Brown, 2010; Miles et al., 1994; Yin, 2009). The questions were based on some information primarily derived from the conducted literature review in conjunction with the conceptual framework (Hu, Liu, Ma, Zhao, & Yan, 2018).

From practical applications, a useful question is to combine the subject itself and the relevant aspect (Hu et al., 2018). The researcher did not attempt to draw conclusions with respect to projects, strategies, age, gender, or other professional or personal background of the respondents. Further, this study did not intend to analyse what was right or wrong. Instead, the interview provided insights into the various viewpoints and ended with an open-ended closing. The openness encouraged by this approach is transformed into dialogue because of the various degrees of explicit confrontations with the topic (Flick, 2014, 2018; see Appendix B for the list of questions).

4.9   The Interviews

The interviews started with an introduction to the topic and what was to be covered during the conversation (Rowley, 2012; Saunders, Kitzinger, & Kitzinger, 2015). It consisted of the following content:

- The interviewee is thanked for participating.

- A brief outline of the research purpose (aims and objectives) is presented along with the nature and intention of the research output including what will happen to the collected data.

- The previously agreed right to confidentiality and anonymity is reiterated.

- Request to audio record the interview is restated.

- A summary of the themes is covered, time availability is confirmed, and the informed consent sheet is verified for the interviewee's signature.

The second part comprised non-sensitive and welcoming questions regarding their automotive and professional experience to help the participant feel comfortable and for the researcher to gain initial insights (Galletta, 2012; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

In the third part, the respondents were asked to specify the disruptive changes in the industry, especially the changes and impacts to BMW´s senior leaders. Several semi-structured, open-ended interview questions were asked in order to obtain an in-depth understanding. The idea was to guide the individuals through aspects of the issue developed from the literature and incorporated into the conceptual framework of the study. Besides the open-ended questions, the researcher used theory-driven, decision-directed questions related to key aspects and concluded by asking a comparative question. The various types of questions allowed the researcher to deal more explicitly

with the presuppositions brought into the interview in relation to features of the interviewee. At the end of the interview, topic-related final questions and closing questions were asked.

The next aspect was the execution of the interviews. The starting point was the invitation for an interview, which was sent by e-mail. A cover letter informed potential participants about the goal and circumstances of the research, and how the data would be used. The interview questions were drawn up in English with the intention of including non-German-speaking individuals, as well. The interviews themselves were carried out in the English or German language depending on the interviewee's preferences. Every one-to-one interview took approximately 30 to 60 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded, anonymized, and transcribed. Furthermore, extensive field notes were made during and directly after the interview. The collection and anonymisation of the data followed the Code of Practice on Research Integrity guidelines of the Edinburgh Napier University (Barkess, 2013). The associated Research Integrity (RI) application was approved by the Faculty Research Integrity (ethics) Committee.

4.10   Sampling Strategy

Qualitative research is characterised by a set of distinguishing features that set this tradition apart from quantitative approaches and is reflected by the applied sampling strategy (Bryman & Bell, 2016). Therefore, the sampling strategy requires a purposive or theoretical sampling approach. Instead of using random sampling, as is the goal in quantitative research, qualitative research uses purposive sampling. That

means the researcher chooses the participants based on their expected contributions to an in-depth, information-rich understanding of the research topic.

Thus, the samples used in this research are not inclusive. In qualitative research, the generalisability of research findings is not a concern. Hence, the absence of inclusiveness does not detract from the value of this research (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2016; Denzin & Lincoln, 2006).

4.10.1 Interview sample structure

After clarifying the sampling strategy, the sample structure is explained in this section. The approach for the purposeful sample compilation was to opt for participants that could be treated as key informants (Jankowicz, 2013). Easterby-Smith et al. (2009), Eisenhardt & Graebner (2007), and Hyett et al. (2014) all recommend using key experts for data collection. This technique was beneficial because the research approach was relatively new and not statistically representative, hence gathering knowledge about the research issues was more important (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Faifua, 2014). The focus was not on the expert as an individual, but on the expert within the organisational and institutional context (Meuser & Nagel, 2002). An expert is understood as someone having privileged access to relevant information and who can shape reality through their institutional context (Meuser and Nagel, 2009). These types of experts were selected either from BMW´s senior executive organisation or from the external consulting firm.

Furthermore, the participants were designated based on the positions that made them knowledgeable about research matters. Explicitly, the participants were chosen

based on their position in the organisational hierarchy, employment tenure with BMW, and the accessibility to the researcher.

For the second sample set, participants were chosen based on industry knowledge and experience in consultancy engagements with BMW in innovative projects. It was important to ensure that the sample was representative and verified. According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2013), the most common causes of unrepresentative sampling were using non-representative informants and generalising from non-representative activities (Hashimov, 2015; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

4.10.2 Sample set I: Senior executives

As stated, the purposeful sampling strategy for selecting senior executives was guided by selecting participants with different functional backgrounds and responsibilities in the BMW organisation to ensure representativeness across this employee level. The sample design ensured that, on the one hand, key aspects of the conceptual framework are addressed and considered by individuals inside the population.[1] It also ensured that the target group of individuals had common characteristics (Faifua, 2014; Mays & Pope, 1995; Symon & Cassell, 2012). Nevertheless, the study does not deduce any conclusions about the expected result from the respective and specific function of the executives. Importance and significance were based on the hierarchical position of the executives in the company.

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[1] The total number of employed senior executives within the level of analysis and during the time of the research was 300.

Figure 4.3 refers to an abstracted organisational overview and location of the senior executives in it.

Figure 4.3

Position of the senior executives within the hierarchy
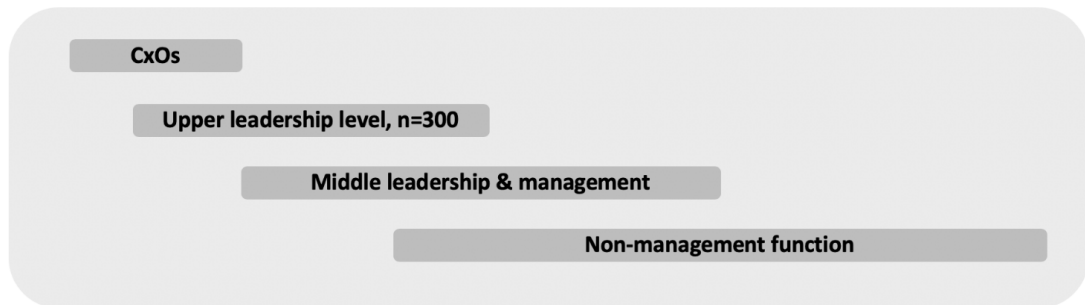
Note. Figure 4.3 visualises the position of senior executives in the BMW organisation. Based on the annual company report the total number of employees is 129.932 (BMW annual report, 2017). The term *CxO*, includes positions like chief executive officer, chief financial officer, chief technical officer, chief technology officer, and chief information officer.

The common characteristics of a BMW senior executive is employment with the firm and having decision-making powers delegated to them by the board of directors. A further characteristic is that senior executives typically head product and geographic units or functional departments in the company, such as the Head of Digital Products and Services, Digitalization and Customer Interface. These senior executives, referred to as *OFK*[2], occupy positions at the highest levels in the

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[2] OFK stands for 'obere Führungskraft,' translated into English as senior executive.

management hierarchy. Moreover, they typically have day-to-day tasks managing larger parts of the organisation.

The other main characteristic is that they have a significant relationship with the overarching corporate strategy and are heavily influenced by the business disruption. The assumption is that senior executives are operating at the strategic level of the company and are required to execute on the basis of strategic leadership behaviours, specifically in terms of providing direction and guidance to the organisation and associated human resources toward corporate strategic objectives (Khurana & Nohria., 2010; Wang, 2018). Additionally, senior executives must ensure that the organisation and organisational functions are aligned with the external environment, corporate strategy, and connected objectives (Zaccaro & Klimoski, 2001). They must ensure the coordinated functioning of the organisation as it interacts with a dynamic external environment (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Wang, 2018). In particular, senior executives are responsible for managing the business on a daily basis, which also is essential for organisational innovation, adaptation, and performance (Day & Antonakis, 2018; Hesterly & Barney, 2010; Wang, 2018).

Table 4.2 provides an overview of the participants with years of experience in the senior hierarchy levels and functional responsibility.

Table 4.2

Characteristics of senior executives

No.	Characteristics of senior executives, first sample	
	Years employed at BMW at the executive level	Functional responsibility
SE1	10+ years	Digital products and services, digitalization customer interface
SE2	4+ years	Customer experience, data & analytics
SE3	9+ years	Product management
SE4	7+ years	Training and qualification
SE5	15+ years	Controlling sales and marketing
SE6	4+ years	Controlling sales and marketing
SE7	6+ years	Aftersales
SE8	9+ years	Customer experience, data & analytics
SE9	11+ years	Digital products and services, digitalization customer interface
SE10	12+ years	Production system, digitization
SE11	6+ years	Aftersales
SE12	12+ years	Product management
SE13	8+ years	Brand communication
SE14	5+ years	Brand communication
SE15	11+ years	Information technology
SE16	15+ years	Training and education
SE17	9+ years	Sales and marketing
SE18	11+ years	Sales and marketing

Note. SE means senior executive; this abbreviation is used in the findings chapter.

4.10.3 Sample set II: External senior advisors

Selection for the second sample set was based on the main criteria, domain expertise in the automotive industry and years of consultancy experiences with a relationship to BMW. A review of related documents and articles, accessible through the internet, was conducted to identify a self-governing international consulting firm. The major characteristics for the selection were independence, a connection to BMW innovation projects, and a representative self-image as a leading and global technology research and advisory firm.

The selected consulting firm specialised in digital transformation, including a specific practice for the automotive sector. The purposeful sampling strategy determined senior advisors from this practice, who had specific knowledge of digitization issues and consequences for the automotive industry and BMW.

The provided knowledge was in response to the new requirements and global competition. The selected sample was a relevant source for this research. Table 4.3 shows the composition of this sample divided into the years in consultancy and the related domain expertise. Furthermore, the selected individuals have positions on the senior level within the consulting firm that ensure they were at a comparable level to the senior executives at BMW.

Table 4.3

Senior advisor characteristics

No.	Characteristics of senior advisor, second sample set	
	Years in consultancy (partner and director level)	Domain expertise
EC1	15+ years	For global clients, develops strategies for optimal delivery alternatives to meet their most pressing business objectives. Regularly advises senior executives on strategy.
EC2	10+ years	Supports many large manufacturing companies; experience in helping clients see market and commercial opportunities in complex situations.
EC3	10+ years	Leads the engineering service practice and has over 20 years of leadership experience.
EC4	15+ years	Has supported one of the leading global car manufacturers to successfully adopt a new innovation.
EC5	15+ years	Experience in large organisational transformation projects in the automotive industry.
EC6	13+ years	Has supported leading global car manufacturers to successfully transform organisational parts to new working models and agile methods.
EC7	21+ years	Responsibility for clients in the manufacturing industry.
EC8	11+ years	Engagement lead for a global car manufacturer; responsible for transformation projects of the account.

No.	Characteristics of senior advisor, second sample set	
	Years in consultancy (partner and director level)	Domain expertise
EC9	25+ years	General manager of the consulting firm; extensive experience with transformation, innovation, and changes in the car industry.

Note. EC means executive consultant; this abbreviation is used in the findings chapter.

4.11   Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis is understood as the process of reviewing, synthesising, and interpreting data in order to describe and explain the phenomenon studied (Fossey, Harvey, Mcdermott, & Davidson, 2002). As qualitative data can have various meanings, rigorous data analysis includes an explanation of the process by which the raw data are transformed and organised (Mårtensson, Fors, Wallin, Zander, & Nilsson, 2016). As a result, this section discusses how the data collected from the semi-structured interviews were processed to answer the research questions.

In summary, the data analysis in this qualitative single case study research relied on the theoretical propositions through the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework supported focusing on the data needed to contribute to the practical ambitions and theory extension in general.

The intention is a coherent composition to supply a framework for the analysis of the collected and transcribed interview data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Regarding data analysis, the qualitative single case study research followed the

recommendations of a number of scholars (Easterby-Smith et al., 2009; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Hyett et al., 2014; Yin 2009, 2012) who have proposed strategies for data analysis (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998, 2009; Thomas, 2011).

Likewise, as recommended by Yin (2009, 2012), the rich interview data were systematically recorded and managed through a database. The data analysis included constructing data themes, naming categories and subcategories, and developing systems for placing the data into these categories and data themes as recommended in the literature (Hyett et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2015; Tight, 2010; Webb & Kevern, 2001; Yin, 2017). The categorisation of data increased the quality of the data analysis, which included data presentation, discussion, and interpretation. Network analysis was used extensively to present the findings, illustrating the respective data themes, and facilitating systematic analysis and reporting as recommended in the literature (Crowe et al., 2011; Hyett et al., 2014; Yin, 2009, 2017).

4.11.1 *Level and unit of analysis*

The first component is the determination of the level and unit of analysis. Following Strang (2015), to appropriately address the research question two aspects were defined for the determination of the findings, namely the level and unit.

Commonly, discussions around strategic leadership refer to a strategic leader as an individual. Indeed, most research around leadership in organisations uses the individual leader as the unit of analysis (Kriger & Zhovtobryukh, 2013). In this research, senior executive representing the level of analysis and the approach to the actual leadership the unit of analysis. Explicitly, the level of analysis is where the analysis of the data as a whole is performed. In this study, it is the organisational level

of the senior executives, which is defined as the level of analysis and subjects of observation (Strang, 2015). On the other hand, the unit of analysis refers to the envisioned improvements of the approach to leadership. The improvement to the approach to leadership is determined as this kind of unit. There is a logical relationship shown in Figure 4.4 between the unit of analysis and level of analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Strang, 2015; Yin, 2017).

Figure 4.4 shows the combination of the level and unit of analysis, which indicates that there is a logical relationship between the unit of analysis and level of analysis, and both are embedded in the context of BMW.

Figure 4.4

Level and unit of analysis

In summary, the level of analysis defines where the unit of analysis is created (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). The unit of analysis is the entity for the analyses in the study and this is the approach to leadership. The unit of analysis within the level of analysis provides the framework for the location of the envisioned improvement (Strang, 2015). This finally aligns with the research question where senior executives are the level of analysis and the unit of analysis is the improvement.

4.11.2 Steps of the analysis

The steps applied for the analysis started with raw field notes produced through tape recordings and handwritten notes converted into write-ups that represent "intelligible products" (Welman, Kruger, Mitchell, & Huysamen, 2005, p. 211). Further analysis includes theme identification in the interviews' context (Charmaz, 2006; Radford, 2008).

The study applied thematic analysis as a systematic approach to the analysis of qualitative data (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012) After collecting qualitative data, thematic analysis is an accessible, flexible, and increasingly popular method of qualitative data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, & Terry, 2019). This approach involves the identification of themes and patterns and interpreting the resulting thematic structures by seeking commonalities, relationships, overarching patterns, theoretical constructs, or guiding principles (Miller & Brewer, 2015).

In detail, coding was employed to extract information from the interviews regarding the strategic leadership depending on the specific industry context. This process of systematically segmenting the text into analytical units is known as *unitizing* (El Hussein, Kennedy, Oliver, & Hussein, 2017). In unitizing, the researcher determines how a segment of the transcribed interviews as a derived unit is conceptually meaningful and empirically identifiable (Allen, 2017). Once the interviews are tape-recorded and transcribed, the findings are extracted and coded. The point of translation from German to English occurs during the extraction of the findings. The analysis then consists of relating these systemised findings to the yet unfulfilled research goals prior to visualising the analysis in network diagrams.

Before beginning the data analysis, the researcher verified if the data were appropriately prepared. For this, the transcripts were read several times to remove all preconceptions and misinterpretations, and to ensure, as best possible, that duplications and inappropriate statements were removed; answers with the same word meanings were identified and standardized. The intention of this process was to remove researcher bias and facilitate data consistency with the goal of achieving the required data quality. As a result, well-organised and reduced data were given for further data analysis. During the data analysis, the researcher divided, condensed, sorted, and reconstituted the data.

Data interpretation took place during this process. The interpretation brings meaning and coherence to the themes and aims to develop linkages and a sensible storyline (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007). The researcher understood data analysis and data interpretation as an iterative task in which continuous learning about the data can aid in discovering new themes and relationships among them (Wicks, 2017).

4.11.3 Coding

In data analysis, the instrument to establish relationships between the object of study and the research question is called coding (Saldana & Omasta, 2018; Wicks, 2017). Each code represents a word or short phrase, and the categories are more general, higher-level, and more abstract constructs (Saldaña, 2015). In addition, verbatim quotations from the interviews are included to highlight codes and constructs (Rowley, 2012). An example of the initial codes is given in Figure 4.5.

Figure 4.5

Example of initial codes
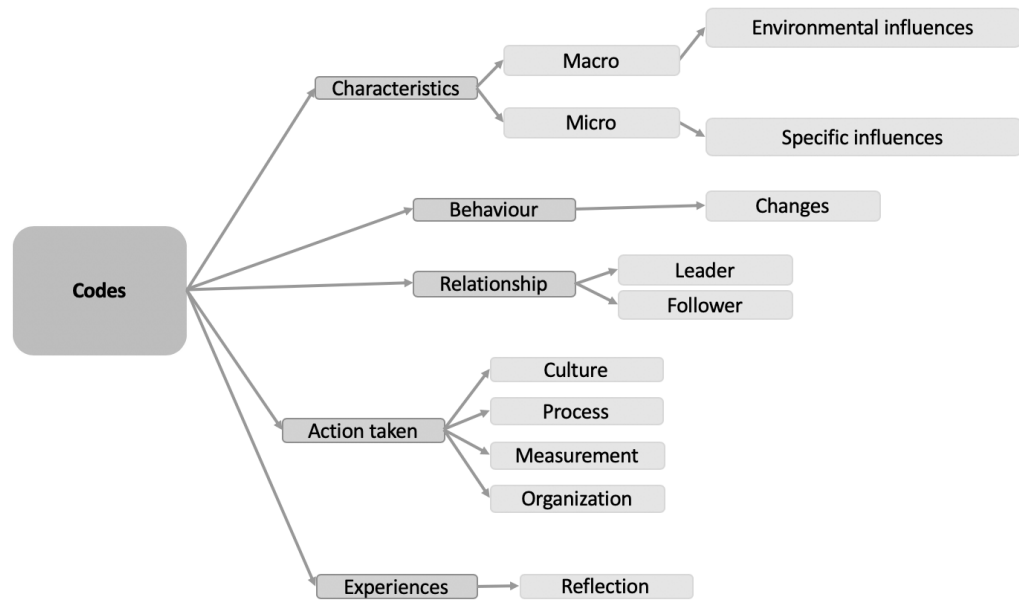
Note. The initial codes were applied consistently unchanged in both sample sets.

In this respect, a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing tribute for a portion of language-based data (Saldaña, 2015). Coding is the process of breaking down data into distinct units of meaning for analysis and then systematically re-evaluating them for their interrelationships; this enables the researcher to move the data to a higher level of abstraction (Denscombe, 2003; Goulding, 2002; Saldaña, 2015). In general, the coding of data refers to the process of transforming collected information or observations into a set of meaningful, cohesive categories (Allen, 2017). Coding assists the researcher with condensing extensive data sets of approximately 10 to 15 pages of data per interview into smaller analysable units by creating categories derived from the data.

4.11.4 Application of coding

The initial coding scheme applied to extract findings from the transcribed interviews had two levels. The first level was the thematic aspects. Within each of these aspects, different topics were coded at the extraction level (Saldaña, 2014, 2015). In addition, the developed coding scheme represented the classification system for the analysis and contained a set of thematic categories as a placement for each data unit (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013; Silver & Lewins, 2007). The concept of coding outlines categories and offers definitions and instructions for the coding. The result is a flexible coding scheme, which is expanded and developed as the coding process progresses (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013; Silver & Lewins, 2007).

In this study, the primary goal was not to quantify pre-established concepts of interest. Therefore, the qualitative coding features an interpretive approach to arrive at original conceptions and meanings through close, constitutive interactions with the transcribed interviews (Allen, 2017).

From a technical perspective, the data were analysed based on the structure explained in Section 4.11.3 using software. *NVivo* and *Atlas.ti* were chosen to store and organise the interview transcripts (Hutchison, Johnston, & Breckon, 2010) and for the coding and analysing of the data.

4.11.5 The codes-to-theory model

Corresponding to the theoretical guidance, the next step in the data analysis was to refine the coding using a codes-to-theory approach (Saldaña, 2015). This procedure facilitates further aggregation into categories and refers to a procedure for developing categories and concepts (Bozic, Suzovic, Nedeljkovic, & Jaric, 2011;

Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Saldaña, 2015; Saldana & Omasta, 2018). In general, this qualitative research is not oriented toward a conclusion because it is directed to capture experiences of an applied action in a specific contextual setting. Figure 4.6 depicts a scheme to reach an assertion.

Figure 4.6

Transformation of data into codes, categories and concepts
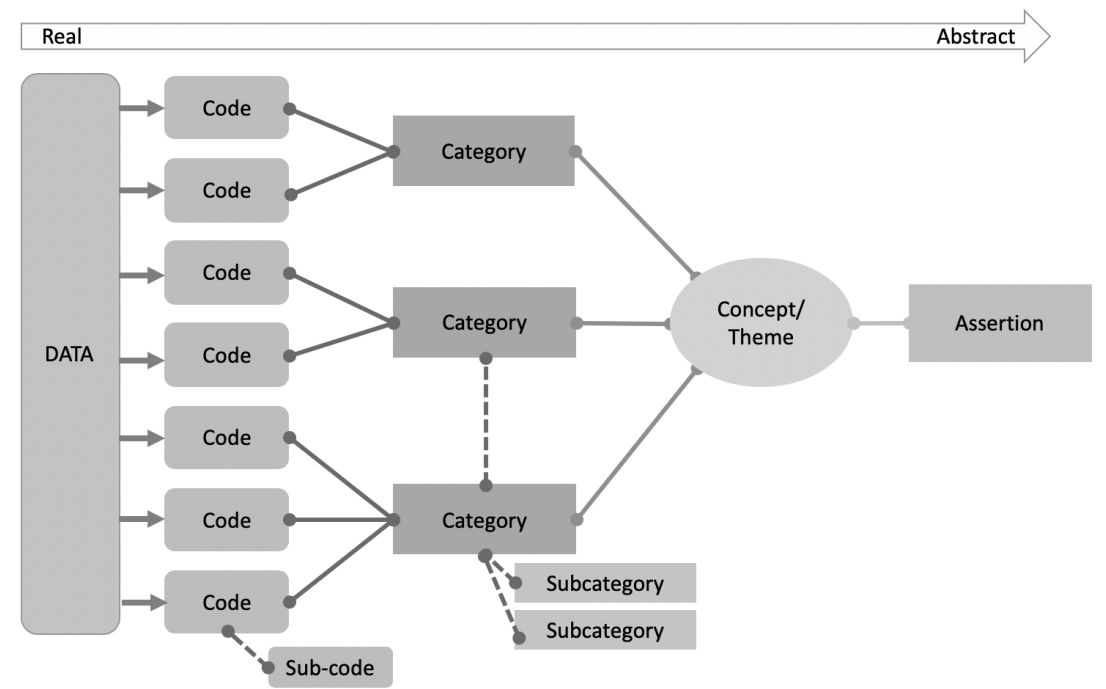
Note. According to Saldaña "*The Coding manual for Qualitative Researchers*" (2016, p.14).

Reflecting the situational nature of the findings, the researcher makes assertions rather than conclusions (Nolen & Talbert, 2011). As stated, the purpose of the codes-to-theory process is to begin to reassemble fractured data toward the assertion (Saldana & Omasta, 2018; Pierre & Jackson, 2014).

According to Mills, Durepos & Wiebe (2010), the codes-to-theory procedure seeks to identify categories that can further develop into concepts; it is the process of integrating categories and subcategories toward a theme or concept (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010). Richards and Morse (2013) clarify that this categorizing is a way to move from the diversity of data to higher levels and more abstract constructs (Richards, 2014). Corbin & Strauss (2014) pointed out that this model is systematically interrelated and related to the development of theory or assertions (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

The assertion in this regard is a confident and forceful statement (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). In particular, coding makes connections between categories that reveal themes, new categories, or new subcategories (Mills et al., 2013; Mills et al., 2010). According to Allen (2017), this approach has proven to be a reliable and credible tool for analysis in qualitative research.

4.11.6 Displaying the data with network diagrams

The researcher applied network visualisation as an analytical tool to support the development of an understanding of the code to theory process and to support the stated reassembly. Displaying the condensed data in this systematic manner has a positive effect on understanding (Miles et al., 2014). It requires permanently considering the relation to the research question and what proportions of the data are needed to answer it. It requires creating full analyses, ignoring no relevant information; and focuses on and organises the information coherently (Miles et al., 2014).

Likewise, networks are adequate for higher-level analyses, such as mapping social processes, like leadership (Miles et al., 2014). In contrast, the researcher rejected the approaches of a word cloud, or words counted by the occurrence of words. In this respect, counted words show only how often a word was said and provide less value for practical use in terms of considering dependencies. Figure 4.7 is an example of a network developed in parallel to the coding.

Figure 4.7

Network example developed during the coding
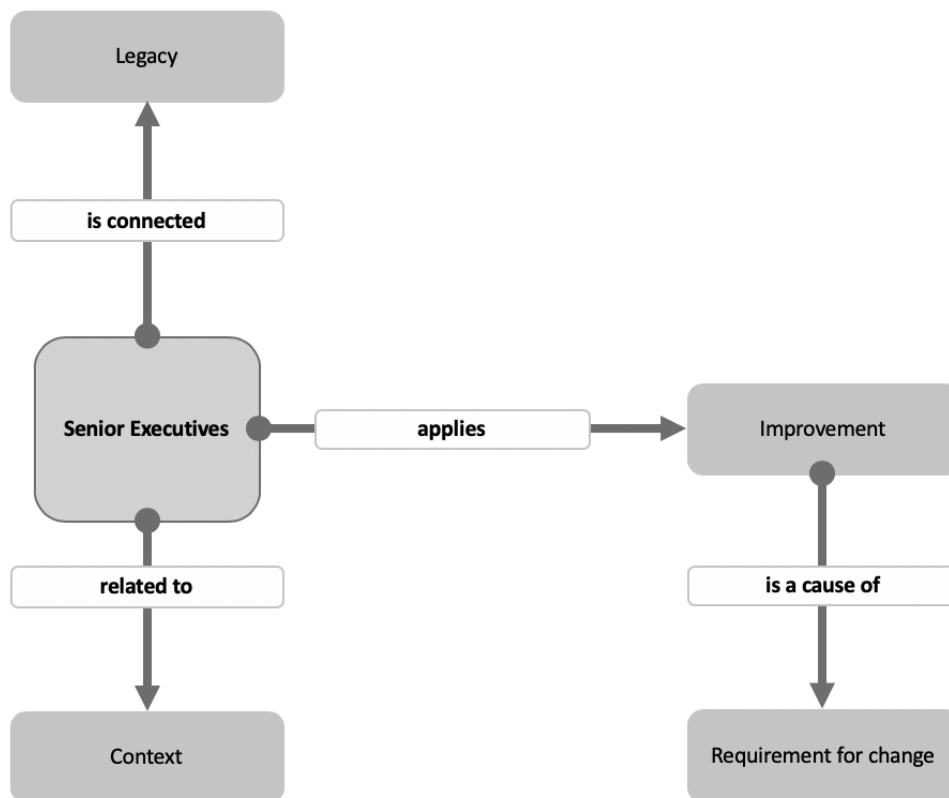
Note. The network example visualises the anticipated dependency of legacy and context in terms of the senior executive. The application of an improvement is caused by the requirement to change. In terms of the dependencies between categories or themes, arrows with labels are used. The network visualisation supports the

reassembling of fractured data toward an assertion. Moreover, network visualisation was identified as a meaningful tool to bridge the gap between codes and further meanings behind the data.

From a pragmatic perspective, the drawing with network visualisation is beneficial than for consideration only extended text because the display is arranged coherently to permit careful comparisons, to detect differences, and to note patterns and themes (Miles et al., 2014). According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), visualisation through networks is well-positioned in case-oriented approaches which fit, therefore, in the analysis of the case of this research. In addition, it shows the complex interrelationships between themes and the related interdependencies.

4.12   Quality criteria

This study contributes to the increasingly recognised value of qualitative research (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Accordingly, it is crucial that this research is conducted in a rigorous and methodical way. To secure trust, the researcher demonstrated that data analysis was performed in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner. In detail it was based on the recording, systematising, and disclosing of the applied methods of analysis. This description provides an appropriate level of detail to enable the determination that the research process is credible (Nowell et al., 2017).

To indicate a widely accepted approach, this study applies Guba's (1981) *quality criteria* to assess the trustworthiness and transparency of the conducted qualitative research.

Figure 4.8

Aspects of the quality criteria
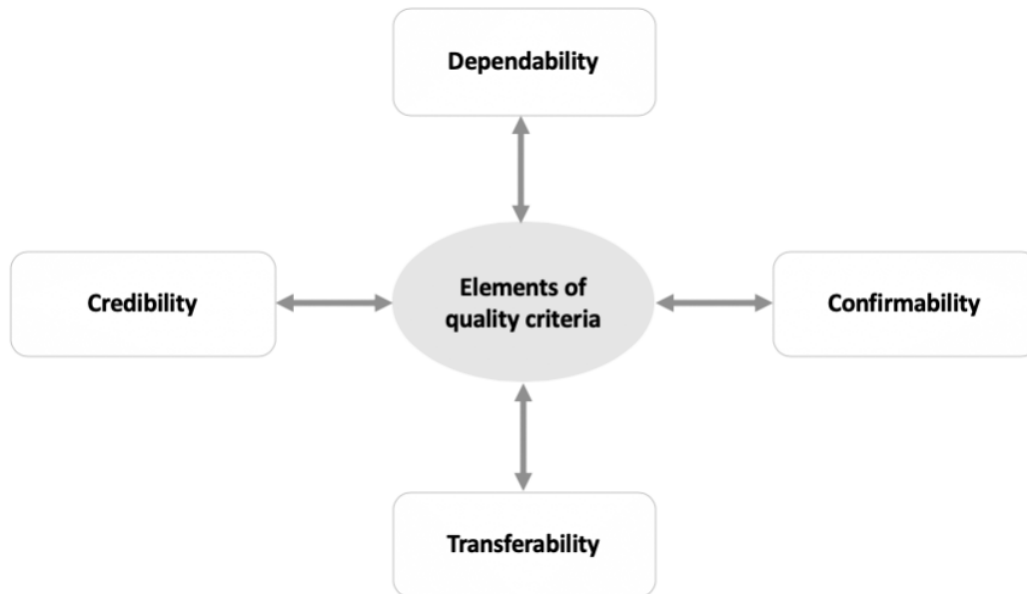
Note: Figure 4.8 presents the four parts of the *Quality Criteria*. By reviewing the research against these criteria, it is possible to evaluate how this research was conducted and knowledge was generated (Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams, & Blackman, 2016).

4.12.1 Dependability

Dependability is defined as the determination of whether the research findings would be consistently repeated if the inquiry were replicated with the same or similar respondents in the same or similar context (Guba, 1981). A context-dependent knowledge development and the collected expertise are tied at the centre of this leadership research. The documented research design provided the details of the methodology, data collection and analysis (Shenton 2004, Polit et al. 2006, Streubert, 2007). This approach reduced the bias and amplified the dependability by increasing

transparency of the research process and also ensured that the research could be repeated (Guba, 1981; Malterud, 2001; D'Cruz et al. 2007; Tong et al., 2007).

4.12.2 Credibility

Credibility is defined as the establishment of the confidence in the "truth" of the findings of the particular inquiry and the context in which the inquiry was carried out (Guba 1981, p.79). When evaluating qualitative research, credibility stems from the intended research purposes. The credible research decisions are those that are consistent with the researcher's purpose (Patton, 2002). The credibility of this study is demonstrated through the strategy of data triangulation (Padgett, 2009). Moreover, the use of verbatim quotes from the interviews provided additional credibility to the study (Tracy, 2010) asthey allow opinions of the researcher and research participants to be distinguished (Gioia et al., 2013).

4.12.3 Confirmability

Conformability is defined as the establishment of a degree to which the findings of the inquiry are a function solely of the respondents and the conditions of the inquiry and not of the biases, motivations, interests or perspectives of the researcher (Guba 1981).

With the discussion of the underlying research philosophy, this study follows Miles and Huberman (1994) in terms of reporting the researcher's predisposition, beliefs, and assumptions, i.e. axiology, ontology and epistemology. This is a major criterion of confirmability (Moon, 2016). The detailed methodological discussion in

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 enables the reader to determine confirmability, showing how the data, and constructs and theories emerge from it (Shenton, 2004).

4.12.4 Transferability

Transferability or generalisation is defined as the degree to which the findings of this particular inquiry may have applicability in other contexts or with other respondents (Guba, 1981). Qualitative research studies, however, are not typically generalisable according to quantitative standards, because qualitative research findings often relate to a single or small number of environments or individuals (Maxwell 1992, Flyvbjerg 2006, Moon et al. 2016).

The concerns in terms of generalising are that the findings in a single case study have a lack of generalisability (Yin, 2009). However, generalisability in the statistical sense as most researchers understand it, namely with other samples or populations, is not the goal of this type of research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2009). Instead, the character of this type of case study is the analytical generalisation and generalisation to theory. Understanding the difference between these two forms of generalisation is therefore, necessary and relevant (Klenke, 2016; Ridder, 2012).

The method of generalisation is commonly recognised because research investigators have quantitative formulas for identifying generalisations (Ravitch & Riggan, 2011). Using this as a method of generalising the results of a case study is inappropriate as cases are not sampling units, but units of analysis (Bryman, 2004; Bryman & Bell, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Analytical generalisation, on the other hand is guided by theory (Klenke, 2016). The researcher seeks analytical generalisation to avoid references to statistical

generalisation. In terms of the application of analytical generalisation, Yin (2017) suggests that a logical argument or theory should be made clear at the beginning and that the argument should be grounded in research literature rather than specifically related to the case study. Along these lines, this research aims to demonstrate how the theory and argument were challenged and supported by the results (Yin, 2017).

4.13   Limitations and Assumptions

From a methodological perspective, the chosen qualitative approach is fraught with limitations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Klenke, 2016; Symon & Cassell, 2012). In a qualitative case study, the sensitivity and integrity of the researcher are characterised as a limitation because of the personal and individual bias of the interpretative orientation of this research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

From an execution perspective, in terms of the interviews, one limitation was the organisational level in the hierarchy and that the interviewees were able to spend only a small amount of time in the interviews; and not every senior executive was available to the researcher.

A further limitation was the scope of the research context, which can illuminate only a reduced ensemble of the surrounding environment and company. As stated by Kovala (2014), it could be a straightforward approach to end up talking of contexts as if they were thing-like entities. Contextualisation presents itself as a selection of points of reference from pre-existing contexts (Felski, 2011). The limitation is that the focus of the research context can be only a partial perspective of an entire system. The same position Kovala (2014) takes is that context is rich in detail, concrete, complex, and

has an interconnected appearance. However, there is always the challenge of selecting one aspect over another (Kovala, 2014).

4.14   Ethical Considerations and Issues

A further crucial aspect is ethical considerations, as robust research includes the consideration of ethical issues. "Naiveté [about ethics] itself is unethical" (Mirvis & Seashore, 1982, p. 100). Generally, as stated in the previous section, a challenge arose for this research to ensure the balance in terms of an appropriate publication and what must stay confidential. In the heavily competitive environment of the automotive industry, this concern must be considered. The researcher signed a non-disclosure agreement, wherein all sensitive corporate data could not be disclosed. Before the interviews were conducted, the research design, methods, and purpose were fully disclosed to all participants. A well-defined clarification and communication of the aim and objectives of the study were presented. It included descriptions of the data collection, analysis, and protection. At the start of the interviews, the informants were reminded of the voluntary nature of their participation and given the opportunity to withdraw or seek clarification of unclear aspects. Informants supplied informed consent before data collection commenced. Key ethical factors also included the careful handling of sensitive results (Runeson & Höst, 2009).

Furthermore, the participants are not mentioned by name here, hence all participants remain anonymous. All data were stored in a tool with automatic and integrated end-to-end encryption that protects all documents from unauthorized access. All participants were informed that the aim of the research was an exploration into their individual experiences and not a discussion about internal corporate issues

or classified information. In a business environment with high sensitivity about competition, this is a mandatory ethical requirement, so no harm came to participants in this research.

In addition, the premise of all the research work undertaken in this thesis adheres to the Edinburgh Napier University (2010) Code of Practice on Research Ethics and Governance (Barkess, 2013). All respondents were required to understand, comment, and subsequently agree on the informed consent form (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This guiding process ensured respect for the rights of others who are directly or indirectly affected by the research. The consent of the participants was obtained after they were fully informed about the project. At all times, participants' rights of privacy were guaranteed with safeguards concerning all aspects of confidentiality. Consent was obtained, and all participants were fully informed of the nature and purpose of the research, particularly in terms of how the research was conducted, the expected outcomes, and how the outcomes were to be distributed. As expressed, this was explained prior to the session and stated again at the start of each interview with the emphasis on the key aspects: The purpose of the study, importance of transparency and confidentiality, audio recording of sessions, and anonymity.

4.15   Concluding Comments on the Research Methodology

This chapter presented a detailed discussion of the research methodology and its limitations. The primary aim of the research methodology was alignment with the overarching research paradigm for a guided approach toward data collection, analysis, and presentation. From a pragmatic point of view, the gained knowledge is the product of inquiry and the problem-solving process, which means moving from doubt to belief.

From a practical perspective, the consideration of the research methodology supports this development and awareness of leadership in context, which is a discrete approach to the predominant static situational leadership models (Northouse, 2016; Antonakis, 2018). In contrast to quantitatively driven methods, the leadership in context approach embraces the role of context as a framing force where an individuum has an individual perception concerning the influential setting (Moir, 2017). The research methodology supports the study of the particularity and complexity of the single case at BMW.

Consequently, this case study does not represent a dedicated sampling research—the aim is not to study this case to understand other cases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 2009). The obligation is to understand this particular case. The primary purpose is to generate a comprehensive understanding (Simons, 2009). Accordingly, the applied methodology supports an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of this case. In addition, the chosen research methodology takes this aim into account and offers a fine-grained analysis of the leadership in context practices. In this regard, the study of leadership is particularly well suited for qualitative analyses because of the multidisciplinary nature of the field, which must be more open about paradigmatic assumptions, methodological preferences, and ideological commitments than many single disciplines (Steiner, 2002).

The study of leadership is context-dependent. Stripping qualitative research of its context, according to Guba and Lincoln (1994), through appropriate controls or randomisation, may increase the theoretical rigour of a study but detract from its relevance because its outcomes can be properly applied only to other similarly truncated or contextually stripped situations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Symon & Cassell, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Klenke, 2016).

Qualitative data can redress the imbalance by providing contextual information (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Symon & Cassell, 2012).

Lastly, this qualitative leadership research is conducted with the same degree of rigour and concern for validity and quality as quantitative approaches, offering more opportunities to explore leadership phenomena in significant depth. To do so, the answer of the related how type of research question is about leadership in context as opposed to a what type of research question, which is answered by quantitative research with more of a factor orientation and a context- and value-free appearance (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Symon & Cassell, 2012; Klenke, 2016).

Chapter 5. Findings

This chapter presents the findings from the interviews conducted in this study. This structure of the findings is around the apparent and evolving categories, along with associated and underlying codes. The presentation of the quotes is without an interpretation, the interpretation and evaluation will follow in the discussion chapter.

As previously stated, this research aims to examine leadership in situ as conducted by senior executives at BMW. To achieve the aim, the study has beside the other objectives a specific research objective to capture data from participants. Namely, to capture the experiences of leadership within the dynamic context of BMW from both directly employed senior executives and non-employed external senior consultants.

The applied research philosophy of pragmatism involves an organised method of inquiry—which includes the elaboration of the underlying problem and the presentation of a recommendation as a potential solution. The purpose of the collection of the dedicated findings is, therefore, to support the examination of relationships. Furthermore, it supports the development of the description of the underlying problem as a part of the pragmatic inquiry in Chapter 6 (Rescher, 2016).

5.1   Present-day Business Changes

The starting point and the reason for the expected changes to the leadership approach are the perceived changes in the automobile industry. The profound transformation of the business environment is causing disruption in the automotive industry, so leadership behaviour must react to it. Figure 5.1 lists the underlying codes in conjunction with the category.

Figure 5.1

Category: Business disruption

Category	Business disruption				
Codes	Uniqueness	New Technology	Extrinsic influences	Intrinsic influences	New competitors
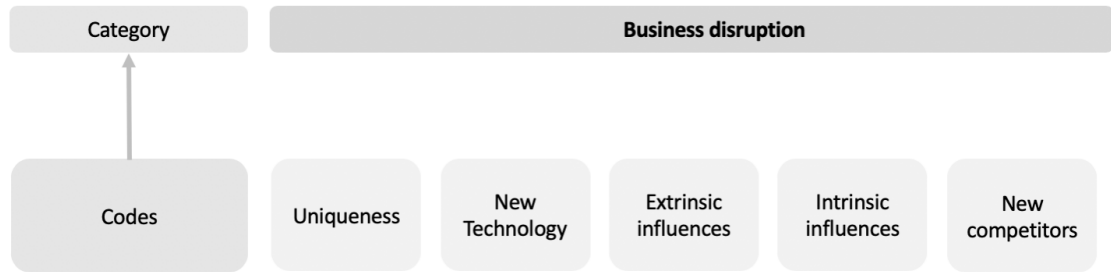
In terms of this category, all interviewees stated that the market, industry and, accordingly, the company experience significant and noteworthy changes. For EC1, business changes, in general, are regular courses of actions—but for the automotive industry and BMW in particular, today many profoundly influencing powers are coming together. EC3 sketched the extrinsic disruption and uniqueness for the automotive industry:

> "Every industry in these times has disruptions and every industry has digitization as a topic and challenges related to this. The automotive industry is slightly different because manufacturers and executives have to cope with a huge mountain because numerous influencing impacts can be independent, dependent or both, but they all appear at the same time" (EC3).

From an intrinsic perspective, it is the application of digitalisation in the company and the intensity of the focus to do so which is an attribute of the change. SE5 stated:

> "BMW pursues a goal with four major strategic pillars: automated, connected, electrified, and shared. Inclusion of the latest technologies, machine learning, AI, virtual reality and so on, all work toward this goal" (SE5).

Another important aspect of the changes caused by digital transformation is the characteristics that those are far-reaching and profound. Hence, the composition of intrinsic and extrinsic influences was a concern of 15 informants. SE9 positioned this view as:

> "In the automotive industry, this is a different level of intensity because fundamentals are really changing there—impacting the way executives perform actions, manage relationships to the followers and move the business toward the objectives" (SE9).

From a retrospective point of view, SE7 stressed that the business system of the company was stable. For example, it was very difficult for new companies to enter the market:

> "Ten years ago, in terms of competition, no new players entered the market. That is changing. That is because of the change to electromobility, i.e., away from the internal combustion engine. This enables brands to enter the market that do not have 100 years of experience with these motor gearboxes, but they do not need them either. This destroys competitive advantage and increases the demand to change parts of the business model and, accordingly, the leadership" (SE7).

As expressed by SE7 this formerly stable business was a major driver for the organisational and leadership behaviour which results to have a specific focus to increase and optimize quality criteria. However, the changes occurring, and the ongoing transformation call for a contractionary behaviour versus the established one. This reflection was expressed by SE11:

> "The organisation and applied leadership tools were focused on optimisation. However, the current business change calls for creativity, agility, and cross-functional working methods" (SE11).

In this regard, SE18 highlighted that business disruption and the consequences for the company have never been seen before:

> "It is certainly the biggest change the automotive industry has ever had. So, I would say much more drastically than the previous stages of industrialization" (SE18).

SE1 alluded to the same direction and stated that it is consequential to have a shift concordant with the appearance of disruption:

> "Of course, we have to ask ourselves now how we will be in the future, where our business model, or where our raison d'être, will be in the future" (SE1).

The same observation of new competitors entering the market causes business disruption, as SE2 shares:

> "There is extremely hard competition, but no longer just the old competitors we all know; the pressure comes especially from new automotive and non-automotive companies, with maximum impact on our core business" (SE2).

5.2   New Business Model

The interviewees mentioned that is impossible to predict precisely what types of vehicles will be leading the market a decade from now. Yet, the majority shared the perspective that the composition and operations of automobile business models will change in radical ways. Figure 5.2 displays the underlying codes in conjunction with this category.

Figure 5.2

Category: New business model

Category	New business model				
Codes	Acceleration	New Approach	Legacy	Transformation	Leadership change

As an indication of acceleration from the demand generated by the shifting environment with the impact on the business and relation to the work, SE4 raised the concern:

> "In the past, long-term planning was a stable thing. And there was this feeling of how it worked. And that turns around. There are still the old issues to deal with. But it becomes more and more important to ask what it will be like in five years. This changes the mindset completely" (SE4).

The interviewees draw the line between the changes and shift of the business model. SE14 summarised the impact:

> "We have to recognize that the industry model has changed irrevocably" (SE14).

EC4 highlighted this view in relation to leadership and explained this with the following words:

> "This new, uncertain, and fluid business landscape presents us as an automotive manufactory with wide-ranging challenges that require a more flexible, adaptive way of leadership" (EC4).

The suggestion that a new business model and leadership approach is needed was particularly mentioned by the participants. SE14 offered the perception that the company transforms itself with new offerings according to the demand, and this has influenced leadership.

> "Completely new business models, in the sense of the product portfolio and with it completely different and new products" (SE14).

SE18 offered this assessment:

> "We have to throw everything overboard and find a new approach and new methods because the world revolves around the customer. We can't handle this with old leadership techniques, we need a completely different leadership approach" (SE18).

An aspect was the relationship of the legacy with the new business model. SE 17 expressed that there is a requirement to cope with it:

> "Very boldly stated is that the anticipated and envisioned new business model is completely against the culture of the house". (SE 17)

SE 15 provided a deeper insight of the contradiction of the organisational legacy and the requirement emerged from the changes in the market which are reflected in a new business model:

> "But it is difficult, especially in old areas or in such classic areas, to explain to employees that you have to do something new. And especially if you have structures that have been built up over 30 years, it is extremely difficult. In the past, the executive probably already had part of the solution, but now they only define the goal" (SE15).

In terms of the business model, the majority of participants stated that an adaption to the occurring changes from the new business requirements is mandatory. The expressed expectations were also that this will have impacts on the applied approach to lead in this situation. In summary SE 18 concluded:

> "I believe that we are now experiencing a radical change that has not yet taken place in this way. Because both the automobile as a product, as well as the business model, is being heavily shaken and turned upside down" (SE18).

Likewise, the external perspective articulated by EC3 pointed in the same direction:

> "The adapted and new business model will cause a new perspective on production and leadership. In terms of concept, in terms of the alignment of product strategies or even in terms of changing corporate strategies" (EC3).

5.3 Unexpected and Novel

All interviewees stated that many factors now shifting the behaviour and attributes of the industry were unforeseen, even in the last decade of the 20th century. Figure 5.3 lists the underlying codes in line with that category.

Figure 5.3

Category: Unexpected and novel

Category	Unexpected and novel				
Codes	Unforeseen	Fundamental changes	Novel changes	Transformation	Complexity
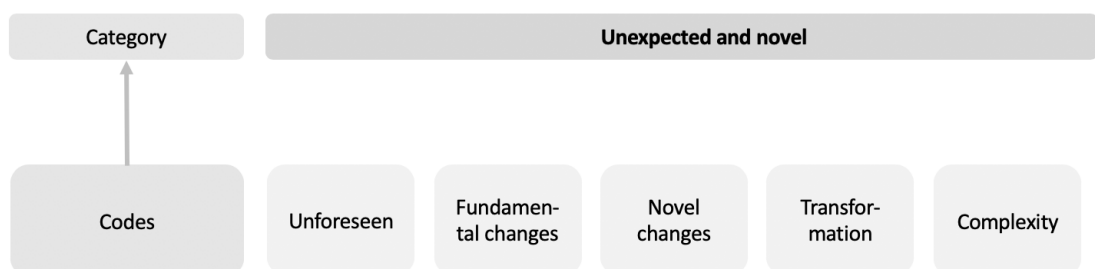
In terms of unexpected novelty, EC5 draws the picture:

> "A few years ago, this would not have been possible at all; that new competitors would have been forced into this highly complex environment" (EC5).

In keeping with unexpected changes, SE8 stated:

> "The individual challenge is to understand that the current crisis at the end of the day also has an undercurrent that is not completely visible, but there. This is characterised by a truly fundamental disruption of the business model" (SE8).

SE10 described the comparison to the previous years and the difference with the current situation:

> "I've been with the company for 20 years. So much that is changing now that has never changed before" (SE10).

Therefore, nearly all the informants particularly referred to an ongoing transformation that altered the way business was conducted, edging toward a new approach. This consideration was summarised by SE6:

> "We all have to get into this transformation process. The question is how much time is available for this. It's not whether you must, or whether it will come, it is a question of how long you have before you have to be there. Otherwise, you are out" (SE6).

For the interviewees the circumstances of the tremendous change for the legacy and established behaviours and organisational structure was significant. The increase in complexity was perceived by the participants as a significant requirement for the leaders. SE 11 highlights this with the assessment:

> "Because simply complexity increases and also that they have to combine various different things" (SE11).

Another expressed characteristic was the combination of continuing the existing business and addresses the new topics as well.

> "They are major changes, which of course now also have an impact on the business model. On the one hand you have to continue the existing business model and the existing products, but on the other hand you also have to address the very topics" (EC8).

In relation to applied leadership participants shared the perspective that the focus is on strategy, definitions and differentiation. The difference and novelty are the consideration of an approach to include all. SE13 highlighted that the changes require a continuously consideration of the surroundings:

> "What do I do on my own, and where do I cooperate? This is a permanent question every day" (SE13).

The interviewees stated that the previously static market was now being reshaped. The participants drew a picture of change which was unexpected in dimension and intensity. Explicitly SE16 shared the observation:

> "The accelerating pace of disruptive innovation, the battle to own important relationships in a digital market and the digitalization across the value chain are some aspects" (SE16).

5.4   Transformation

In terms of the ongoing transformation, all participants underscored that the traditional engineering-driven automotive company of the last century is becoming unrecognizable with the current business disruption. Figure 5.4 presents this category in conjunction with the underlying codes.

Figure 5.4

Category: Transformation
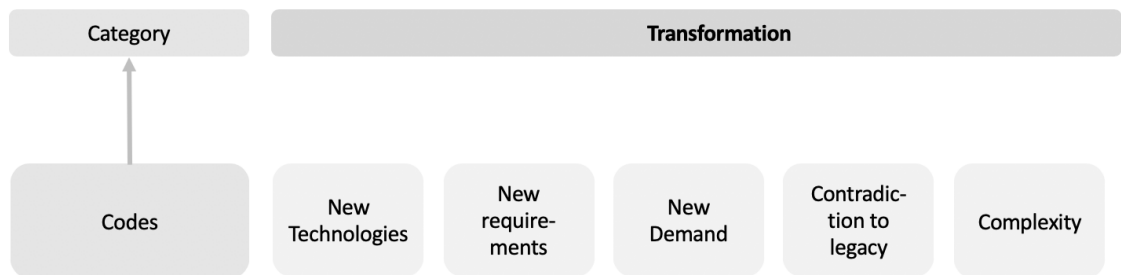
SE2 specified the transformation with the following words:

> "This industrial company is developing into a service company with attached industrial production. And that is a huge difference, both from the mindset and from the way we work, even in the results we have to produce" (SE2).

The relationship between the industrial and domain changes along with the associated impact on the leadership culture and process also was pointed out by all participants. SE15 summarised this dependency:

> "The current situation has a significant influence on organisation and leadership culture and requires a different set of leadership competencies compared to a generation ago" (SE15).

SE14 encapsulated the challenge from a senior executive perspective to cope with the situation:

> "Because ultimately, if that had been there before, you could say, "okay, there's a best way". But the way it presents itself, there is no best way and trying it out is actually the only way to get through it" (SE14).

The observation from this finding is that the novel dynamic based on new technology and customer demand is one of the key drivers of change. Accordingly, the characteristics and application of the existing leadership perception require a shift. A legacy approach is no longer sufficient. EC7 expressed this:

> "In a phase with little changes, it's all about efficiency. And in the phase in which we are now, of course, optimisation helps only to a certain extent. So, transformation is actually the big challenge. And that with ongoing business" (EC7).

Furthermore, SE11 emphasised the complexity of the transformation:

> "In the past, there were also big challenges or problems, but they were relatively one-dimensional. What is happening right now is that we are being challenged internally and externally in every dimension of the business" (SE11).

5.5 Leadership Change

The ECs and SEs explained in unison that there is the perception of a significant business change which has an impact on leadership. Figure 5.5 features the underlying codes in conjunction with this category.

Figure 5.5

Category: Leadership change
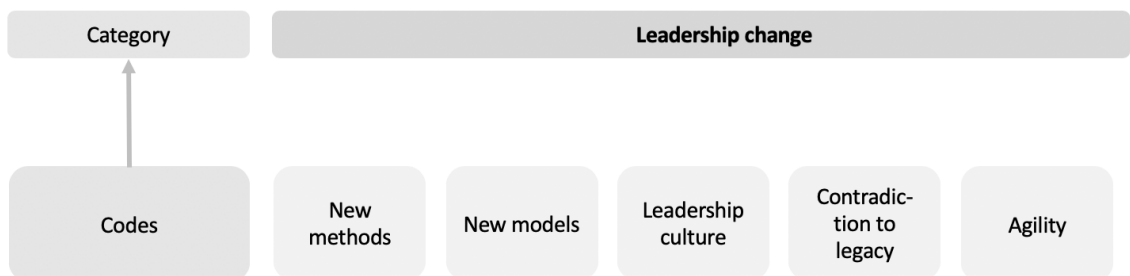
A centrepiece of the perception of market changes is the penetration of digitalization through the industry. EC6 described the current setup:

> "The entire automotive industry is undergoing a huge upheaval, which is almost more of a revolution. The topic of digitization and digital transformation in combination with agile enterprise models, i.e., the new orientation of collaboration models, is having a huge impact" (EC6).

Accordingly, EC2 shared this view and added:

> "In general, the move to digitisation is changing industries all over the world, and the automotive industry is no exception. The need to respond to such new capabilities and global competition while retaining an increasingly demanding customer base means automotive companies must become ever more agile and innovative while remaining cost-efficient" (EC2).

The challenge emerged from the findings was what EC3 called a relativization and stressed that the journey of change had just started:

> "But I don't think the situation has changed at all yet. I think, apart from the technological issues, the automobile manufacturers are still at the very beginning of the change. The real change is yet to come" (EC3).

Four informants raised serious doubts that this transformation will be a quick journey:

> "The industry will change completely. Completely. But they are at the very beginning" (SE1).

EC4, EC5, and SE17 shared the same view and reported that the connection to the legacy leadership with the demand for a new kind of leadership based on the requirements from markets is key to remain sustainable and successful in the market. Furthermore, EC4 and EC2 connected this to the leadership culture.

> "The old leadership culture was focused on maximum quality. And now, they try to keep up with agile techniques, dynamic, minimal viable product, cross teams, and such" (EC2).

SE3 pointed to the tremendous change in the form of a new business model and the relationship to the shift in leadership:

> "In the past, cars were sold, the more the better. That was a relatively simple case. Now comes a whole new business model. The transformation is to sell mobility as a service. For this to happen, executives must change methods, behaviour, and approaches" (SE3).

EC8 concluded with the relationships between disruption, change, new work models, and leadership as well as the requirement for senior executives to cope with these:

> "It is a very difficult job in terms of communication to their workforce. Thousands of people work in factories and they're

accustomed to assembling things. They need now to understand that as the marketplace changes, products change, their jobs change. They have to be very closely linked and understand they're in this together" (EC8).

The derived impact from business disruption in various fields is that the existing leadership behaviours and methods for execution are no longer sustainable. SE12 stated his view this way:

"The current business change calls for creativity, agility, and cross-functional working methods. Drastically speaking, everything must go overboard, and new approaches must be found. Because the world revolves around the customer. This cannot be controlled with old management methods. A completely different leadership style and approach are needed" (SE12).

As stated by all interviewees, numerous external and internal properties, events, and responses have impacts and together they constituted a business disruption. Out of the characterisation of business disruption with different properties arises a relationship to change in the leadership approach. The interviewees made it clear that the anticipated transformation needs a new means of leadership to continue to establish a sustainable business.

5.6   Macro-Contextual-Characteristics

From a contextual perspective, various macro-characteristics describe the background where leadership occurs. In the Figure 5.6 features the underlying codes with this category.

Figure 5.6

Category: Macro-contextual-characteristics
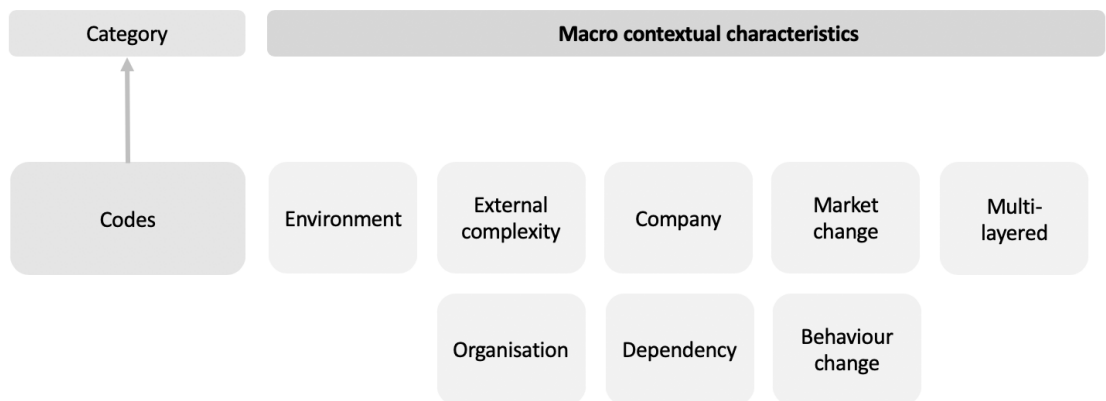
The interviewees specified that from a broader perspective, major impacts happen that needs to be embedded with considerations. SE16 communicated this connection between macro-level characteristics and the senior executives:

> "In this complexity, with the economic environment and context, there are a number of other factors that influence the executive and cannot be seen in isolation. Understanding and explaining these interrelationships is a major task" (SE16).

Sixteen informants mentioned that a significant variety of dependencies are connected to leadership. EC7 expressed this broader picture:

"Leaders must act out of context—and must lead out of the context" (EC7).

SE11 stressed the importance of elaborating the connection between external requirements, the applied actions, and the existing legacy. EC3 formulated this requirement further:

"The challenge is to lead in an environment where many different speeds exist, and all are parallel. This against the background whereby the existing business must be further expanded, and the new business must be built up" (EC3).

SE7 emphasised that. in particular, the effects of externally driven technology factors have a significant impact. This reflects that changes stress different aspects of gained experiences:

"The shift to electromobility, away from the internal combustion engine, makes it possible for brands that do not have 100 years of experience with these motor gearboxes to enter the market" (SE7).

As a relevant macro characteristic, customers and the market were mentioned by the participants. The novel role of the customer was highlighted by most of the participants. SE10 provided an example of a macro-related connection to the customer:

"The process line is in the background directly to the customer" (SE10).

Considering the combined dependencies of the market, the customer, and organisational aspects, SE1 expresses this conglomeration as follows:

"An essential aspect is the time horizon; applied long-term planning is an absolute contradiction to the market and customer demand" (SE1).

An additional perspective was shared by SE12 where the specific change of customer behaviour drives major parts of the transformation:

> "A major change is on the side of the customer's behaviour" (SE12).

Furthermore, SE9 summarised his concerns:

> "I believe that we are now experiencing an upheaval that has never taken place before" (SE9).

Informants frequently were concerned about the description of a macro observation. As both the automobile, along with the associated products and business model, are being turned upside down, SC3 summarised the experience:

> "As far as production is concerned, the change is slower. But in the sense of the concept, in the sense of the orientation of product strategies or in the sense of changing corporate strategies, this can be seen very clearly as an accelerated issue with dependencies to each other" (SC3).

As mentioned previously, SE8 also indicated the experiences such that the type of macro characteristics influence leadership. SE15 took this further and stressed that leadership takes place within a multi-layered and multi-faceted background. As new products and services entail different ways of working and various development cycles:

> "With regard to strategic leadership, the vision is more in focus—from my point of view, strategy, definition, differentiation is [sic] key and challenging" (SE15).

Likewise, most of SCs and ECs considered that the organisation coexists in a social landscape with other performers. Accordingly, SE10 emphasizes the movement of the business focus:

"The company is today a production company for cars and that was it. It is also always managed by engineers who want to sell as many cars as possible in the best possible quality, but what the customer wants is not always the focus, the customer should just buy the product" (SE10).

SE11 stressed this aspect further as a question in relation to the internal processes:

"And this challenges us to question our entire process, the sales process, the service process, the entire interaction process with the customer" (SE11).

Likewise, from a macro perspective, the dependency on market volatility is present. SE17 expressed the concern:

"The market as a driver is invariably there, but at the end of the day, these are economic problems that affect an industry and the company" (SE17).

EC3 and EC4 summarised the leadership dependency from a macro standpoint. When the industry has reached the stage of maturity there is massive pressure to change the company. EC4 stated this consequence for the company:

"The ideal situation is that an organisation can do both. This means that it can somehow reduce and optimize the old and start the new" (EC4).

Along the same lines, SE12 articulated from a macro characteristics perspective his concern regarding the organisation:

"The leadership culture will also change. Until then, a structure and process organisation must be reconsidered again completely" (SE12).

SE13 underscored the relevance from a macro perspective and with a connection to corporate legacy, the leadership process, and corporate organisational structures as an additional layer of complexity:

> "This leadership model must be completely turned upside down in order to be able to keep up with these transformational changes at all. Because the current leadership model is not suitable for it. It is too slow; it is also completely top-heavy" (SE13).

The findings under this category show different properties of the macro characteristics. Despite the presence of the demand for change and the new requirements from the market and customers, the corporate organisational and corporate behavioural legacy are still in place in the forms of the workforce, organisation, and production procedures. Therefore, legacy is an important part of the macro-characteristics.

5.7 Micro-Contextual-Characteristics

Besides the macro characteristics, various contextual attributes on the micro level were considered by the interviewees. Figure 5.7 lists the underlying codes in conjunction with the category.

Figure 5.7

Category: Micro-contextual-characteristics
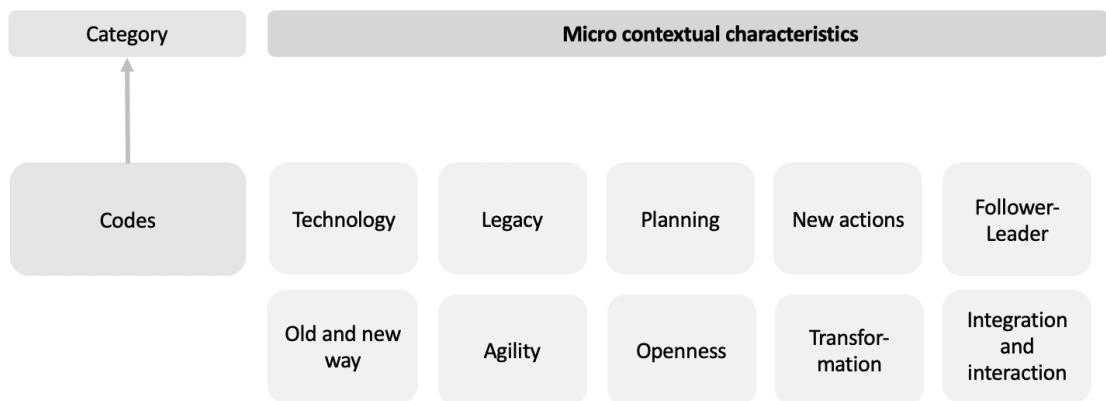
The micro characteristics are direct touchpoints between senior executives and their tasks, job characteristics, and follower interactions. The interviewees started by considering the interaction of the micro contextual characteristic between senior executives and followers. SE5 expressed this dependency in relation to business change:

> "The executive is more of a motivator and driver, instead of being an advisor. That will change more in this direction. If you want to take newer paths, it is important to understand that young employees have to be led very differently from older ones" (SE5).

In the practical application, EC8 rephrased the complexity of applied actions and the dependencies among them:

> "To understand which innovations are developing; to understand what legal consequences this has, which personnel, up to employee motivation and the way to brand management [...] patents and everything" (EC8).

Similarly, in terms of the planning process and associated legacy mindset, SE9 stated the concerns:

> "In the past, long-term planning was a stable thing. And there was this feeling of how it worked. And that turns around. There are still the old issues to deal with. But it becomes more and more important to ask what it will be like in five years. This changes the mindset completely" (SE9).

The interviewees emphasised that the kind of new actions performed by senior executives are related to micro contextual characteristics. EC6 expressed the relationship between technology, customer behaviour, and business change:

> "It is a huge shift because the consumer now looks at the car, not like a machine; they look at it as a piece of technology and that's how they're buying" (EC6).

EC9 summarised the dependency of applied actions in the circumstance of transformation and contextual dependency:

> "Many factors come together at the same time. This complexity in action and tasks has reached a dimension where the classical isolated approach does not work. The big picture must be seen in relation to each other" (EC9).

SC11 and SC12 stressed the point of openness and creativity and the contradiction to the legacy:

> "With a view to the future, it is, of course, important to awaken creativity—in the sense of executive teams. To develop a momentum of its own on the teams, to create the necessary openness there" (SC11).

The participants made the statement that the task has duality as a noteworthy attribute. That was expressed as being connected to the old way but with the obligation to address the new way in parallel. This adds enormous complexity to the leadership job:

> "The old must also go on, the new must also be addressed, I actually find that one of the most exciting insights I have gained here. If you want to take newer paths, it is important to understand that young employees have to be led very differently from older ones" (SE13).

SE12 took this relevant aspect further and transferred it into a dependency:

> "And it is precisely this balancing act, however, that is important that, in addition, at the same time the managers are able to transform the culture, i.e., the culture of cooperation. And this culture and simultaneous development at the same speed is the greatest challenge (SE12).

The balanced act in terms of daily work was mentioned multiple times as a consequence of legacy in conjunction with new demands. SE1 expressed this:

> "The basic question, 'how do I control all this new in conjunction with the old'?" (SE1).

SE3 also described this need for balance in actions:

> "This means that we have to control both, the so-called ambidexterity, we have to control both. And this is quite a challenge for management and also for the employees, logically" (SE3).

The interviewees recognised that parts of the organisation were in the legacy space and others were in the new space. From a task perspective, SE16 phrased this circumstance:

> "This is leadership in changing organisations. So, a leader knows in which areas he needs new working methods and in which areas he needs the classic way" (SE16).

As a link between macro and micro levels, SE11 communicated a recognised dependency:

> "On the one hand, there are the external market influences that actually want these changes. The internal structures must follow, they cannot shift from one day to the next. And then the responsibility still must be profitable. So, you cannot just throw everything away and make everything new" (SE11).

SE4 made the point that the acknowledgement of dependencies of macro and micro observations are vital for the operation of the business. Furthermore, he stated that there is a challenge that occurs with new approaches which must be integrated into the existing company. This is in contrast to the completely new development:

> "We have to make the change happen on our own. This means that we cannot diminish in the 'here and now'. We cannot say: 'Something new is coming to us and now we flip all the switches. We also have structures, we have employees, we have suppliers, we come from Brownfield. That's something different than a new player that starts all over again" (SE4).

In relation to previous aspects, the current applied working model and team interaction were challenged. The SEs highlighted the need to adapt flexibility, creativity, agility, and trust in a new working model. SE9 expressed this:

> "The agility that you must grant your employees and the agility and leadership in agile ways of working" (SE9).

Along the same lines, the ECs emphasised that agility and creativity will be more relevant:

> "You have to give agility to your employees, and this is challenging, because we need more creativity" (EC5).

SE15 combined the new requirements and work relationship as an important micro-contextual- characteristic:

> "The larger issues now lie in the cooperation model between executives and employees. The model is changing massively. The danger is that this change will make people unwilling to make decisions. This is one of the biggest issues for top management" (SE15).

Derived from the previous findings, EC4 pointed to the execution of actions in relation to the existing workforce:

> "It must be implemented to a large extent with the existing team. Not all hundred thousand can be exchanged. That is a huge challenge they face" (EC4).

In terms of the workforce, EC5 summarised the relationship between the legacy, the leader as induced by the changes, and the organisational setting:

> "You can only take your employees with you if the competence is there. Especially in times of change—they have to be able to make decisions faster and more consistently. And that is actually their huge challenge. With all these changes, decisions have to be made at some point. And they have to be made quickly and in such a way that everyone follows suit" (EC5).

Additionally, SE10 noted this dependency of legacy in combination with a legacy leadership approach because this legacy is still the backbone of the company:

"This legacy was and is connected to a legacy leadership approach. And this legacy is still the backbone of the company. The point was stressed that macro and micro characteristics are related and interact with each other" (SE10).

The interviewees expressed the demand for a consideration of both levels of contextual characteristics for the application and adjustment of an appropriated leadership approach in the disruption of the business. The participants pointed out that a senior executive must cope with the circumstance that established parts of the organisation are still relevant and connected to the old, and in parallel, a new applied leadership approach is required. As detailed by most of the interviewees, this is an important relationship and dependency. Therefore, legacy was expressed with the similar importance comparable to the findings shown within the category macro-characteristics.

5.8   Leadership Culture

The interviewees stated that the leadership culture is a connecting and important element of the approach to leadership. Figure 5.8 shows the underlying codes in conjunction with this category.

Figure 5.8

Category: Leadership culture
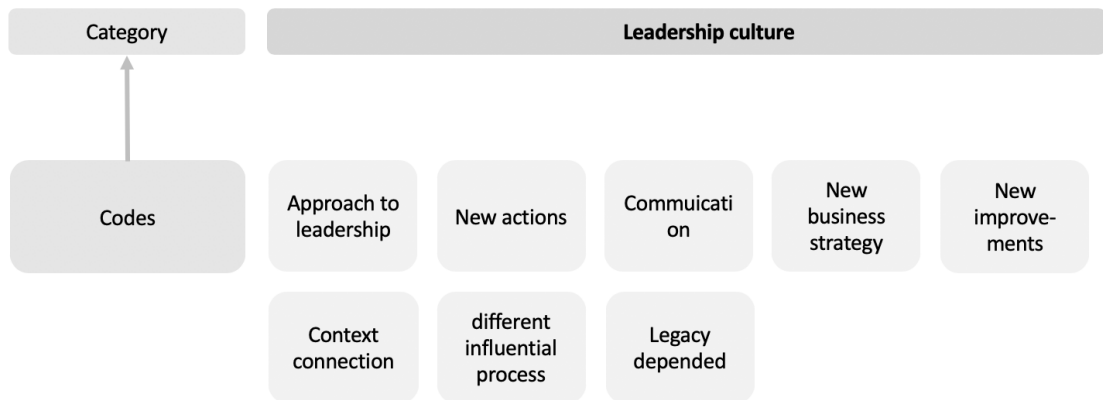
The change in the leadership culture with respect to business disruption was indeed mentioned by the participants. SE2 shared the following:

> "The leadership culture reflects beliefs, practices, patterns, and behaviours. It's the way things are done, the way people interact, make decisions, and influence others" (SE2).

The relevance of the leadership culture that emerged from the findings was characterised as a circumstance which supports the guidance of the senior executives in changing a related execution. This new leadership culture is formed by the senior executives. EC1 shared the view:

> "It must be implemented to a large extent with the existing team. Not all hundred thousand can be exchanged. That is a huge challenge they face. Employees who have long been part of a traditional leadership culture find it difficult to reorient themselves" (SE1).

From that point of view, most of the interviewees argued that an action performed by the senior executive is embedded in a leadership culture. EC7 contributed the following:

> "The change of the leadership culture is a necessary consequence. Mainly driven by the market requirements regarding the products. And on the other hand, because the company must be attractive for its old and new employee" (EC7).

Despite the demand for change, there are parts of the enterprise that have significant challenges in terms of acting accordingly. SE9 added:

> "The closer we get to production, the more inflexible it becomes" (SE9)

SE4 noted that in these times, the applied and adjusted corporate leadership culture is relevant, and this must be taken into account for any anticipated improvement:

> "A pervasive lack of care for leadership culture might be the most effective way to destroy the position" (SE4).

In the same manner, SE1 described the view of the leadership culture and relevance in the current disruptive situation:

> "The change of leadership culture is important because, simply tremendously, many factors come together at the same time. And the complexity reaches a dimension where the classical means won't get you any further" (SE1).

In addition, leadership culture reflects the perspective from most of the interviewees in the pursuit of executing the business strategy. SE2 detailed:

> "I actually believe that a long-term vision and strategy is almost more important than before" (SE2).

SE12 derived the need to adapt leadership cultural to be sustainable in the business:

> "It takes time, but there is no way around it. Here, the company needs to tackle and rethink topics completely anew—even in leadership culture" (SE12).

SE13 provided how leadership culture is the way people interact, make decisions, and influence others:

> "For me, the bigger issues are cooperation between senior executives and followers. The model is really changing massively. One danger is that those involved are paralyzed and unwilling to make decisions. I think this is one of the biggest issues where you really have to think about how to deal with it" (SE13).

This issue was described by SE9, EC3, and EC5 who stated that a new applied influential process needs adjustments and is contradictory to the legacy:

> "I'm asking people to try things. But that's completely against the culture of the company" (EC3)

EC5, EC6, and EC7 communicated this contradiction to the exiting leadership culture:

> "Because we work and have worked according to the classic goals, models, market shares—this is counterproductive with any new technology or significant change due to market changes" (EC7).

SE11 drills deeper into the dependency of the influential process:

> "It's difficult to explain to people, especially in old areas or in such classic areas, that you have to do something" (SE11).

SE15 elaborated on the difficulty of promoting optimisation instead of an agile approach:

> "When optimizing, they are not interested in creativity in the team, they want the tasks to be completed. This should be as efficient and of the expected quality as possible" (SE15).

SE16 alluded to the legacy approach and to the connection to the changes needed:

> "It is already a significant change in leadership culture if you were previously very hierarchically close to production and are now trying to transform into an agile, fault-tolerant system through a change. That's what's needed to drive the innovations we need" (SE16).

The participants stated that the novel attitude and influencing process appears to be a multi-layered approach where dependencies exist with various properties. SE18 provided an example in terms of agility and the interaction between the properties:

> "You have to be a lot more agile to get there. So, you have to have the vision clearly in mind and communicate straight. But the way to get there must be much more agile" (SE18).

SE4 stated that the connection between the leadership culture and the macro and micro characteristics:

> "They have worked according to these classic goals, models, market shares and that is counterproductive for new technology" (SE4).

SE1 described the demand for communication as a part of a new leadership culture:

"Especially in the current phase, the new orientation of the leadership culture is more strongly demanded. Now the connections must be explained, which is more important than five years ago" (SE1).

SE14 summarised the relevance, linkage, and challenge in terms of leadership culture:

"The corporate culture is already needed today but not fully implemented yet—that makes it possible to be faster, work more intensively together, make faster decisions. In large organisations, it is actually deadly to have classic siloed specializations. And a structure that is built for dedicated problems. Therefore, the flatter the hierarchy, the more global the responsibilities, the fewer silos there are—the more flexible the organisation becomes" (SE14).

The findings under this category show there are different properties and attributes with leadership culture. The interviewees observed that leadership culture is multi-faceted, and all the different parts have an influence on the shift of the cultural features of the company's leadership behaviour. Furthermore, the alterations, modifications, and anticipated improvements are part of a new understanding of the leadership culture that is required. Also important is the need to consider the legacy. As a recurring theme, the interviewees characterise the legacy as another part of the change of leadership culture. This legacy has organisational, workforce, and processual features, and legacy is a part of the change to a new leadership culture.

5.9   Applied Improvements

The interviewees stated that, in particular, the concurrence of macro- and micro- characteristics in relation to the change of cultural leadership forces an improvement in the approach to leadership. Figure 5.9 presents the underlying codes in conjunction with this category.

Figure 5.9

Category: Applied improvements
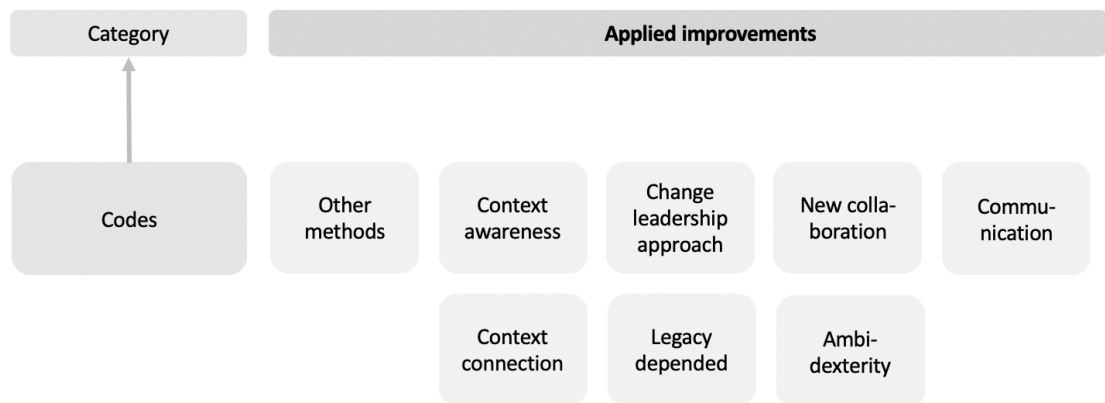
SE3 observed that the envisioned improvements depend on the disruption and are mandatory to stay competitive. Furthermore, the participants stated that the change in the approach to leadership is an irrevocably necessarily action. According to SE4:

> "We need other methods, other approaches to how leadership is shaped and designed, also how leadership operates in companies" (SE4).

EC1 referred to improvements in the relation between the senior executives and the macro- and micro-level characteristics:

> "When the moment of change has arrived—a situation or environment is needed where that change can take place" (EC1).

The interviews stated that improvements have their limitations, based on the legacy or the slowness of adjustment or the requirements of automobile production. EC2 emphasised that an applied action for improvement cannot be independent of the requirements of the existing business:

> "An automobile manufacturer can only allow limited fault tolerance and detached creativity. In production, it is almost impossible to dissolve stringency. This means that the claim is to deliver innovation agilely and with open communication, but the challenge is to manufacture products that can drive safely at 130 km/h on the motorway" (EC2).

As such, to the interviewees, an applied improvement represents a consequence outside the change of leadership in the case of business disruption. In this regard, SE12 underlined the demand for ambidexterity as one element of improvement:

> "On the one hand, you have to make sure that you keep the old or legacy structures, because, in the end, all the production and all these other things are heavily attached, but on the other hand, you have to create freedom and things for digital content, for new approaches. And I think that's the ambidexterity that's being extremely demanded in this transformation" (SE12).

SE2 raised the point that this is an improvement—considering the macro and micro perspectives of the business. SE7, EC2, and EC6 comprehended and referred to ambidexterity:

> "Ambidexterity applied at both levels, in organisational and individual matters" (EC2).

SE13 rephrased the need for ambidexterity and included the employees:

> "The new worlds are extremely important, but the old ones
> will not disappear, at least not in the next two or three years.
> In other words, we have to master both, the so-called
> ambidexterity. And that is quite a challenge for executives
> and, logically, also for employees" (SE13).

Moreover, organisational conditions and the related tasks of the senior executives to provide the work environment for new ways to collaborate were elaborated. In this regard, SE18 stated:

> "Senior executives have to create the framework conditions
> where employees can unfold their potential for innovation, can
> move, and do not have to struggle with any decision-making
> processes" (SE18).

For most of the interviewees, it was important that for the execution of an improvement, a new measurement model provided the basis for implementation. SE14 summarised this:

> "The usual pattern is no longer working for the targets"
> (SE14).

SE9 put forward an improvement toward measurements:

> "There must be an evaluation criterion. This must have the
> willingness and ability to transform and the implementation of
> transformation as criteria" (SE9).

The perspectives of measurement were combined with the view of ambidexterity. SE12 noted:

> "Measurement also must take both into account accordingly.
> You cannot take the agile assessment for a classic topic or vice
> versa. And here, we are again with this ambidexterity" (SE12).

EC7 discussed, for example, the connection between the customer and measurement:

> "The customers that are in the centre then, of course, must also measure the impact directly on the customer. This means, however, that we need an end-to-end responsibility. In other words, we no longer have to work classically with the resource, but on processes" (EC7).

Six interviewed ECs emphasised the need for improvement in communication:

> "The problem is that many people say it, but don't mean it at all. But it must give the employees the feeling that we are taking this seriously" (EC7).

A derivation of this issue was addressed by SE6:

> "It's all about a lot of honesty and transparency. I then have to communicate the situation in real terms" (SE6).

SE13 and EC5 added to this the handling of concerns and early involvement:

> "And on the other hand, there are employees, so you may need more time, you may have to take away fears, you may have to take them with you on your journey early on" (SE13).

As a contradiction to the legacy, it was expressed that an improvement in terms of delegation is different from the existing procedures:

> "New decision-making processes are needed, more responsibility on the part of employees, but also on the part of managers—that is what is needed" (SE17).

SE16 combined delegation with responsibility and leadership culture:

> "The change of the leadership culture requires an understanding that one assumes 100% responsibility for one goal" (SE16).

A further improvement mentioned by the majority and likewise, a contradiction to the current situation is the change toward agile methods and the acceptance of failure. SE 5 said:

"Employees have to learn and try things out" (SE5).

In this regard, SE6 formed a new strategic view and pointed out:

> "It is strategically the right way, to try things out, only in this way can you deal with a new situation that you have not had before, learn how to deal with it" (SE6).

There is an experienced relationship between an improvement in accord with business disruption and anticipated adjustments of the leadership culture. The participants stressed that the variety of applied improvements are a part of a new corporate leadership culture. Moreover, they saw a correlation in that an improvement is connected to a meaningful action which takes into account the high demand for communicating to the followers in disruptive business situations. Furthermore, a concern was raised that improvements are a contradiction to the legacy in terms of the incumbent corporate leadership and organisation practice.

5.10 Meaningful actions

The interviewees established the connection and requirements that an improvement had to be embedded in a meaningful action. The meaningful action in the sense of an articulation is concerned with understanding and resolving problems in uncertain business situations. The meaningful action is the engagement with activities that are appealing in a disruptive situation. Figure 5.10 presents the underlying codes in cohort with this category.

Figure 5.10

Category: Meaningful actions
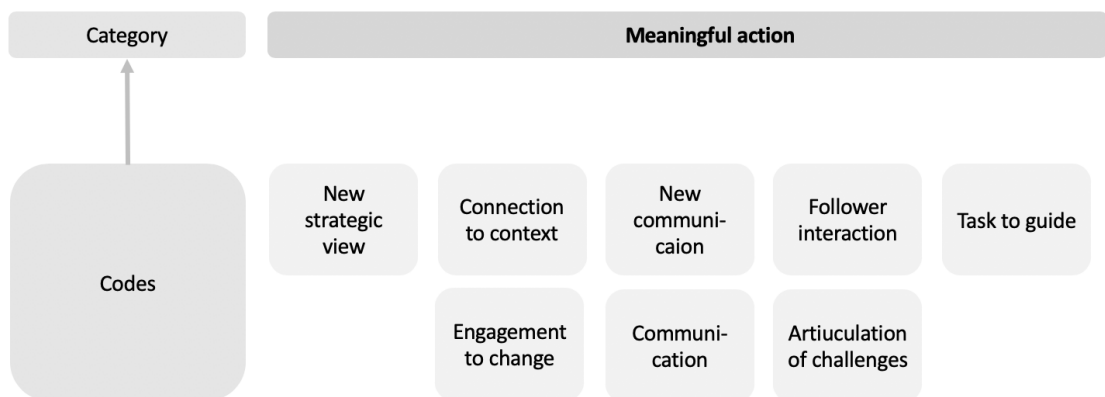
SE2, SE4, and EC6 stated that to execute an improvement, the meaningful action must include appropriate communication as a prerequisite. SE5 abridged:

> "It's not clear what exactly comes out. And that's why they, the employees, need an explanation, more logic, and more background so that they know what and why they're doing what they do" (SE5).

SE15 continued this and brought forward the dependency of change, action, and the approach a senior executive must handle this with:

> "The way decisions are made and the way we work together is changing. The actions as we lead in change must take into account the new. We have to broaden our view" (SE15).

SE6 added the important aspect of openness in communication:

> "I have to explain the information to everyone. And this information is the basis of the decision. I have to share a lot of information" (SE6).

Besides the requirements of communication, SE10 saw that acceptance was related to the location where the actions take place in the organisation:

> "So, those who deny reality are the farthest away. And those who profit from it still have disadvantages but are close to the changes because they have customer contact and are most likely to accept the new realities and also demand vehement change" (SE10).

SE5 summarised that a meaningful action is required for communication during the business disruption:

> "It does begin with clear, articulate, and visible action—this visible will to change something and question and redesign the existing" (SE5).

SE9 and EC6 expressed the view that the cause of a meaningful action is embedded in the context. EC6 recapitulated that in the current phase of change, the demands on senior executives are, of course, to shape this transformation of the company:

> "We have to adapt the way to lead and apply other methods, these have to be derived from the context" (EC6).

The articulated meaningful action embedded in context has a strong dependency on an ambidextrous approach that can deal with legacy and the new settings at the same time. SE9 connected this to the communication to and relationship with the followers:

> "This means that we have to master both, the so-called ambidexterity" (SE9).

Most of the interviewees saw that meaningful action embedded in the context has priority in the transformation. One aspect articulated by SE4 was:

> "Ultimately what you cannot automate is creativity and motivation. These are things that happen in the interaction between people" (SE4).

The interviewees noted that the kind of meaningful communication of the related actions is relevant in the ongoing transformation. A set of properties of the meaningful action emerged in these findings. The interviewees maintained that the legacy, either from the organisation or from the perspectives of the leadership, is always present and relevant for consideration.

5.11   Concluding Comments on the Findings

This chapter focused on the presentation of the findings supported by verbatim quotes from the interviewees (Tracy, 2010). The coding of the interview data helped to identify emerging categories, such as *business disruption*, *micro- and macro-characteristics*, *applied action*, and *leadership culture*.

Chapter 6. Discussion

As stated, the applied inquiry for this research transforms the stated problem into a solution. This means that the applied inquiry investigates and interprets with the purpose of creating knowledge for a controlled transition (Rescher, 2016). For the discussion, the inquiry is a reflection and an iterative process to solve the problem being explored (Bacon, 2012; Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). Moreover, findings from the academic literature will be included to allow for a discussion of the findings from multiples views.

Consequently, the discussion identifies the problem that emerges from the data in the findings. Hence, the engagement with the data in the inquiry seeks to better understand and solve the stated problem. The discussion of the explored knowledge is thus valued for its usefulness and understanding of the situation, since pragmatism focuses on real conditions, not abstractions (Rescher, 2016).

6.1 Triangulation of the Categories

As stated in Chapter 4, triangulation supports an understanding generated by two or more sources (Bryman, 2004; Feilzer, 2010; Greence & Caracelli, 2003; Kelle, 2006). Irwin (2010) stressed that "different methods and different sources of evidence reveal specific slices through the phenomena and processes under study" (Irwin, 2010, p. 415). Consequently, the first stage is to consider the different perspectives of the two samples (the executives and the consultants) to determine similarities and

differences. As stated in Chapter 4, data triangulation involves the use of the two samples to increase the validity of a study, and it is executed at the category level (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2002). Figure 6.1 shows the triangulated categories from the two perspectives.

Figure 6.1 The triangulation of different categories

The triangulation of different categories
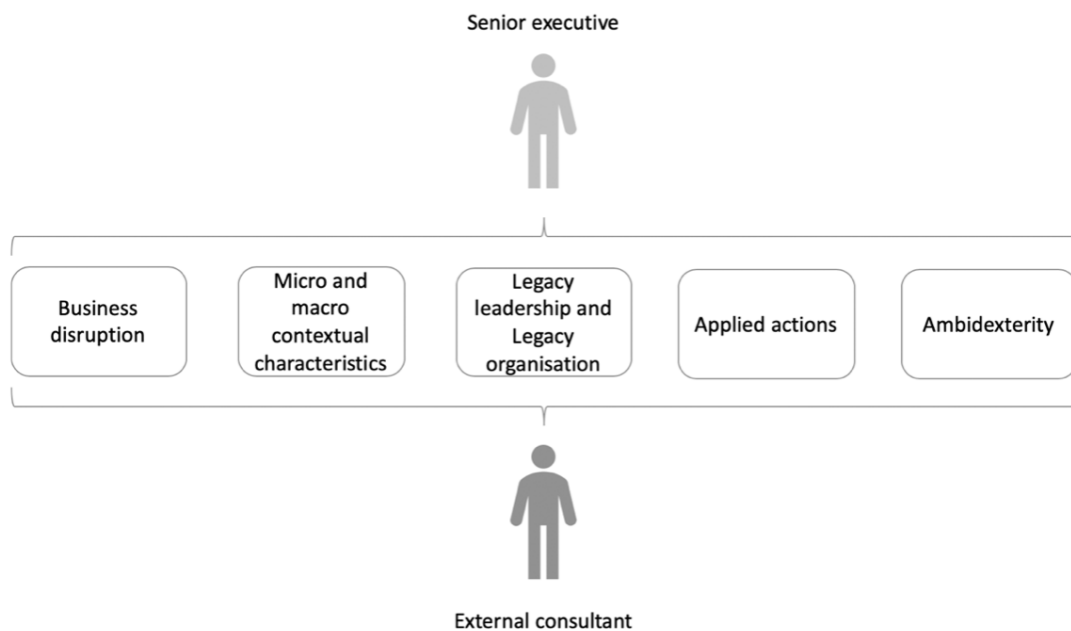
6.1.1   Category: Business disruption

The first triangulated category is the perception of the business disruption. Both samples indicated and highlighted significant changes in the automotive industry in general and BMW in particular. Business disruption is assessed as the origin of the transformation process with a variety of consequences. The SEs pointed explicitly to the challenge of changing the business model because of the disruption in the industry.

They observed that the uniqueness of the transformation is not limited to new ways of production or organisational enhancements. The overarching transformation influences the company as a whole and the surrounding business, as well. The ECs positioned the argument in a more holistic manner, noting that every industry undergoes transformation and is affected by disruptions. They pointed out that transformation is a synthesis of various parts. This transformation is massive because multiple streams are either independent, dependent or both, and the transformation happens at the same time. Figure 6.2 shows the key citations for the category: Business disruption.

Figure 6.2

Key citations for the category: Business disruption

Key citations :

Our Business model is changing in unpredictable ways and speed. Everything changes massively or that has already changes: Production, customer, employees and ultimately the leadership as well (SE16).

Category:
Business disruption
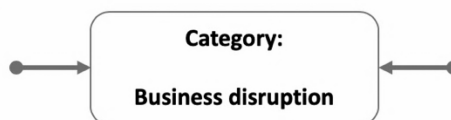
Key citations :

Every industry has disruptions and every industry has the impact of digitalisation; but the automotive industry has to cope with a huge transformation because it is affected by multiple streams independently of each other at the same time (EC2).

6.1.2 Category: Micro and macro contextual characteristics

In addition, the findings show the alignment of the two views that considering the macro and micro characteristics is mandatory for a better understanding. The samples addressed the importance of considering the context and where leadership occurs and where senior executives perform actions. In this regard, the SCs noted that the transformation must be understood at all levels and that dependencies must be acknowledged. The holistically and integrated consideration of interdependencies is essential for performing the daily work. From an external perspective, the ECs agreed with the assumption that the speed of change affects macro and micro characteristics. The argument was that the company and the individual parts are affected and inseparably linked to each other. In the Figure 6.3 the key citations are highlighted for the category: Macro and micro contextual characteristics.

Figure 6.3 Key citations for the category: Macro- and micro-characteristics

Key citations for the category: Macro- and micro-characteristics

Key citations :

It must be understood across all levels which consequences and dependencies exist. A holistic consideration of interdependencies is an essential criterium for the future success (SE6).

Category: Macro and micro contextual characteristics

Key citations :

The speed of change affects both the company as a whole and the individual level as well. The broader and the narrowed dependency creates a unified circumstance (EC8).

6.1.3   Category: Legacy leadership and legacy organisation

The connection was expressed that the legacy within the company, either in terms of the organisation or the leadership methods, behaviours, and traits, are a contradiction to the requirement to change in terms of the business disruption. The SCs concluded that the legacy organisation is a massive part of the transformation and that the SC needs to consider this as a dominant factor. They referred to the time it takes to transform the organisation into taking on new business models. Nevertheless, they offered a perspective regarding structure with supplies and their global productions sites. ECs referred to this circumstance in a similar way by highlighting the strain of keeping the old while pursuing the new in the longer-term. Figure 6.4 shows the perspectives on the importance of coping and handling the existing legacy dependencies.

Figure 6.4

Key citations for the category: Legacy leadership and legacy organisation

Key citations :

We cannot diminish in the here and now. We cannot say that something new is coming to us now an we flip all the switches and we are ready. We have to consider the existing corporate structures, workforce and suppliers (SE17).

Category: Legacy leadership and legacy organisation

Key citations :

It is the long-term strain that exist. Invest in the new and keep the old going as long as needed. But apply a transformation strategy (EC2).

6.1.4 Category: Applied actions

A variation in the findings was the different focal points concerning the applied actions. Senior executives highlighted the relevance of more meaningful action as a vehicle for communication wrapped in a new leadership culture. In contrast, the external consultants focused more on applied action as a reaction to cope with the challenges. The findings indicated that a sustainable improvement to the approach to leadership was required through applied and contextually dependent actions. The characteristics of the change and its significant impact on the way work and actions are performed was expressed across the interviewees. Figure 6.5 depicts the perspectives on the importance of tailoring applied actions to the context and to the legacy landscape of the company.

Figure 6.5

Key citations for the category: Applied actions

Key citations :

For the executives this also means accepting that things are not going well. They have to accept new ways, new methods and new approaches (SE9).

Category: Applied actions

Key citations :

It is very important to have a new way of communication and transition management in place. Transparency and explanations are important as well (EC1).
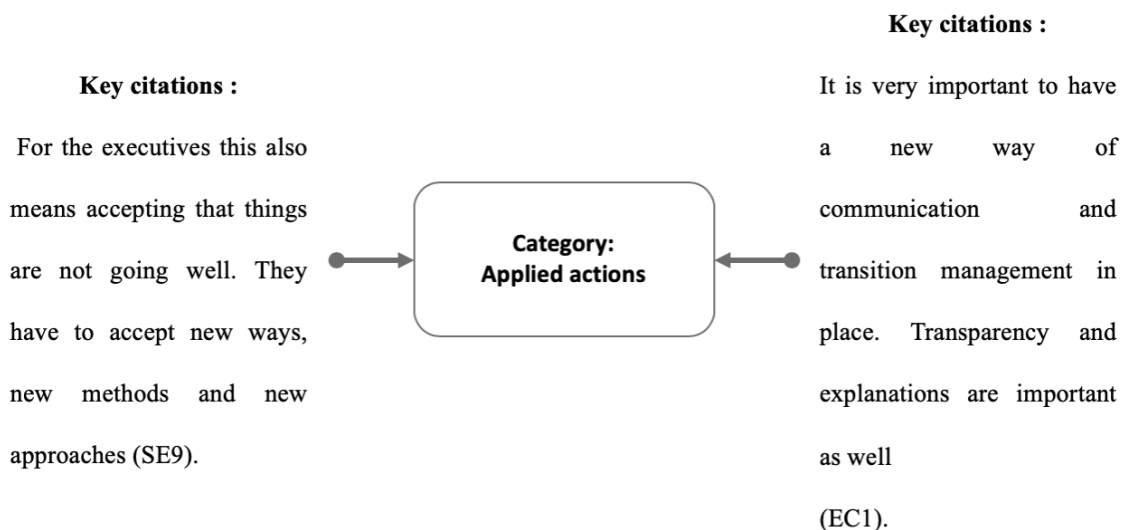
6.1.5 Category: Ambidexterity

The interviewees emphasised ambidexterity as a continual adjustment of performance with different focuses depends on location either in the new setup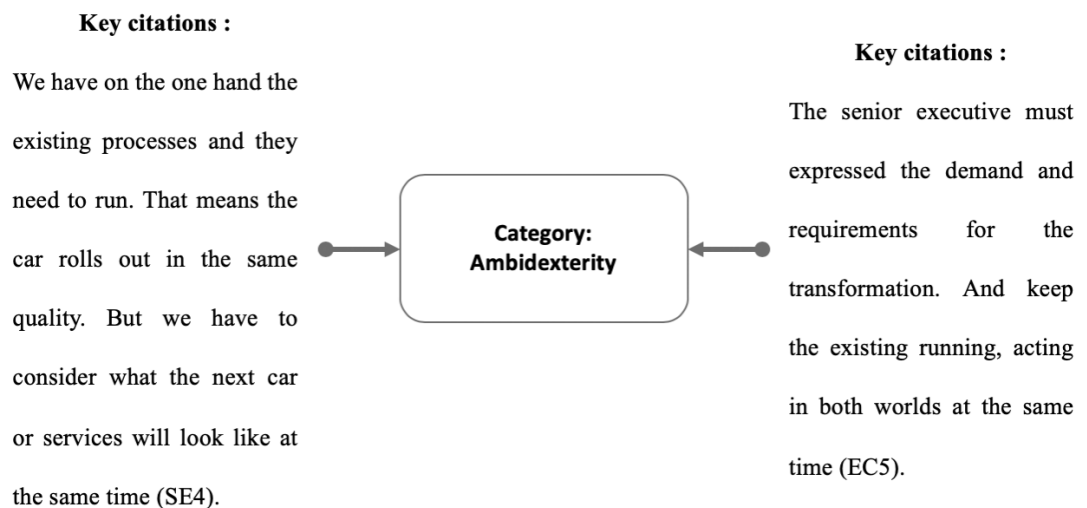 or the legacy environment. Figure 6.6 features the key citations concerning this category. The SCs referred to an application where one hand is on the existing process and handles the work in that environment to ensure that, e.g., car production is conducted with the usual quality. At the same time, the consideration of what comes next and how the organisation needs to change is pursued. From an external point of view, the ECs shared the requirement that senior executives offer the employees goals and orientation so that, despite constant change, everyone knows in which direction they are heading—acting both in the old world and purposefully in the new.

Figure 6.6

Key citations for the category: Ambidexterity

Key citations :

We have on the one hand the existing processes and they need to run. That means the car rolls out in the same quality. But we have to consider what the next car or services will look like at the same time (SE4).

Category: Ambidexterity

Key citations :

The senior executive must expressed the demand and requirements for the transformation. And keep the existing running, acting in both worlds at the same time (EC5).

6.1.6 *Synopsis of the triangulated Categories*

The triangulation underscores a comparative consideration in terms of a common view that business changes are inevitable and occur on distinctive levels with different, interrelated characteristics. The articulated challenges consistently drive transformation in different areas. In this regard, the senior executives perceived the need for a new leadership culture and a new approach to leadership as the way to integrate novel aspects required to implement actions related to business transformation. In contrast, the external consultants focused on applied action as a direct response to the changing context.

The results from both examples support the argument that the awareness of the legacy is essential in terms of organisation, leadership methods, and interaction with followers. Because of this awareness of dependence, there is a need to apply this knowledge to actions.

Thus, both groups noted that the envisioned improvements to the leadership approach must take into account actions performed at the same time on different sides in a meaningful and ambidextrous manner.

6.2 Connected Categories

The applied triangulation produced a more detailed picture in contrast to a presentation only explored through one perspective (Guion, Diehl, & Mcdonald, 2002; Turner & Turner, 2009). This study benefited from the triangulation of findings which supported the viewpoint expressed in previous research that the automotive industry and BMW, in particular, is changing (Blatt, 2018; Cornet et al., 2019; Krüger, 2019;

Maggioni et al., 2016). Moreover, it underlines the assumption discussed by Donkin et al. (2016) that a fundamental shift in the leadership capabilities is required to succeed in this disrupted automotive business. The codes and accordingly the developed categories, unveiled the complexity of the current situation and that senior executives must adapt their actions accordingly.

Network 6.1 describes the relationship, and connections supported by the triangulation of the resulting categories. The data showed that the origin is the recognition of the business disruption, which represents a manifestation of massive changes in the market and, therefore, the need for change in the entire organisation. Those changes are categorised into the level of appearance either at the macro or micro level with their distinctive characteristics. These characteristics describe the demand for an adjustment in terms of a different leadership culture. This new leadership culture is a reaction to the changes, and it provides a guideline for applied improvements. As a recurring category, the connection to the legacy was stressed. The participants pointed to new actions with a relationship to the macro and micro-contextual-characteristics.

Therefore, the explored relationships show that both the macro and micro-contextual-characteristics are part of the ongoing business disruption. Hence, the category of business disruption is an anchor point for new requirements. Network 6.1 expressed this relationship and connections.

Network 6.1

Relationship and connections of the categories
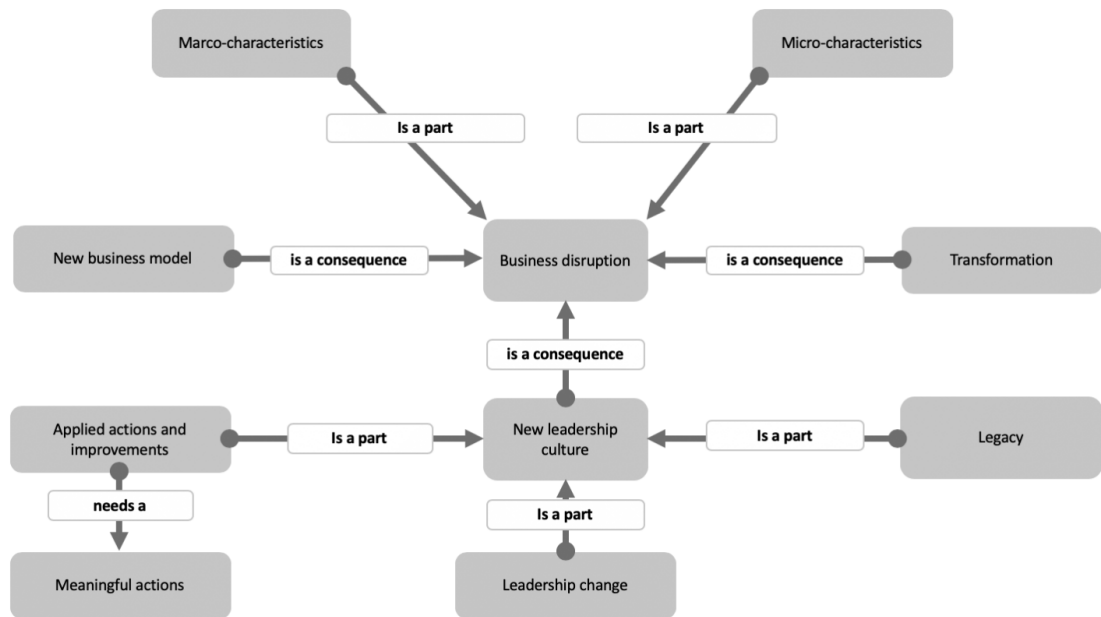
Note. This arrangement of the relationships between categories does not intend to provide a conclusive and deterministic overview. Instead, it shows that different aspects influence the condition of "Business Disruption" or are a part of the "New leadership culture".

The business transformation and the new business model are consequences of the business disruption. A further consequence of the business disruption is a new leadership culture. This new leadership culture includes the applied improvements and the consideration of the corporate legacy. Finally, the execution of an applied improvement requires a meaningful action.

After the analysis of connected categories, the next section explores the root cause of the changing business context. This is the starting point for developing the problem statement.

6.3 The Changing Context as the Root Cause

Network 6.2 shows that the demand for a new approach to leadership is caused by the new corporate strategy that is substantially influenced by the ongoing transformation of the industry, which has its roots in applications of new technologies.

Network 6.2

The dependency of new technology and the approach to leadership
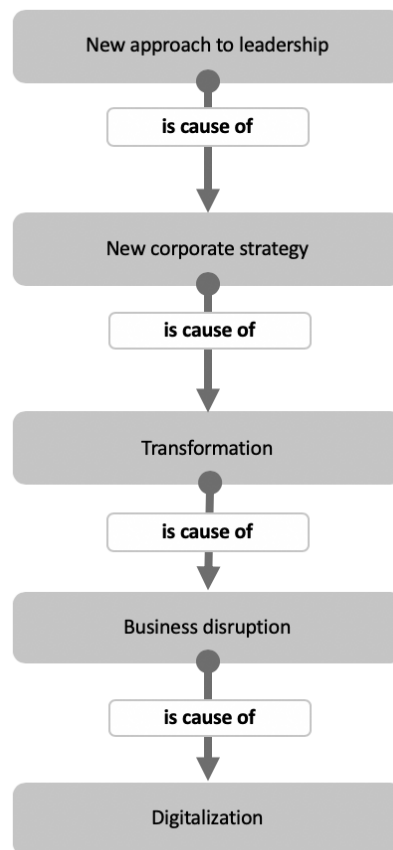
Note. Network 6.2 represents certain properties. All these properties shape the change in the leadership approach and are therefore dependent. The 1-to-1 dependencies represent a simplified exemplification of the relationships. It shows that digitalisation

is a dominant circumstance for the change in the industry which has an influence until the implementation of a new approach to leadership.

One recurring statement was that business disruption was the source of change. Network 6.3 provide an overview of the business disruption properties and the change of the approach of leadership as a consequence.

Network 6.3 Properties of the business disruption

Properties of the business disruption
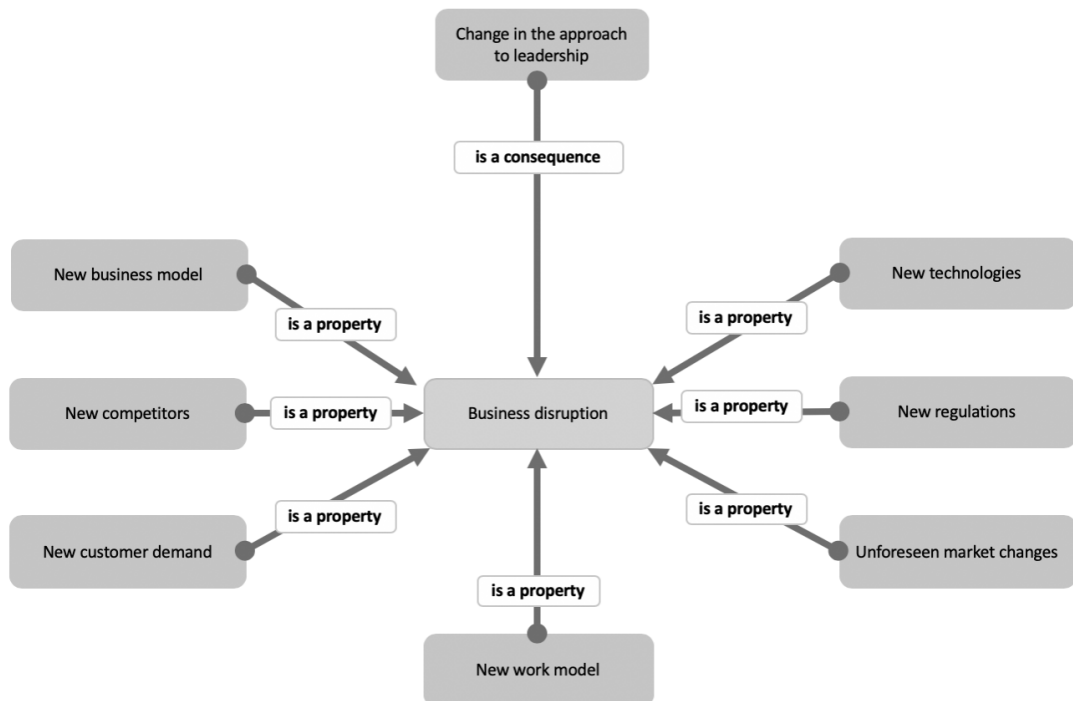
Note. The shown arrangement does not intend to provide a conclusive and deterministic overview of all properties. It offers a visualisation of various influential aspects and that the resulting change of the approach to leadership.

Based on the expressed network diagrams the problem development commences with the consideration stressed by all participants that the occurring change is disrupting the entire enterprise in a way that has never been experienced before. Some researchers have noted that an increasing level of disruptive change has influenced automakers massively (Singh, 2019; Towers-Clark, 2019). Accordingly, the car industry needs a new strategy that seeks to identify and develop senior executives equipped with the requisite skills and capabilities (Hitt, Haynes, & Serpa, 2010). Such levels of changing dependencies are also consistent with recent streams of leadership research that argue that "leadership is multi-level, processual, contextual and interactive" (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009, p. 631).

The knowledge society, global economy, and technological revolution that have come into effect since the last decade of the 20th century have resulted in a business environment with levels of complexity, uncertainty, and dynamism not previously experienced (Hitt, Ireland, Sirmon, & Trahms, 2011; Nadler & Tushman, 1999). The interviewees expressed the dependencies with an emphasis on digitalization and the related impacts. In relation to the highlighted issue, one consequence is the emergent requirement of new and different business models. This new model must incorporate entirely new processes for production, sales, service and the entire interaction with the customer. Thus, the leadership culture and approach to leadership must change accordingly.

For BMW's senior executives, this means that the automotive industry is facing the challenge of undergoing profound change on several fronts at the same time. This new environmental context was characterised by the participants as having increasing risk and uncertainty, decreasing forecasting ability, and the demand for a new managerial mindset focused on flexibility. Changes in industry structure, the

instability of the market, and the probability of environmental shocks are all important elements producing uncertainty. There was a focus on how senior executives need to respond with new leadership capabilities that are relevant and provide competitive advantages.

6.3.1   Contradiction to the legacy

A crucial determination is that the legacy of leadership and organisational behaviour is a predominant dependency. This legacy exists at different levels and is seen as a partial contradiction to the new requirements and demands. The findings stressed the position of the contradiction to the new approaches and procedures. A major reason for this is that the complexity of the situation, the interdependencies, and the required actions reached a dimension in which classical approaches lose their impact and relevance. As articulated by Wang (2018), leaders must be sufficiently adaptable to understand this new consumer mindset and acquire the skills to motivate and lead development teams down unfamiliar avenues. This situational consideration articulated by most of the interviewees characterises the demand for a set of leadership competencies that are different from those needed in the past. This request is contrary to the approach of incumbent leadership. In relation to the existing structures and organisation, it is obvious that the old industrial environment where BMW optimized itself nearly to a maximum is no longer the ultimate objective. In the previous industrial situation, the production, organisation, supply chain, information technology and infrastructure were optimized. Yet, because of the business disruption, the framework of considerations is changing.

As expressed, this legacy perspective on the leadership approach was established under the premises of achieving maximum optimisation. This came along with the circumstance that legacy corporate structures were simpler, product programs were planned for a long time, and inter-company joint ventures and partnerships were less prevalent. A frequently raised theme was the transformation of this legacy and the indicated challenges. In this phase of corporate renewal, the demands on the senior executives are, of course, shaping this transformation of this firm and driving it forward.

However, there is a requirement to cope with the contradiction to the existing systems. Network 6.4 portrays the dependency of legacy as a component of the change of leadership culture. The complexity of this connection is derived from the corporate structures established and lasting for a long time. Consequently, the structures fall away or change significantly and that is extremely difficult.

Network 6.4

Dependency of legacy as part of the leadership culture change

This dependency fosters the demand that senior executives confronted with leadership culture change must be able to adapt quickly and apply experience successfully considering new and different challenges. The consequence is that the approach to leadership must change, and there is now a greater demand on senior executives than ever before. That means senior executives need to demonstrate speed, agility, and focus combined with awareness of the legacy when it comes to execution.

According to Antonakis (2018), the adaptation, alteration, and renewal of the leadership process are vital for a company. The interviewees stated that this adaptation also acknowledges that the current leadership approach is no longer valid in some respect. For instance, some employees must be led differently because business is changing fundamentally. In the past, the production of a car was planned every three years and produced for seven years. Today, everything is much more agile, with completely different timelines and challenges. In the literature, Northouse (2016) and Wang (2018) drew attention to appropriate and robust leadership being not only a competence but also a means of adapting work every day. The senior executives must recognize the talent of each individual, align the team with a common goal, motivate everyone to peak performance, and deliver effective results.

6.3.2 Leadership culture

The stated relationship is between the business disruption and its relevance to leadership culture as a binding element. Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck (1961) described leadership culture as learned and shared beliefs and values of people (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Kohler, 2015). The findings highlighted the importance of leadership culture as a connecting aspect. The cultural aspect is critical because of the distinctly different perceptions about what to do, what values to emphasize, and how leaders should interact (Luthans & Doh, 2012; Russell & Aquino-Russell, 2010). In the past, senior executives could concentrate exclusively on their business goals. Now, they are caught between business change and the old mentality. The company must deal with such changes much more regularly. Yet, the system of this organisation does not allow that (Finkelstein, Hambrick, & Cannella, 2009). The explored connection as

seen in Network 6.5 between the categories business disruption and leadership culture change reveals this.

Network 6.5

Dependency of the change of leadership culture and business disruption

The senior executives at the strategic level are confronted in a much more pronounced manner than at other hierarchical levels. Decisions taken by senior executives must maximize benefits and minimize losses (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992; Hamann, 2017). The task for senior executives is to accommodate both the disadvantages and advantages of their decisions (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992). The objective is to arrive at an alternative that is better than the alternatives. The overarching transformation dimensions turn the focus toward the demand to change the mindset.

The interviewees considered the need to change the leadership culture as a prerequisite for further actions and improvements. As most of the interviewees noted, the leadership culture at the automobile manufacturer was designed for maximum optimisation of the production process. Now, there is a significant alteration driven by the business disruption, and there are impacts on the leadership culture. The consequences are faster product cycles, novel technologies, different ways of working together, and a unique business model. The successful implementation of the transformation strategy is an integral element of moving the business forward. There must be understanding and conviction as to why new leadership methods may now

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lead to better results. Until now, the predominant self-conception of senior executives was based on the ambition to be a very knowledgeable expert. This will no longer be the case; the interviewees stated that the complexity is too great for that holistic traditional ambition.

Based on the stated assumption, Network 6.6 adds two extensions to the network shown in Network 6.5. They are the change in the approach to leadership as a result of the modified leadership culture and the applied actions and improvements induced by the leadership culture.

Network 6.6

*Dependency of action, approach to leadership and cultural change*
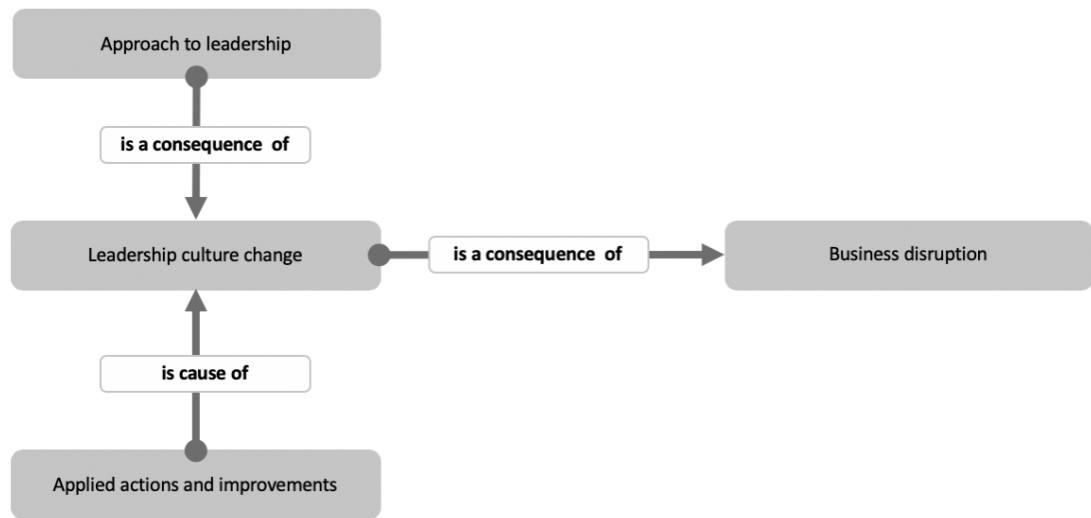
The future must be communicated comprehensively, and that means there must be an explanation for why something must be done. One observation is that the BMW corporate culture is in principle sustainable, but there is a need to develop the culture of the company further to cope with market and business changes. That means living

the corporate values convincingly in everyday life and as a duty of every senior executive.

6.4   The underlying Dependencies

Based on the discussion in the previous sections, this section connects the different concepts that have appeared. As indicated in Chapter 1, BMW is a premium German car manufacturer that has experienced a profitable existence for many years. The car industry in general had an economic prosperity and success were supported by a heritage business model that had as its primary purpose selling a product with very few changes since Henry Ford´s Model T (Towers-Clark, 2019).

Subsequently, the attitudes of automobile manufacturers and their senior executives did not change much. This assessment is based on the consideration that the product was always desirable and heavily requested, so the business model supported this. To a certain extent, the achievement of objectives was orientated to consolidate and optimize the organisation per se and, in particular, car production. However, the ongoing and persistent business transformation is characterised by an application of new and advanced technology—which have crucial impacts on BMW. Thus, the established model of stability is at risk. The BMW business suffers and is under pressure from flexible, accessible, and innovative services that suit a more dynamic economy. Network 6.7 articulates this relationship, where the senior executive is related to the business disruption and interact with the new leadership culture.

Network 6.7

Dependency of senior executives
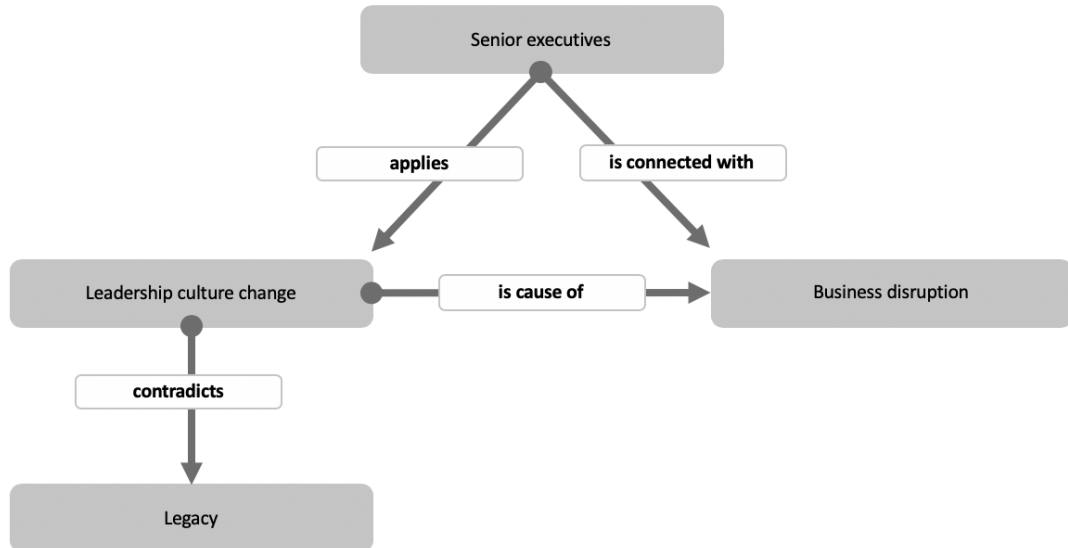
A new leadership culture as a binding element is established for the ambition to change the company accordingly. The new leadership culture has its origins in the disruption of business operations; it is a consequence of the need to adapt to these changes. A significant dependency is the acknowledgement of the existence and relevance of the legacy, which is, to some degree, a contradiction to the new leadership culture. It was stated that the legacy one-dimensional approach was very typical for automotive manufacturers because they are engineering-driven companies. For a long time, technology and the product were paramount, not the customer using the product.

This is expressed in Network 6.8 where the legacy either of leadership or of the organisation contradicts the requirements for the new leadership culture.

Network 6.8

Anticipated contradiction of the new leadership culture and legacy
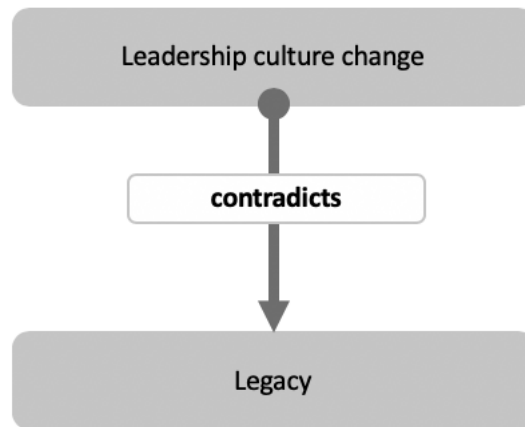
Note. Parts of a new leadership culture contradicts to the existing and still relevant legacy.

This dependency also means that the ability to use prior experience to predict the outcome of a current action is fallible, and there is always a chance that prior experience is not sufficient to guide the actions in a given setting (Morgan, 2014).

A further dependency is the observation that the business disruption can be divided into macro and micro characteristics. The context of the business disruption is significantly different from earlier one-dimensional observations. As expressed by the interviewees, one characteristic of the ongoing transformation is that it changes multiple dimensions.

To extract this multi-dimensional connection, Network 6.9 describes the relationship between micro- and macro-characteristics. This association was articulated that both levels of characteristics interacting with each other.

Network 6.9

Dependency of micro- and macro-characteristics and business disruption
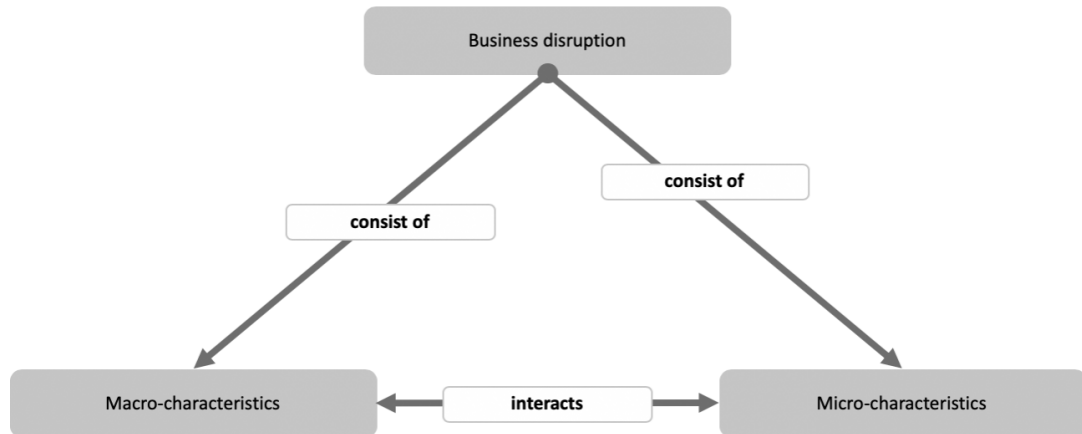
This assessment is different because, compared to other explanations of leadership, which were primarily focused on the micro perspective, it includes macro, micro, and the interaction of the two (e.g., Boal & Hooijberg, 2000; Waldman et al., 2001; Wang et al., 2012). However, leadership must deal with the tremendous challenges of the changing business environment. This novel situation is different from the heritage in that more dimensions are combined. Macro- and micro-characteristics are considered as a unified context for senior executives. The context is, in a wider perspective, responsible for the functioning and purpose of specific traits in the approach to leadership. The assessment of the dependencies has shown that the perception constitutes the argument, and that context is more than just a moderating variable—it is rather an inseparable component. Emphasising the importance of inseparability indicates an improved approach to leadership.

Hence, this practical guided connection and the awareness of different levels represent a disbanding of a silo-oriented leadership culture. Network 6.10 presents the explored dependency in a comprehensive visualisation.

Network 6.10

The underlying dependencies
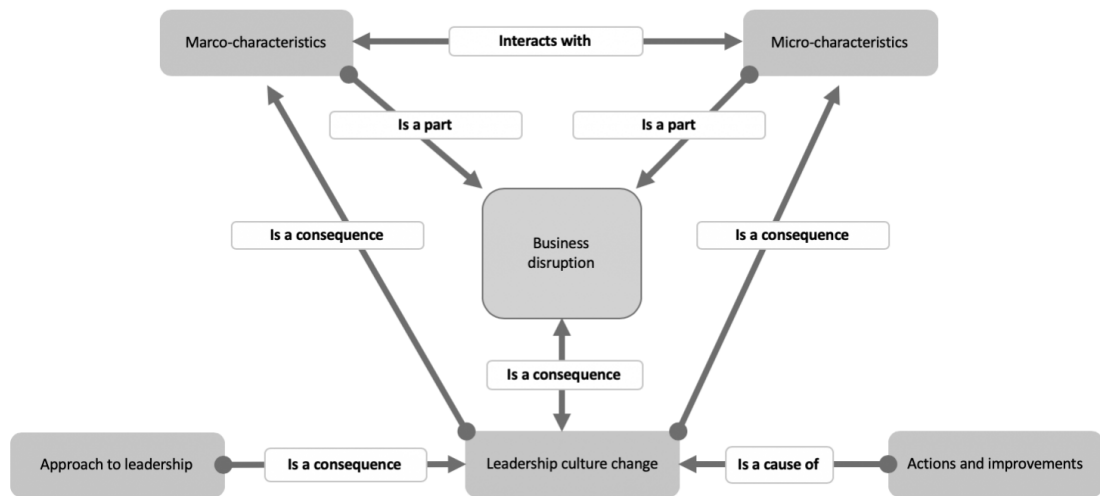
6.5 The Statement of the underlying Problem

To express the problem beside the visualized dependencies in Network 6.10, the following Network 6.11 inserts the senior executive. The senior executive must define an approach to deal with this conglomerate of challenges. The developed problem demonstrates the importance of the business disruption as the reason for the significant changes in the company and accordingly for the approach to leadership. The macro and micro-characteristics are parts of the entire business disruption and interact to each other. The leadership culture change is a consequence from the changing circumstances.

Network 6.11

Problem statement
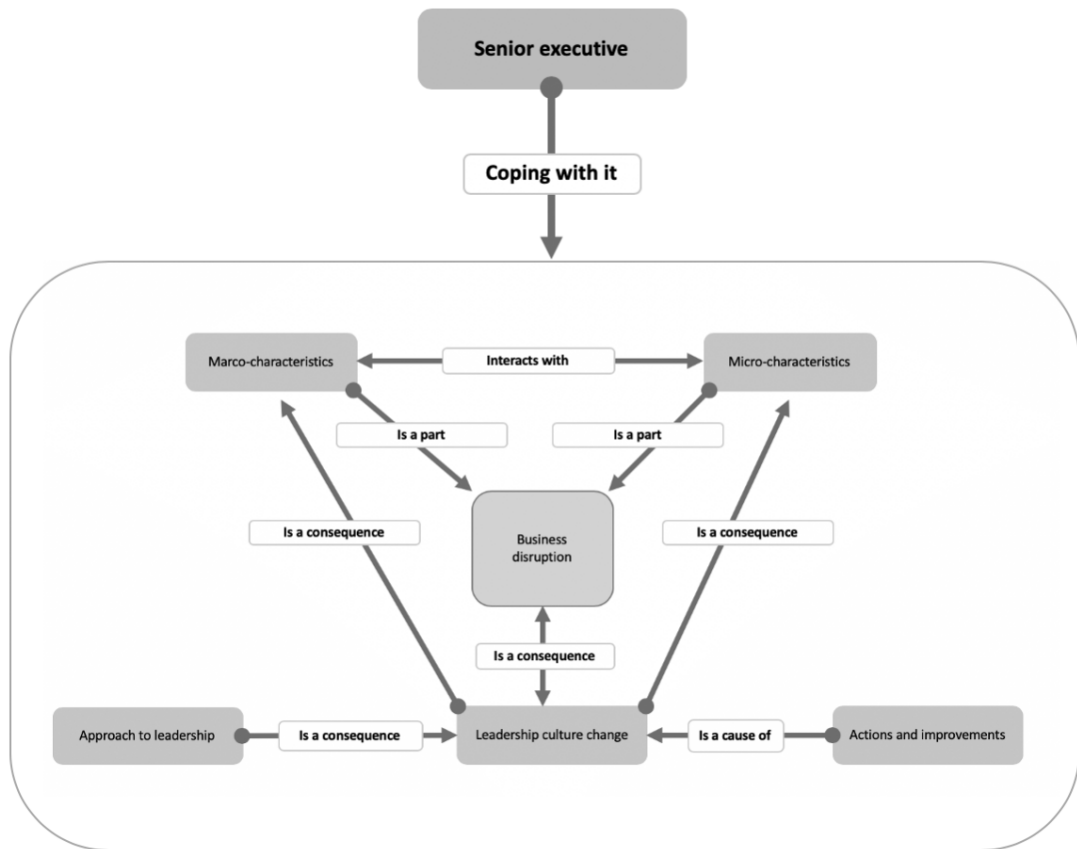
The process of the solution development in this pragmatic study is first to identify the underlying problem as shown and developed in Network 6.11. In terms of pragmatism, this study starts with the understanding of the experience and the derived problem. Likewise, the pragmatic study seeks to understand the various dependencies involved and how the senior executive performs actions in this given context. With the articulation of the problem, the researcher expresses that the research itself is used to solve the problem and improve the senior executive condition.

The intention of the next section is to solve this conveyed problem that genuinely affects the senior executives in the current industry transition. The solution obtains to translate research results into applicable knowledge. This conception

illustrates the principle of a pragmatic research to conduct a study whose solution can be transformed into practical ends (Duram, 2010).

6.6   Solution Development

The solution development is rooted in the previous discussion and provides a transformation of the expressed problem statement. The purpose is to combine and apply the gleaned knowledge. The development of this particular solution starts with a more holistic description of a task performed by senior executives. This is the nucleus which reflect what is expected from leadership. This expectation in terms of daily related tasks is that senior executives are forced to set goals for the organisation through mission- and vision-building exercises (Schoemaker et al., 2013; Yukl, 2008).

With this observation, senior executives apply a specific action as a proper of a solution to achieve an envisioned outcome. This action is a property of a solution for the problem embedded in context. Moreover, the context also interacts with the outcome. According to Hesterly and Barney (2010) and Matarazzo and Pearlstein (2016), senior executives must anticipate that the future necessarily entails understanding multiple levels of context, from the global context to the organisation and the employees themselves. This also considers the current situation, perceived by senior executives in relation to the challenges the company is facing. The interviewees expressed their concerns regarding an increasing feeling that their wisdom and experience is no longer pertinent.

This action-to-outcome is a principal purpose of leadership (Northouse, 2016), and it is represented in Network 6.12.

Network 6.12

Action to outcome
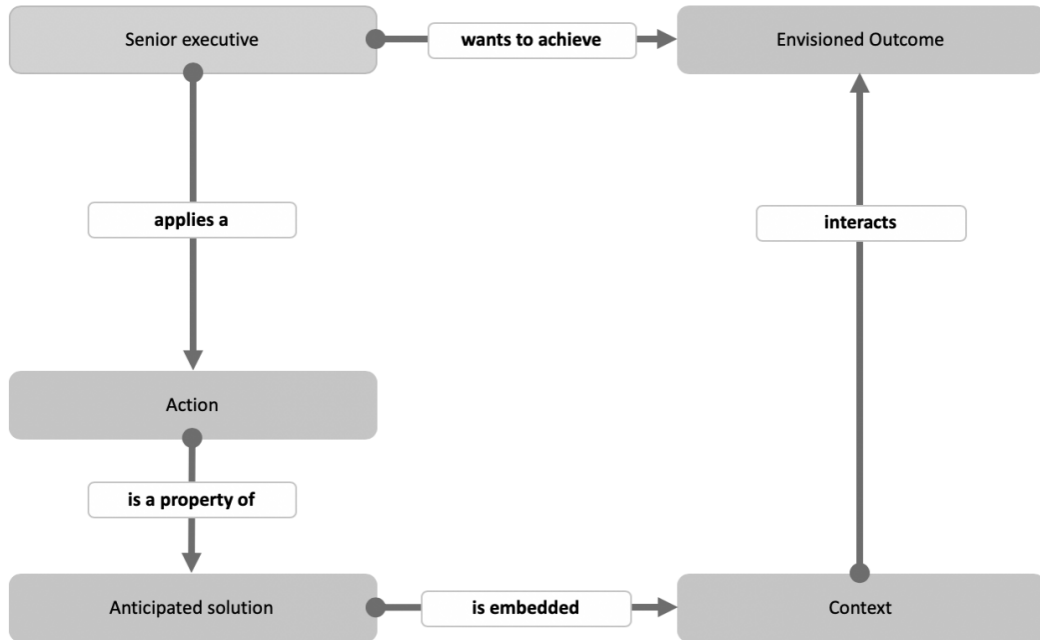
6.6.1 The integration of macro- and micro-characteristics

As stated, the actions of senior executives are embedded in context. Hence, it is a mandatory requirement to consider the relevance of macro and micro contextual characteristics (Iszatt-White, 2011; Porter & McLaughlin, 2006; Poulis, Poulis, & Plakoyiannaki, 2013; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). For a senior executive a critical aspect is the ability to switch focus quickly between the macro and micro. This is relevant because effectiveness depends less on the traits and more on the contextual dependencies where firms' competitive challenges, legacies, and other shifting forces have impacts (Bazigos, Gagnon, & Schaninger, 2016). Senior executives must adapt to the context, and they should monitor the external and internal environments and formulate strategies based on the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation as well

as the opportunities presented by the situation (Antonakis & House, 2014). Academics agree that context in this regard matters for several reasons. These include explaining variation in the research findings, providing better explanations of the practical implications of research, aiding theorising, selecting research sites, and measuring, analysing, and interpreting data (Johns, 2006; Rousseau & Fried, 2001). Derived from the literature review,

Figure 6.7 supplies the framework for this interpretation.

Figure 6.7

Micro- and macro-characteristics interdependency
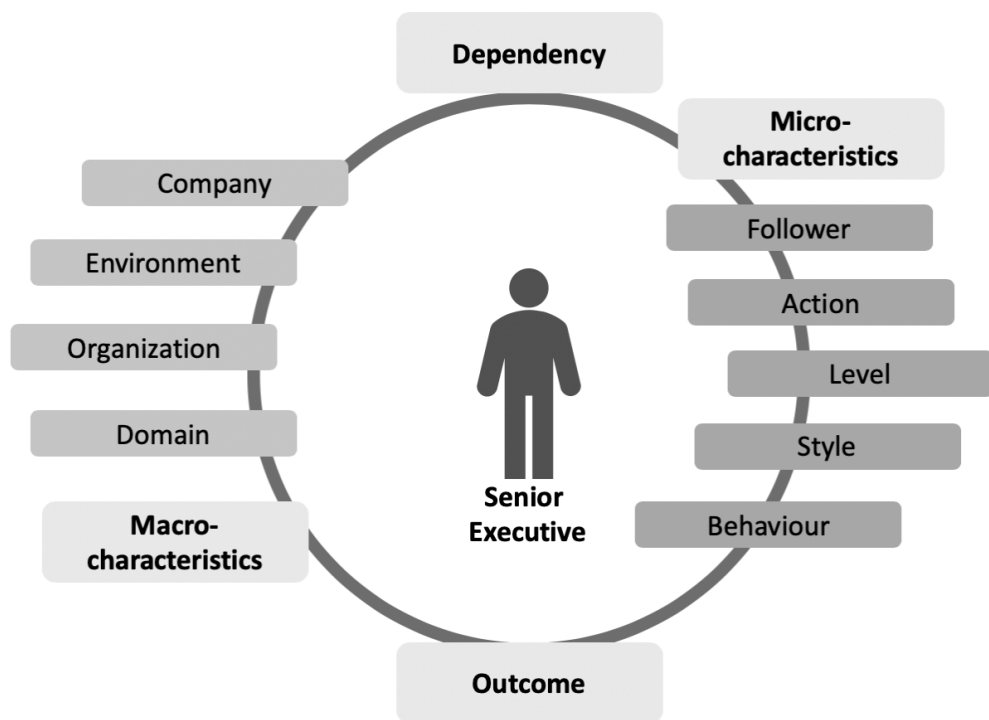
Note. This contextually dependent perspective accounts for the interrelated micro and macro forces (characteristics) that influence the perceptions, actions, and expectations of and by senior executives. The macro and micro-perspectives reflect this new,

uncertain and fluid business landscape and they present automakers with enormous challenges that require a more flexible, adaptive style of leadership (House & Aditya, 1997; Hunt, 2004; Moir, 2017; Osborn, et al. 2002; Waldman, et al. 2004; Yukl, 1999).

A context describes the reason that a phenomenon is occurring, and the appropriate behaviour and actions associated with the situation. Context is the situation, circumstances, or specific setting in which an event takes place. That is the fundamental difference in the situational leadership theory (Northouse, 2016; Antonakis, 2018; Hersey & Blanchard 2013). A context is defined by an event itself and hence leadership appears differently in varying contexts.

The context is a situational description with opportunities and constraints that can affect the occurrence and meaning of leadership. The discussion points to a practical perspective of an applied form of observation to determine all the relevant facts. These facts are perceived as context consisting of the two categories—the macro- and micro-characteristics. Oc (2018) expressed this with the assessment that the effects of one factor may sometimes require including elements embedded in another. Instead of drawing stronger distinctions between the effects, the applied view in Figure 6.7 is more concerned about the interactions among macro- and micro-characteristics and influence on the outcome.

Figure 6.8 depicts this, where the senior executive is centred, and macro and micro characteristics surround the individuum. The discussion and findings revealed that legacy also is a relevant, dependent, and important feature. Hence, this dependency necessitates consideration for an anticipated outcome.

Figure 6.8

The dependencies of the senior executive
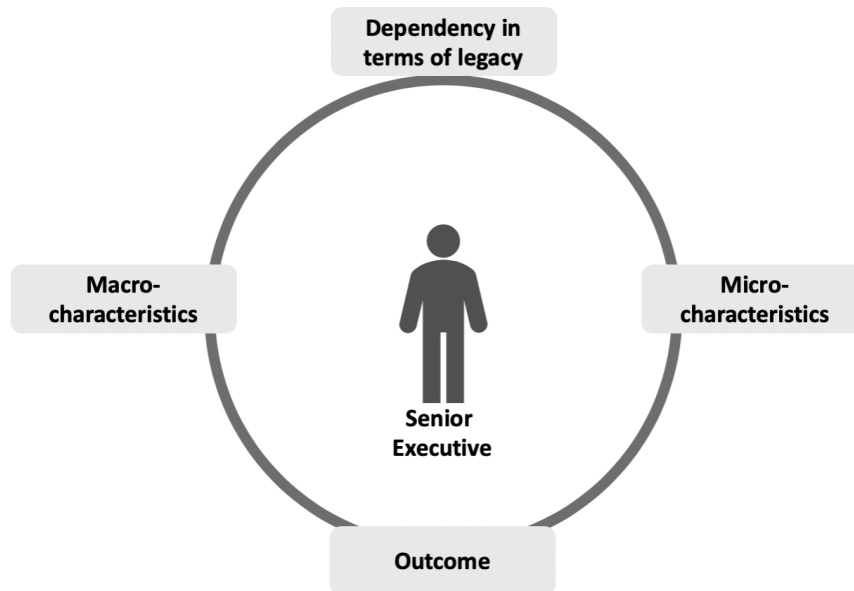
Note. The four shapes with its labels describe in the relations to each other the dependencies—the embedded senior executive is affected from all. Moreover, the Figure 6.8 reflects an approach not to recognize a situation as an isolated component but rather with its interdependencies. The argument is that the responsibility of senior executives is to acknowledge macro- and micro-contextual characteristics in order to be capable to act (Crossan et al., 2008, 2008; Jansen, Vera, & Crossan, 2009).

6.6.2 Concept: Meaningful action

A central concept is that a meaningful action is based on the knowledge to cope with unknown changes. From a practical perspective, effective leadership relies on a functioning leader-follower relationship (Kahai et al., 2003). Transferred to the current situation of business change, the interviewees expressed the demand from employees

to relieve their fears. As such, employees must be involved in transformation at an early stage.

A meaningful action is, therefore, a procedure of engagement with the related context to provide communication to achieve a targeted result. The discussion reflects this with the concept of the meaningful action; especially in situations where the objectives are new to the organisation. It was a recurring observed property expressed among all participants that the application of a meaningful action is dominated characteristic.

A senior executive must involve contextual dependencies in communication. The significant aspect with influence on the meaningful action is, therefore, the relationship to and association with the context (Osborn & Uhl-Bien, 2002; Osborn et al., 2014; Oc, 2018). In addition, the values and beliefs of the leader framed by the leadership culture are how issues are interpreted and acted upon (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000; Greer & Carter, 2013).

The choices and decisions that leaders make affect the organisation's performance and effectiveness (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000; Greer & Carter, 2013). Scholars frequently combine the concept of communication and leadership. Liden & Antonakis (2009) argued that leadership in principle is rooted in context and is an interactive event related to communication.

This applies to the meaningful action, where senior executives must communicate a full contextual picture. Figure 6.9 show this.

Figure 6.9

Concept: Meaningful action
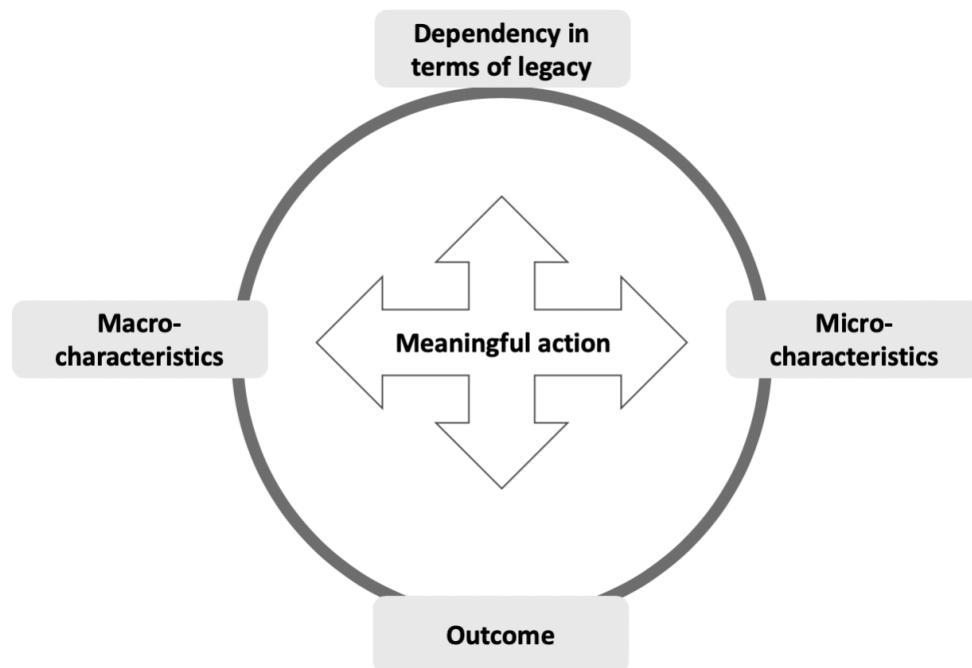
6.6.3 Concept: Ambidexterity

Ambidexterity is developed as a second concept through the code-to-theory process. This signifies the need to incorporate more than one dimension when considering the approach to leadership. In the literature, Duncan (1976) was one of the first to introduce the term, ambidexterity, which was later developed and analysed more thoroughly by March (1991).

From the perspective of senior executives, ambidexterity refers to the ability to balance exploration and exploitation, to adapt to environmental changes while relying on existing methods of business (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). Exploration refers to searching, risk-taking, experimentation, and innovation, whereas exploitation has to do with refinement, efficiency, implementation, and execution (Gianzina-

Kassotaki, 2017). Network 6.13 breaks up the arrangement in Figures 6.9 and 6.10 to transform these dependencies into a network diagram. This depicts the additional relationship to the applied improvement and meaningful action.

Figure 6.10 takes the previously developed dependency further and places ambidexterity as a central feature.

Figure 6.10

Concept: Ambidexterity
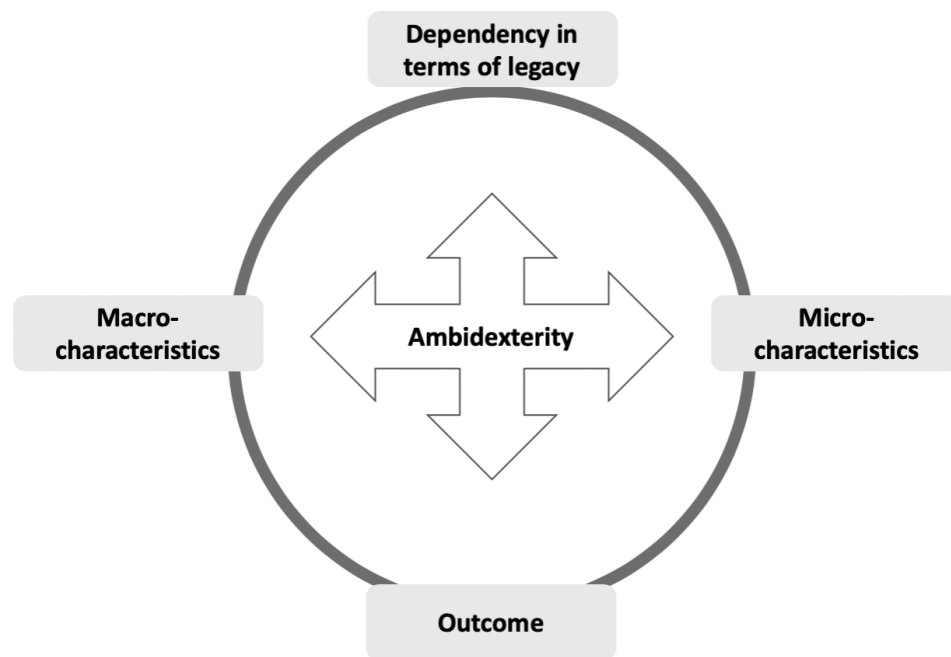
Senior executives play a key role in facilitating ambidexterity. With this consideration, the senior executives must assess the internal and external dependencies. Network 6.13 shows that the associated ambidexterity is an interaction within dynamic business disruption and legacy. In addition, from a practical

perspective, ambidexterity materialises as part of the applied improvements and represents a meaningful action in the approach to leadership. A main feature of ambidexterity as an improvement to the approach to leadership is the ability to manage the legacy and simultaneously have a hand on the innovation used to lead the company into the new business situation.

Network 6.13

Relationship ambidexterity
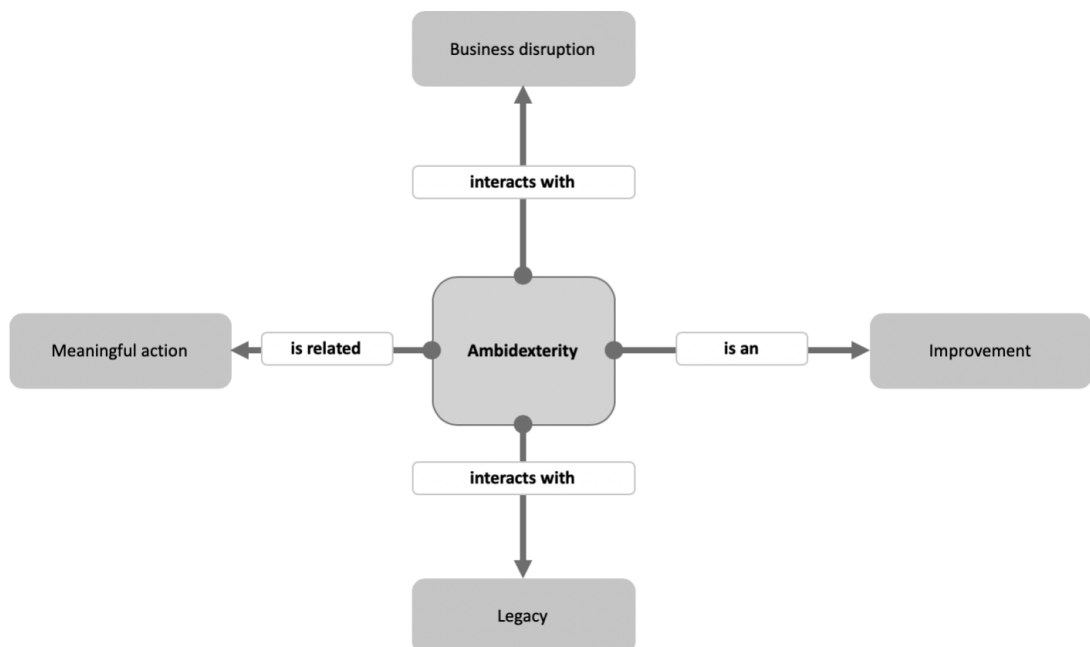
6.7 Solution

Based on the previous discussion of dependencies, this section presents a solution for the described problem by applying further the code-to-theory procedure. The actual problem-solving, as such, incorporates the application of the discussed concepts toward a particular solution (Morgan, 2016).

In general, senior executives implement a targeted approach in order to cope with challenges and implement a transformation accordingly. The applied approach is to establish an entangled consideration of micro and macro-characteristics concerning the demands for the new, but also the demands from the operational legacy. The solution expressed that the senior executive performs an action to achieve the envisioned outcome. The contextual integration into the construction of this action is an essential criterion for improving the approach to leadership because the action is embedded in the context where the leadership occurs.

In this regard, the legacy is consistently an expression of the old organisation, leadership, and behaviour, but it is also an indispensable contextual dependency. This legacy appears on broader organisational level but also in corporate procedure and behaviours. To implement a meaningful action to achieve an anticipated outcome, ambidexterity is expressed as an applied implementation of action to cope with the problematic situation.

This implementation includes dealing with the complexity of the situation as well as with the contextual relationship. It is the practical representation of the entangled view. Network 6.14 combines the previously discussed relationships and dependencies, and it presents the outline of the solution.

Network 6.14

Outline of the solution
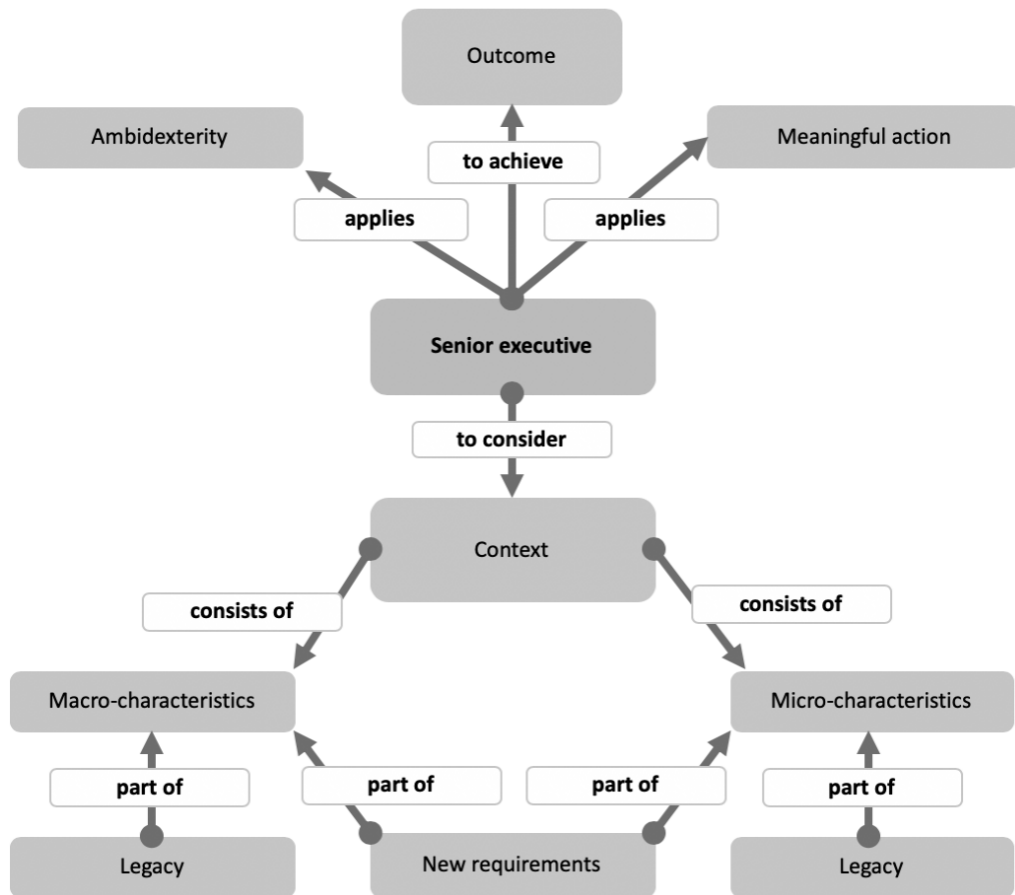
Note. This outline indicates that the new requirements and the legacy are properties of the context where the actual leadership happens. Osborn et al. (2002) contended that the effectiveness of leadership is embedded in context. To be able to engage with the context, senior executives must be able to read the context and act accordingly. Leadership in the organisation takes place in the context of the organisation. Therefore, senior executives can fail unless they realize the significance of the context.

Network 6.15 extracts the new requirements that represent the demands emergent from the business change. These new requirements are properties of macro- and micro-characteristics, but it also is an essential area in the consideration of legacy domains.

Network 6.15 Relationships of new requirements

Relationships of new requirements
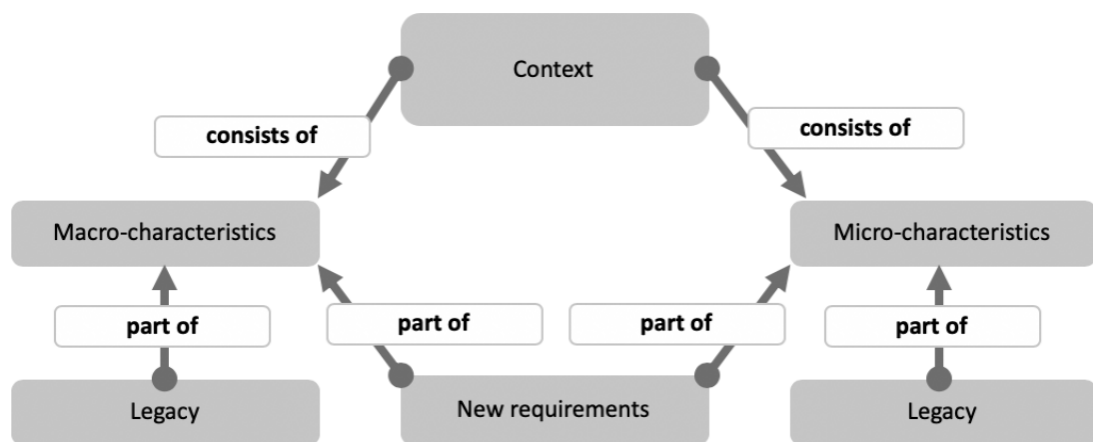
The further detailed visualisation of the solution is concerned with the envisioned outcome. The senior executive is related to the context and must perform a consideration accordingly, afterwards a meaningful action and ambidexterity is applied while reflecting the contextual dependency. This implicitly calls for ambidexterity as a predominant contextually dependent quality of the action that ensures alignment with the legacy and related context as the central component of the solution. Network 6.16 portrays this relationship.

Network 6.16

The contextual consideration to achieve an outcome
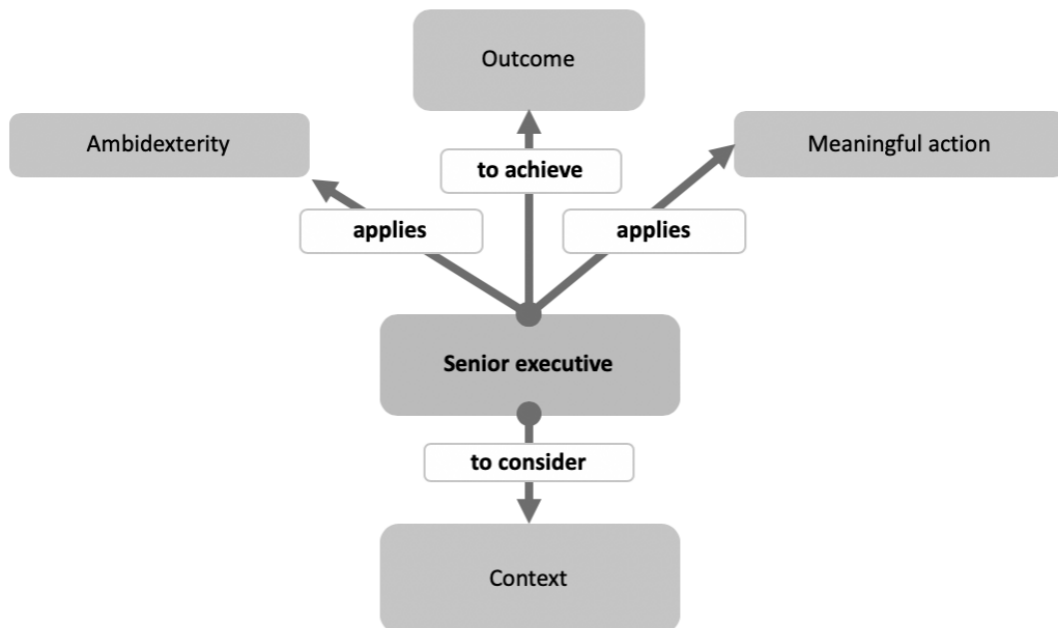
In summary, for the achievement of an envisioned outcome, the senior executive considers the contextual dependencies and applies a combination of ambidexterity and meaningful action to support this. The consideration emphasizes the importance of leadership in context. It exposes that the acknowledgement of context is an integral aspect of the leadership discipline.

6.8   Discussion of the Solution Outline

The analysis demonstrates that the described industrial change is faster and less predictable. These new issues and novel circumstances require senior executives to take a different approach to what is already established. They must be able to respond even when there is no prominent framework of experience. The emphasis is on a consideration of the dependencies in relation to the legacy organisation and the

simultaneous development of a new way of thinking. This expressed interdependence includes a push to change the established leadership culture and transform this legacy organisation, which enormously raises the complexity.

Figure 6.11 embodies the merger of the conceptual framework with the solution from Network 6.14 into a unified illustration. This represents the assertion as a result of the code-to-theory procedure.

Figure 6.11

Combined view of the conceptual framework and developed solution
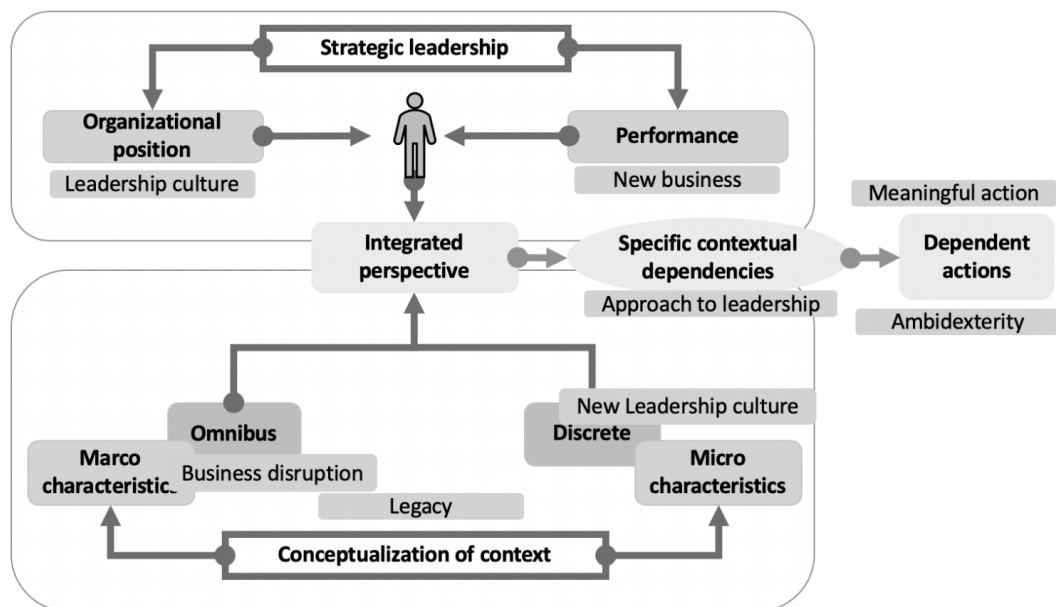
Note. The inserted terms from the developed solution to the defined problem do not implicitly express a conclusive and deterministic consequence.

The developed solution presents a result in terms of the demand to enhance the approach to leadership to cope with the changing business. Osborn et al. (2002) posited the need for an essential modification in perspective, which goes beyond a more

traditional way of considering leadership because the context in which leaders operate is radically different and diverse. The requirement for an integrated perspective is based on the challenges that come with the anticipated future demand. Among others, the increasing application of digitalisation, greater competition and time pressure, and the need to continually innovate are significant characteristics. Senior executives must deal with a variety of complex and usually contradictory challenges because the existing processes and procedures of the enterprise are grounded in a long-established business model. The developed concepts of *meaningful action* and *ambidexterity* is inherently challenging—it includes the simultaneous pursuit of exploration and exploitation in the same business unit and an appropriate communication (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004; Hamann, 2017; Wang & Rafiq, 2014).

BMW as a company must keep running as fast as it can in order to stay in the game. The improvement to the approach to leadership is this ambidextrous perspective and execution. This is based on the contextual consideration which deals with the application of a two-sided approach to leadership to handle the existing and relevant legacy. Yet it reaches for the new at the same time. This is a remarkably consistent pattern that emerged from the data.

In addition, in dynamic markets like that in which BMW resides, the company must continuously innovate while being effective in terms of their organisational setup because the duration of competitive advantage is very uncertain. Along with the ambidextrous perspective, the expectation of the application of meaningful actions also emerged. Senior executives are pushed to set long-term goals for the organisation through mission- and vision-building exercises conveyed through appropriate communication.

According to Wang (2018), strategic leaders must anticipate or envision the future. This necessarily entails understanding multiple levels of context, from the encompassing global context to the organisation and to the employees themselves. Fairhurst (2009) and Pye & Pettigrew (2005) proposed to add attention to more situated and practice-oriented approaches to the understanding of leadership.

The entangled perspective of macro- and micro- characteristics of the context unveiled how senior executives render the specific contextual dependencies and respond accordingly. The solution provides a more holistic picture of the interaction of change and reaction, and it underscores the dependent action as a consequence.

6.9   Summary

The aim of this research was to develop an improvement for a determined problematic situation by developing an appropriate solution. The determination of the problematic situation was conducted with an analysis of collected data from either senior executives or from external consultants. The analysis uncovered, on one hand, the characterisation of the current economic situation and, on the other hand, the relevant consideration of macro- and micro-contextual dependencies.

This pragmatic case study views the problem not as an isolated event, but rather in its full context (Duram, 2010). The improvement emerged from an entanglement of macro- and micro-characteristics with the cross dependency to the legacy aspects of the organisation. The entanglement here means the interconnectedness of the individual parts and their acknowledgement. Consequential *meaningful action* and *ambidexterity* are two concepts of the execution toward the

anticipated outcome. This approach includes the requirement to continuously consider the legacy characteristics.

This qualitative analysis has brought to the fore several aspects of leadership that might otherwise have been unexplored—interdependencies derived from the analysis of the findings that are vital for the research of this topic. The connection of senior executives acting in a micro and macro-specific context reflects the complexity of the current business. To implement an approach that fits all is not applicable or sufficient for this challenge when specific contextual dependencies are neglected. The improvement emerged from the experiences of the interviewees along with the performed and related actions.

This research differentiates itself from previous work in that context was addressed in a manner that owes much to the long-established models of situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982) or contingent leadership (Fiedler, 1978; Vroom & Jago, 2007). This research is comparatively novel and based on practical experience with qualitative guidance. As stated, the acknowledgement of context is not adequately considered in the current literature (Iszatt-White, 2011; Johns, 2006; Porter & McLaughlin, 2006). Nevertheless, the contextual view can explain how individuals act and cope in relation to anticipated outcomes. Context placed at the centre of the consideration provides a value-add in terms of the understanding of the approach to leadership in the business disruption of BMW.

However, this analysis recognised that contextualisation presents itself as a selection of points of reference (Felski, 2011). The considered interdependencies can be only a partial assessment of an entire system. Correspondingly, Chemers (1997) stated that "leadership processes are complex enough that not all perspectives can be addressed simultaneously" (Chemers, 1997, p. 163).

The assertion derived from the code-to-theory procedure finally represents a substantial improvement to the leadership approach at BMW. The combination of ambidexterity with meaningful action represents a solution to the dominant contextual dependency a senior executive is facing. The consistent application of knowledge regarding dependencies in the approach to leadership is necessary to sustainably persist in the dynamic, changing, and developing automotive business.

Chapter 7. Conclusions

The last six chapters presented a line of reasoning through the different facets of this study. This structure indicates the structure of this research project, in which the components have been assembled consecutively. Moreover, the exposition laid out the importance from theoretical and practical perspectives. The study included the consideration of the different findings and a transformation of the derived problem statement into a solution. The purpose of this line of activities was to establish the relationship between contextual dependencies and dependent actions.

This chapter presents the conclusions of the study, beginning with a detailed overview of the research objectives and their corresponding results in Section 7.1. Based on this, Section 7.2 discusses the answer to the research question and Section 7.3 describes the contributions of the study. The limitations are found in Section 7.4 and the final remarks and concluding comments in Section 7.5.

7.1   Research Aim and Objectives

As stated in the introduction, the aim of this research was to critically examine leadership in situ as conducted by senior executives at BMW. To achieve the aim, the researcher defined specific objectives. In terms of the aim and objectives and how they were achieved, it is important to acknowledge that the research accomplishments corresponded with the research paradigm. The collected data revealed that senior executives are exposed to massive change in the industry and that a new approach is mandatory to remain competitive. Hence, possible improvements were explored and assessed in terms of applicability based on experiences. The research approach allowed investigation of the emergent subjects, which called for theory-building rather

than theory-testing (Cardon et al., 2009; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). The theory-building process included application, integration, and meaning in daily life rather than dealing with their theoretical meaning or generalisation per se. Table 7.1 reviews the research objectives and summarises the corresponding results.

Table 7.1

Research objectives and their achievement in the research

Objective	Corresponding result
To conduct a critical review of the academic literature to assess the association between strategic leadership and contextual leadership.	An extensive literature review was conducted with peer-reviewed articles, industry reports, and books that allowed the identification of the research gap and concluded with the development of a conceptual framework.
To capture the experiences of leadership within the actual changes in the industry from both directly employed BMW senior executives and non-employed external senior consultants.	Senior executives and, as an additional external data source, senior consultants were interviewed. The data unveiled the complexity of the current situation and how the senior executives adapted their actions to cope with this situation.
To identify critical aspects of the dynamic business environment which help explain the approaches to leadership adopted by senior executives at BMW	The developed and derived problem expression exposes the critical aspects as relationships and showed the importance of the business disruption as the reason for the significant changes in the company and

Objective	Corresponding result
	accordingly for the approach to leadership. The macro and micro-characteristics are parts of the entire business disruption and interact to each other. The leadership culture change is a consequence from the changing circumstances. The solution developed upon the problem description followed the pragmatic inquiry approach. The combination of ambidexterity with meaningful action represents a solution in terms of the context.
To recommend enhancements in practice for senior executives at BMW	The recommendation put forward a enhanced approach to leadership at BMW. This recommendation is comprised by a combination of ambidexterity with a meaningful action. The consistent application of knowledge regarding contextual dependencies in the approach to leadership is necessary to sustainably persist in the dynamic and changing automotive business.

7.2   Response to the Research Question

It is important to present a concise answer to the research question. That answer is summarised in this section, allowing for further discussion of implications for knowledge and practice. The research question was derived from the research gap that recognised the importance of exploring leadership in context.

The answer is a synthesis of the findings of the literature review and analysis of the data (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The research question addressed the problem rooted in the automotive industry and especially at BMW, where the business shifts drive the demand for leadership change and improvement. At a macro-level, senior executives are faced with tighter regulation, more demanding consumers, disruptive new players, unfamiliar technologies, and increasingly complex global market challenges. At a micro-level, new actions, leadership culture, and applied improvements are necessary as a response to the occurring changes and shifts. As such, BMW must equip and prepare senior executives with an ambidextrous mindset that can cope with the pressures and fundamental changes of the business to remain competitive.

Hence, the answer is an *ambidextrous-meaningful-action* to applied in the approach to leadership. This ambidexterity appears at different levels and in different contextual dependencies. The acknowledgement of these dependencies sharpens the applicability of new actions according to changes in the business.

7.3   Research Contributions

The Doctor of Business Administration thesis is meant to contribute to knowledge as well as to practice. Figure 7.1 presents the different pillars of the research contribution. The contributions to practice as well as to knowledge are summarised in the next four sections.

Figure 7.1.

Parts of the research contribution
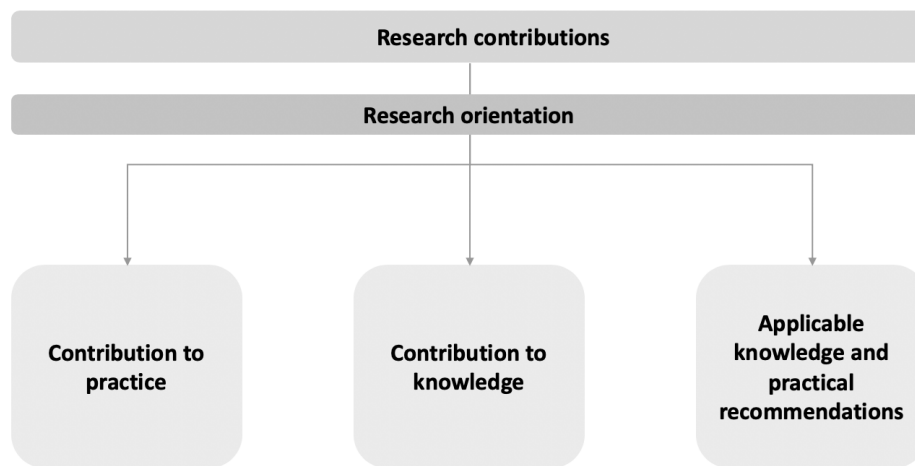
Accordingly, this dissertation takes up the challenge of formulating an answer that fits the contemporary context, while building on senior executives' knowledge and experience. This research does this by providing theoretical as well as practical insights for leadership in a specific context and the development of a solution for the emergent and relevant problem.

7.3.1 Research orientation

This thesis offered a novel research strategy to the study of leadership by taking a directly situated approach to the understanding of this topic. The qualitative frame applying pragmatism is concerned with concrete and practical questions that are designed to produce answers that shed light on the nature of leadership practice. Attention is paid to the practical accomplishment of leadership in a given context. Assuming that context influences leader behaviour, effective leaders will seek to actively adjust their behaviours in order to meet their own and their followers' expectations in different contexts (Hogg, 2001). It is the premise of this research contribution is to supply an important aspect to leadership research by considering the research topic from an exclusively methodological perspective.

By placing the macro- and micro-characteristics as the context in an entangled manner at the centre stage of the consideration and explaining the practice of leadership as an inherently contextual performance, the thesis offers a relatively untapped approach to the understanding of leadership. This qualitative research into leadership sees the nature as an important feature. In it is essentially a call for a greater emphasis on the contextual nature of leadership processes. Alvesson and Deetz (2006) proposed a move toward an increased focus on local patterns. Such a shift toward greater recognition of unique leadership configurations would be in tune with the contextual nature of leadership (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006).

7.3.2 *Contribution to practice*

The practical contribution is based on the unique opportunity to locate this research inside BMW—one of Germany's prime industrial organisations—and gain insights from participants. This collection, investigation, and analysis of experiences provided a view of leadership in a specific context and surrounding the actions to preserve the business performed in the disruptive circumstances. The practical application of this investigation into the modification of the leadership approach in response to the changing environment during the transformation of the automotive industry offers a better understanding of those dependencies. The new CEO of BMW, Oliver Zirspe, restated the relevance of leadership change under consideration of an ambidextrous perspective (Zirspe as cited in Afhüppe, 2019):

> "We experience the simultaneity of great challenges: Emission reduction, digitalisation and autonomous driving—to name a few. We must penetrate all these fields very carefully but at the same time" (p.1).

In general, the essence of a pragmatist ontology is actions and change; mapped to the case of senior executives acting in a world which is in a constant state of becoming. Action is the way to change existence. To effect changes in desired ways, action must be guided by purpose and knowledge (Dewey, 1931). To connect the position, this study was carried out at the human resources department of BMW as an initiative regarding workforce analytics during the period from August 2017 to December 2018. The researcher was engaged as an external academic counsellor for this topic. Besides the academic focus, there was applicability to the company's employees as a crucial element of this engagement. The defined practical scope was the response for the identified object to provide insights into the interdependencies of

strategic leadership in general and into the relationship of strategic leaders to their context in particular. This approach was chosen to prepare for an improvement strategy. It was articulated as project objective to formulate appropriate insights because of the criticality to the success of BMW.

7.3.3   Contribution to knowledge

Some academics, such as Boal and Hooijberg (2000) and Oc (2018) argue that leadership theories avoid a deeper consideration of macro and micro contextual dependencies, or even context in general. Some of their models of leadership have considered impact in a manner that either overlooked or simplified the context in which the senior executive is embedded (e.g., Rosenhead, Franco, Grint, & Friedland, 2019; Zaccaro, Green, Dubrow, & Kolze, 2018).

Hence, despite the vital aspect, little research has been conducted concerning the linkage of context to strategic leadership (Greer & Carter, 2013; Oc, 2018). Instead, the focus was at the lower level and mid-level managers, dyadic relationships, or rather unspecific situational descriptions (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000; Carter & Greer, 2013; Northouse, 2016).

However, recent developments in the field of leadership research have led to a renewed interest in the aspects of contextual leadership (Day & Antonakis, 2018; Dinh et al., 2014; Gardner et al., 2010; Lauritsen & Ayman, 2018; Oc, 2018). Moreover, recent empirical efforts have called for more research on strategic leadership (Antonakis, 2018; Wang, 2018).

Nevertheless, there is a demand in terms of what constitutes context and how senior executives at a strategic level perceive this and act accordingly (Ayman &

Adams, 2012; Hannah, Uhl-Bien, Avolio, & Cavaretta, 2009; Osborn, Hunt, & Jauch, 2002; Porter & McLaughlin, 2006). In general, research in the domain of leadership began without paying much attention to contextual characteristics (Iszatt-White, 2011; Moir, 2017; Osborn et al., 2002, Oc, 2018; Avolio, 2007). With those sorts of research approaches, contextual characteristics were often considered at a system level rather than as specific conditions facing a particular group of people (Day, 2014).

Therefore, this study's contribution comes through the development of an entangled perspective on contextual and strategic aspects of the leadership approach, and then it applies this perspective to a single case study. This approach takes the demand of scholars and pays more attention to an integrative or combined way forward, which connects earlier leadership theories with emergent leadership theories to create a specific focus on strategic leadership (Antonakis, Bendahan, Jacquart, & Lalive, 2010; Avolio, 2007; Bonardi et al., 2018).

This study facilitates a new way of thinking about complexity, relevance, and dependencies of leadership in context and the contribution of qualitative leadership research. Especially on this last point, the researcher follows the viewpoint of Bryman (2004)—qualitative research is committed to a contextual understanding where behaviour and context form an inextricably linked unit. Consequently, this research follows Crossan, Vera, and Nanjad (2008), developing a holistic, content-domain view of strategic leaders dealing with the unique challenges posed by the highly dynamic business of the automotive industry (Crossan et al., 2008).

Finally, from a methodology perspective and according to Gephart (2004), qualitative research can advance the field by providing unique, memorable, and theoretically meaningful contributions to the study of leadership (Gephart, 2004). In leadership research, several calls have been issued for increased attention to the

context (Day & Antonakis, 2011; Dinh et al., 2014; Gardner et al., 2010; Oc, 2018) because the rationale is derivable such that contextual grounding is essential for the understanding of the meanings of actions conducted by senior executives.

An important consequence of this lack of attention is that context with regard to strategic leadership is not adequately conceptualised and empirically explored. Instead, there has been a focus on testing individual contextual factors with an approach that aims for a comprehensive generic theory (Day & Antonakis, 2011; Dinh et al., 2014; Gardner et al., 2010; Oc, 2018).

This study has shown that relationships and interdependencies are complex structures and the challenge is to provide an appropriate exploration. The threat is that an quantitative approach leads to a condition where researchers end up as "prisoners in the positivistic trap" (Dubois & Gadde, 2002, p. 559). In this regard, it is questionable that a quantitative perspective can merely combine all the potential contextual factors and explore in-depth interrelationships (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Osborn et al., 2014).

7.3.4 *Applicable knowledge*

The analysis of the data with the derived problem and developed solution represents a contribution to practice and explicitly to applicable knowledge. This view is essential for pragmatism (Rescher, 2016; Goldkuhl, 2015). In this regard, the gained knowledge is useful for action and change.

One of the greatest challenges at BMW is cultural change inside the company. The obstacles and weaknesses are rigid hierarchies, well-worn thought patterns, and the pride of being better than the competition. However, the dependent view of

strategic leadership and contextual dependency with the notion of micro- and macro-characteristic supports this transformation. The problem and the proposed solution have applicability and value. Concerning the practice of leadership, the focus on ambidexterity is a valuable outcome of the proposed solution. Despite the task of building the business, executives must always consider the legacy organisation with its products, workforce, and processes. The improvement to the approach to leadership takes that into account.

Furthermore, the proposed solution is applicable to the development of individual leadership behaviours with an adaptation to the specific contextual dependencies. The senior executives observed that the existing and developed actions stem from their experiences. They take up this change, formulate meaningful actions from it, and convert them with ambidexterity. The interviews expressed this with the ambition to implement a modern approach in combination with a more classical approach to leadership. This reflects ambidexterity as an enablement for this balanced approach to leadership. The predominant contextual dependencies of new requirements, technologies, and customer expectations will cause executives to rethink, thereby having to master both by applying ambidexterity.

However, the old industrial production system still exists. There is a need to consider how the old-fashioned command-and-control management chains work in combination with innovative, agile work models. The senior executives engaged in innovation pursue new knowledge and develop products and services for emerging customers and markets. However, this innovation must build on existing knowledge resources and extend existing products and services for current markets.

The SEs and ECs stated their concerns that talents from younger technology industries, coupled with the need for faster decision-making, will make the

hierarchical command-and-control structures of the past give way to increasingly flatter, more fluid systems with more decentralized responsibility. Less rigid ways of working will increase the need for leaders who understand ambiguity, are flexible in their approach, and are able to shift their focus from strategic to operational and back again quickly. However, this contradiction to legacy was highlighted by most of the interviewees. The current business model generates profit for the investments needed for the anticipated future so it will take time and a different approach to leadership to adjust to the requirements from both sides.

Finally, the applicable knowledge is appraised by reflection and assessment from the interviewees as valuable for their actions performed as senior executives. As stated, BMW must equip their senior executives with an ambidextrous mindset that can cope with the pressures and fundamental changes of the businesses to remain competitive.

7.4   Limitations of this Research

This research was established under the knowledge of limitations discussed earlier. The purpose of the research was not to drill deeper into ambidextrous leadership. The researcher recognised that, with respect to ambidextrous leadership, just a few studies provide insights into what specific behaviours (Rogan & Mors, 2014; Tuncdogan, Van Den Bosch, & Volberda, 2015) and leadership styles accomplish ambidexterity (at the micro-level) (Good & Michel, 2013; Havermans, Den Hartog, Keegan, & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Luo, Zheng, Ji, & Liang, 2018) and how organisational constraints influence ambidextrous leadership (at the macro-level) (Yitzhack Halevi,

Carmeli, & Brueller, 2015). It is beyond the scope of this research to link micro-level behaviours of ambidextrous leaders with their macro-level activities.

Furthermore, the research recognises that there are more contextual dependencies, but to develop feasible research, the scope was narrowed. The researcher's limitation is in making decisions about how much detail and complexity to include in the research context.

7.5   Directions for further Research

For a potential further direction of research which builds upon this study various topics are detectable. Generally, research in leadership has long recognised the importance of context for the leadership process and its outcomes (e.g. Oc, 2018). Accordingly, context can act as a noticeable influence on leadership. Because of its variety of influences and impacts, context can be considered in future research from different perspectives, e.g. macro or micro orientated.

First, the consideration of the research limitations provides, at the same time, interesting areas for future research. The claims made in this thesis are context-depended in relation to BMW. Hence, from a case study perspective, it would be beneficial to explore the differences between senior executives from different automotive companies. Additionally, a comparison between new vendors (e.g. Tesla) and the incumbents would provide a useful view on contextual leadership research. In this regard a multiple case design could provide supplementary inside into this topic (Yin, 2018).

From a data collection perspective there is a considerable strong and consistent evidence that situation, context, and contingencies matter in understanding and

studying leadership. For the future in leadership research, researchers might want to consider situational factors when examining the relationship between traits and outcomes. When assessing context, it could be beneficial to examine and to triangulate data collected from multiple perspectives and sources of evidence (Antonakis, 2018)—upon this a mixed-method research design could provide variation in terms of the insight (Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006).

From a time and methods perspective, it is reasonable for future research to conduct longitudinal research. A longitudinal study in terms of the applied research design could provide additional perceptions with repeated observations of the same circumstances over short or long periods of time (McLeod, MacDonell, & Doolin, 2011). Moreover, by applying observation to collect data by watching senior executives at work could add a different point of view.

7.6   Concluding Comments

This thesis began with a quote from John Dewey:

"A problem well put is half solved." (Dewey, 1938, p. 108)

Guided by this quote, the detailed description and characterisation of the underlying problem provided the approach to the developed solution. As a predominant circumstance, technology is forcing an unprecedented transformation of the automotive industry, and of BMW in particular. Associated with this transformation is the requirement for a new and more diversified business model (Towers-Clark, 2019). This need is associated with the claim of implementing a novel approach to leadership that copes with these changes and sustains a profitable business.

Based on the data, the problem was identified, described, and analysed, and then transformed into a solution. The presentation of the solution with its integrated concepts expressed the most prominent resulting relationships. These emergent relationships explicitly called for an application of an ambidextrous approach to leadership. The network analysis emphasised that a simultaneous pursuit of different contextual aspects is imperative.

In dynamic markets, the continuous demand to innovate is threatening BMW, but parts of the organisational structure and mindset are still embedded in traditional behaviours and circumstances. The former, more stable automotive market appeared to be easier to satisfy; BMW had longer periods of exploitation and short bursts of exploration (Birkinshaw & Gupta, 2013; Prasad & Junni, 2016). This transformation of the automotive industry is forcing BMW to accept the demand for approaches to leadership that are different from those needed a decade ago under more stable market conditions. The analysis showed that senior executives perceived the current situation as a major challenge and confrontation in terms of the methods and processes of the incumbent approaches to leadership. The senior executives recognised the pressure to change the existing structures because they are no longer applicable; behaviour and business are in a fundamental reorientation.

It is a consequence of this consideration that the same exercises in a different context could be received and oriented differently as a result of different understandings. What has been undertaken in this research effort is a practical approach to the study of leadership in context, with an empirical illustration of how the combination of strategic leadership and contextual dependencies provides insights into the day-to-day practice of senior leadership. Thus, this research helps to fill the

gap in knowledge about applied leadership and how context determines leadership actions.

The data underlying this research show that leadership is a necessarily situated occurrence. The improvement of the approach to leadership is expressed by an ambidextrous behaviour, which aims to achieve the expected result with targeted actions. An instrument is the consideration of contextual dependencies shown in this study. This improvement to the approach to leadership at BMW comprises the application of an ambidextrous leadership approach, which deals with the relevant legacy and simultaneously implements that which is new. This expression of balanced approach is the essence of the present research. BMW senior executives must find a way to implement innovations and changes while considering the current circumstances. In doing so, the consideration of context is a decisive characteristic of the application of leadership. To anticipate the future, an understanding of contextual dependencies at several levels is necessary and, thus, it is a predominant dependency for success.

The approach of this study of leadership in context demonstrates the benefits of a narrow view of macro- and micro-characteristics. In addition, the study linked predominant contextual conditions with practical applicability. Consequently, this research supports BMW senior executives in implementing a new approach to leadership. This understanding and the applicability of leadership in context to the daily practice of leadership represents the practical value of this work and solves the problem encountered in this situation of significant business disruption.

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APPENDIX A: INDICATIVE INTERVIEW THEMES

This appendix includes the semi-structured interview questions and indicative themes.

- What challenges do you see with regard to the market, competition, and innovations? (*situational description*)
- How do you see the relationship between leaders and employees in this environment? (*leader-employee relationship*)
- What are the key factors of business change, internally and externally? (*macro and micro*)
- How would you characterise an effective leader in disruptive times? (*strategic leadership*)
- How would you characterise business effectiveness in disruptive times? (*strategic leadership*)
- What are potential changes in terms of measurement of leadership? (*measurement criteria*)
- What do you think about future leadership in the automotive sector? (*strategic leadership*)
- How would you characterise business effectiveness in disruptive times? (*strategic leadership*)
- What are potential changes in terms of measurement of effectiveness? (*measurement criteria*)
- How would you bring this knowledge into action? (*functional pragmatism*)

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Edinburgh Napier University, for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration, represents my own work and has not been previously submitted to this or any other institution for any degree.

All verbatim quotes have been marked in the text. All sources have been acknowledged and are included in the list of references.

Herten, August 2020

Ulrich Clarenbach