



Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet  
Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

Department of Economics

# **Leadership skills developed through horse experiences and their usefulness for business leaders**

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**Credits:** 30 hec

**Level:** A2E

**Course title:** Independent project/degree in Business Administration

**Course code:** EX0782

**Programme/Education:** Agricultural Programme - Economics and Management

**Faculty:** Faculty of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences

**Place of publication:** Uppsala

**Year of publication:** 2015

**Name of Series:** Degree project/SLU, Department of Economics

**No:** 984

**ISSN** 1401-4084

**Online publication:** <http://stud.epsilon.slu.se>

**Key words:** business leaders, emotional intelligence, equestrian, leadership, leadership skills, horse experiences



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# Acknowledgements

I would like to start by saying how grateful I am for my years at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences. It has been a couple of exciting and valuable but also challenging years. The university has given me experiences that I will never forget and for that I am very thankful.

Without my interviewees, I would not have been able to complete this thesis. Therefore, I would like to thank the five interviewed business leaders for the interesting and valuable interviews. Thank you for sharing your experiences!

Thank you Gabriella Thorell for the literature you suggested and the articles you sent me. They were very useful. I would also like to thank my supervisor Richard Ferguson. You have supported me throughout this journey and provided valuable feedback and ideas. At last, I would like to thank my family and friends for their support and patience during this process.

Uppsala, August 2015

Josefin Fransson

# Abstract

Recent research suggests that experiences with horses may help individuals to develop leadership skills. It is argued that leadership skills are developed through the interactions and relationships with the horses, and also in the social context of the stable environment. This research has been reported in the general media, leading to statements claiming that individuals with equestrian backgrounds have strong leadership skills and that the business leaders of the future will come from equestrian backgrounds. However, to date there has been little research on how useful the specific leadership skills that are developed through horse experiences actually are in business settings. The aim in this thesis is therefore to get a better understanding of how the leadership skills that are developed through horse experiences are actually perceived to be useful in business settings. To address this aim, interviews with five business leaders have been conducted to gather accounts of how their horse experiences have helped them in their business careers.

The theoretical frame of reference is largely based on Goleman's (2000) emotional intelligence framework, which includes the four capabilities of self-management, self-awareness, social awareness and social skills. This basic framework is supplemented with other leadership skills identified in the literature as being important in successful business leadership. The analysis of the interview data shows that confidence, assertiveness, communication skills, emotional control and power-of-action are particular leadership skills that the interviewed business leaders believe they developed through their horse experiences and have found useful in their business careers. These findings lead to the conclusion that the development of these leadership skills are not only useful in work with horses and in equestrian environments, but that once developed, these leadership skills can also be of use in subsequent business careers.

The interviews provide evidence showing that the confidence developed through equestrian experiences is useful in business settings as it makes leaders more willing to face problems and take on new challenges. Similarly, the interviews revealed that the assertiveness learned through handling horses is useful in business leader roles in getting co-workers to accept the leadership. Furthermore, the clear and straightforward way of communicating that is crucial to develop in the stable is an essential skill for business leaders since it is useful in directing co-workers in a clear way and keep them motivated. The interviewed leaders also described how work with horses was highly valued during their business careers, as it was a way for the leaders to de-stress and maintain emotional control. Lastly, the interviewed leaders reported that the power-of-action fostered through their equestrian backgrounds has helped them to be driven and take a head-on approach to problems in their business careers.

At the same time, in some of the interviews the leaders question whether it was their equestrian experience that had led to the development of some of the discussed leadership skills, or if the development of these skill should be attributed to somewhere else, such as their upbringing or certain personality traits. Relatedly, there may be a selection bias in those who take interest in working with horses: It may be that horses attract certain types of people – such as individuals with high leadership potential – who are apt to develop leadership skills regardless of the activities they engage in. More research will be needed to clarify these uncertainties.

# Sammanfattning

Forskning visar att människor utvecklar ledaregenskaper när de interagerar med hästar och vistas i stallmiljöer. Denna forskning ligger till grund för de många artiklar som har skrivits i media om hur framtidens företagsledare fostras i stallet. Trots att ledaregenskaperna som utvecklas i stallet till stor del matchar kompetenserna i Golemans (2000) ramverk för emotionell intelligens och andra ledaregenskaper som är viktiga för framgångsrikt ledarskap inom företagsvärlden så finns det ingen forskning som säger att ledaregenskaperna som skapas i stallet är användbara för företagsledare. Målet i denna uppsats är därför att få en bättre förståelse för hur användbara ledaregenskaperna som skapas i stallet är inom företagsvärlden. Fem företagsledare med hästbakgrund har intervjuats för att ta reda på vilken nytta de har haft av sin hästbakgrund genom deras karriär.

Det teoretiska ramverket för uppsatsen utgår ifrån Golemans (2000) ramverk för emotionell intelligens där de fyra kompetenserna självuppfattning, självbehärskning, social medvetenhet och social färdighet ingår. Ytterligare ledaregenskaper som är viktiga för framgångsrikt ledarskap inom företagsvärlden har också använts för att öka förståelsen för hur användbara ledaregenskaperna som skapas genom hästerfarenheter kan vara i företagsvärlden. De intervjuade företagsledarna beskrev att självförtroende, bestämdhet, kommunikation, emotionell kontroll och handlingskraft var egenskaper som de hade utvecklat tack vare sin hästbakgrund och att de också hade haft användning för dessa egenskaper under sin karriär. Slutsatsen är därför att ledaregenskaperna inte bara är användbara i relation till hästen och i stallmiljöer utan att egenskaperna också kan vara användbara i företagsvärlden.

Självförtroendet som företagsledarna utvecklade tack vare sin hästbakgrund gjorde dem villiga att möta nya utmaningar under karriären och orädda att ta tag i problem. Bestämtheten som de lärde sig genom att handskas med hästar var användbart i chefsrollen där det gäller att få medarbetarna att acceptera deras ledarskap. Att kommunicera på ett tydligt sätt är av yttersta vikt när det gäller hästar då det gäller att få dem att förstå vad de ska göra och att hålla dem motiverade. Det är samma sak för företagsledarna, de måste kommunicera på ett tydligt sätt med sina medarbetare för att få dem att förstå och bli motiverade. Företagsledarna sa att hästarna var viktiga under deras karriär eftersom att det var ett sätt för dem att stressa av, få ny energi och återta kontrollen över känslorna. Företagsledarna var drivna och tog tag i saker direkt, detta kan kopplas till det faktum att en hästbakgrund skapar handlingskraft.

Vissa företagsledare var osäkra på om ledaregenskaperna som de utvecklade i stallet verkligen enbart kom från hästbakgrunden. De lyfte möjligheten att en del egenskaper kunde komma från deras uppväxt eller vara en del av deras personlighet. Frågan ställdes också om det är personer med en högre ledarskapspotential som drar sig till ridsporten och att det inte bara är ridsporten som utvecklar ledaregenskaper. Mer forskning behövs för att finna klarhet i dessa frågor.

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# 1 Introduction

The need for effective leadership is widely recognized. Every year, large investments in leadership development programs are made around the world since this is a way for businesses to become successful and to secure their survival (Hotho & Dowling, 2009). However, leadership development programs have received critique. There is no evidence that participants in these programs actually have taken in and put the newly acquired leadership skills into practice (Hotho & Dowling, 2009). Further, it has also been argued that not enough focus lies on the participants' individual and contextual differences and that the effectiveness of leadership development programs may be limited with an overly didactic approach (Hotho & Dowling, 2009). As a consequence, it is not surprising that new ways of finding individuals who possess leadership qualities have come forward, and in this light, attention has recently turned to the equestrian industry.

“Where the business leaders of the future are fostered” is the heading in one of Sweden's business newspaper (Internet, di, 2008). The Swedish National Equestrian Centre is pictured and followed by an article on why the riding school is the perfect place to develop leadership skills that will be useful in a future business career. The connection between horses and the development of leadership skills has received much attention in Swedish media lately (e.g. Internet, chefstidningen, 2014; Internet, chef, 2014; Internet, prevent, 2014; Internet, dt, 2015). Many articles have been written spawned from the research conducted by Forsberg (2007) that raises awareness of the importance and potential of the equestrian sport by identifying the impact horses have on girls. Forsberg found that girls create an identity within the stable culture that makes it easier for them to ignore societies expectations of how young girls “should be”. Additionally, the findings show that girls in an equestrian environment see themselves as energetic, competent and fully able to be leaders. The research also found that other skills that can be developed in equestrian environments are independence, decisiveness, inner strength and the ability to be clear, deterrent and responsible (Forsberg, 2007).

Forsberg (2007) is not the only researcher who has observed that horses can help individuals to develop leadership skills. Other researches' have found a number of additional skills that horses can help individuals to develop, such as confidence (Plymoth, 2008; Forsberg, 2008; Keaveney, 2008; Evans *et al.*, 2009), improved self-awareness (Keaveney, 2008; Evans *et al.*, 2009; Gehrke, 2009), assertiveness (Duff, 2010; Evans *et al.*, 2009; Forsberg, 2008), power-of-action (Forsberg, 2008; Plymoth, 2008), emotional control (Keaveney, 2008), planning (Plymoth, 2008), attentiveness to verbal and non-verbal signals (Plymoth, 2008; Keaveney, 2008; Duff, 2010; Hausberger *et al.*, 2008; Evans *et al.*, 2009), communication and persuasion (Plymoth, 2008; Keaveney, 2008; Hausberger *et al.*, 2008), relationship-building (Keaveney, 2008; Hausberger *et al.*, 2008) and cooperation and teamwork (Plymoth, 2008; Duff, 2010; Hausberger *et al.*, 2008).

However, in contrast to the media statements saying that experiences with horses shape business leaders, the research on the topic does not state that the leadership skills developed from horse experiences are useful in business settings. Instead, most of the research focuses on leadership skills that are built and can be used in relation to the horse and in equestrian environments. If these leadership skills are later useful for business leaders in their daily leader roles is still unexplored.

The development of leadership skills is a function of practice and to become a business leader, it normally takes years of appropriate job training, mentoring and hands-on experiences of problem solving to acquire the skills needed for the position (Mumford *et al.*, 2000c). However, some individuals are more likely to advance in organizations than others depending on their individual characteristics, skills and abilities (Connely *et al.*, 2000). Equestrian practitioners have to practice leadership on a daily basis when handling horses. They also need to face problems that arise when handling horses and deal with these situations immediately in order to be leader of the horse and to earn its trust and respect.

If the leadership that is exercised when handling horses can be transferred to business settings and be as useful in the business context as in the equestrian context, the media statements saying that the business leaders of the future will come from equestrian backgrounds might be true. In that case, leader recruitment firms will have a whole new arena of potential leaders to find candidates from. Especially since many equestrian practitioners have practiced leadership from a very early age. But again, there does not appear to be any research stating that the leadership that is exercised in relation to the horse and in equestrian environments can be transferred to business settings. However, the large amount of leaders with equestrian backgrounds makes it interesting to investigate if these leaders feel that their horse experiences have given them leadership skills that have been useful in their professional careers.

## 1.1 Problem

The link between horse experiences and the development of leadership skills is an emerging field and more research is needed. Swedish media has written about how horses and the equestrian environment create the business leaders of the future based on articles that merely indicate this relationship. Evans *et al.* (2009) state that horses can help individuals to develop certain life skills and the other researchers have studied leadership skills that are developed together with the horse and exercised in that same relationship. If the leadership skills that can be developed from horse experiences also can be used in business settings is still unknown. There is a gap between the research and the media statements since the actual impact that an equestrian background has had on current business leaders has not been studied. In order to fill this gap, this thesis will check the validity of the media statements saying that the future business leaders will come from equestrian backgrounds.

## 1.2 Aim

The existing research does not disclose if the leadership skills that can be developed through horse experiences are useful in business settings or not. To fill this gap, the aim in this thesis is to develop an understanding of how useful the leadership skills that can be developed through horse experiences are perceived to be in business settings.

To address this aim, the following research question has been investigated: How do business leaders with equestrian backgrounds feel that their horse experiences have helped them through their career?



### 1.3 Delimitations

The thesis focuses on the leadership skills horses can help individuals to develop and how useful these skills are at leading positions within the business world. There are researchers that have studied the equestrian sport and its contributions from a gender perspective (Forsberg, 2008) and many of the media statement says that the development of leadership skills through the equestrian sport is a way to get more women at leading positions due to the majority of female practitioners. Despite the strong female domination in equine sports and recreation, this thesis does not focus on the gender perspective. The focus is on the leadership skills that can be developed through equestrian experiences and their usefulness in business settings. Also, since researchers have found that the equestrian sport creates leadership skills, it would be interesting to compare the equestrian sport with other sports in terms of the development of leadership skills, but this thesis focuses on the equestrian sport only.

### 1.4 Structure of thesis

This section presents the structure of the thesis. The thesis starts wide to introduce the reader to the topic. Thereafter the problem will be addressed as well as the aim and the research question of the thesis. The delimitations of the study are also presented in the first chapter. Chapter two presents the method where the research process is presented as well as choices concerning the literature and the theoretical framework. The chapter also includes information of how the interviews were conducted, ethical issues and issues concerning the quality assurance in the research process. The literature review and the theoretical framework are presented in the third chapter. The literature review gives the reader a deeper understanding about the topic and previous research while the theoretical framework presents the theory that the thesis is build upon. The following chapter presents the empirical study, which in turn is analyzed and discussed in the chapters that follow. The thesis ends with the conclusions and suggestions for future research.

The structure of the thesis can be seen in figure 1. The illustration gives an overview of the structure of the thesis and its different chapters.



*Figure 1. Illustration of the structure of the thesis (own processing)*

## 2 Methodological issues

This chapter explains the research approach, background to the literature review and the choice of theory and how the empiric material was collected and analyzed. The ethical issues of the thesis are commented upon as well as the quality assurance in the research process.

### 2.1 Research approach

Initially, the idea to write about the topic was due to media statements saying that horse experiences develop the leaders of the future. When studying the research in which the media statements are built upon, a gap appeared. The media statements stated that horse experiences help individuals to develop leadership skills that are useful in a future business career. However, the research on the topic does not say that the leadership skills that can be developed through horse experiences can be transferred to business settings and be useful for business leaders. The existing research only discloses that the leadership skills that can be developed through horse experiences can be useful in the relation to horse and in equestrian environments. Therefore, the aim in this thesis is to fill that gap and see how useful the leadership skills that can be developed through horse experiences are useful in business settings.

To address the aim in this study, a qualitative research method has been chosen. Qualitative research methods are useful when studying human experiences, communication, expectations, thoughts, attitudes meaning and processes, especially related to relations, interactions, development, interpretation, activity and movement (Malterud, 2001). Qualitative methods are more suitable for understanding than for explaining (Malterud, 2001). Since the aim of the thesis is to get a better understanding of the interviewees' experiences, a qualitative approach is well suited and an interview-based comparative case study has been conducted.

This study is based on interviews with five business leaders. The interviewed business leaders come from different backgrounds and have different careers and leader roles. Their equine background also varies. This will inevitably affect their experiences and views of how their horse experiences have shaped their leadership skills. However, all leaders have an extensive leadership experience and a genuine equestrian background. While limiting the number of studied cases allows a deeper investigation of how the equestrian background has influenced each business leader, it also means that population-wide generalizations cannot be made.

A literature review was conducted before the interviews took place in order to get an understanding of the research topic. Much of the theoretical framework was also developed prior to the interviews since this made it possible to design the questions in a way that would fit the theoretical framework. However, the completion of the literature review and the theoretical framework has been an ongoing process throughout the writing of the thesis.

A transcription of the interviews was sent to the interviewees after the interviews were completed. When the business leaders had confirmed the transcriptions, the empirical chapter was completed. The results of the interviews were later analyzed together with the findings from the literature review and the theoretical findings. The emotional intelligence framework was used as a base for the analysis. Thereafter, the results of the analysis were discussed and the thesis ends with the conclusions and suggestions for future research.

## 2.2 Literature review and theoretical choices

The literature review is the point of departure for this study. The literature that has been used for the thesis has been found in the search databases Primo and Google Scholar. The literature review is based on articles explaining how horses contribute to the development of leadership skills and end with a section on how horses can be used in leadership development programs. The research within this topic is relatively new and little research has been conducted within this field of leadership studies. The limited research, however, enables a relatively full review of the literature that has been published within the topic.

The literature focusing on business leadership, on the contrary, is extensive. Leadership skills, however, have received comparatively little attention (T. Mumford *et al.*, 2007). Despite this fact, a number of individual capabilities and skills that leaders need in order to perform well have been identified. Many of the identified leadership skills come from articles written by Michael Mumford since he and his colleagues has been a strong influence within the leadership field. Michael Mumford has been cited 17 142 times according to Google scholar and he has written many leadership articles and published several books about leadership, such as *Leadership 101*, *Pathways to outstanding leadership* and *Creativity and leadership in science, technology and innovation*. The article Mumford *et al.* (2000a) have 248 citations while Mumford *et al.* (2000b) have been cited 208 times and Mumford *et al.* (2000c) have been cited 667 times. T. Mumford *et al.* (2007) do not have Michael Mumford as the author but Troy Mumford<sup>1</sup>.

The reason to why the theory of emotional intelligence is used for the thesis is that emotional intelligence has been proven to be a fundamental base for successful leadership. The theory is well known and widely accepted. The theory has a framework that has been used in this study to display the findings from the literature, the theory and the empirical findings.

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis uses two authors that have the same last name; Michael Mumford and Troy Mumford. To be able to separate the two, Troy Mumford will be referred to as T. Mumford.

## 2.3 Interview structure

Interviews are among the most common strategies for collecting qualitative data and can be used across many disciplines (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Interviews are about obtaining information by encouraging the interviewee to speak and then listen to what the interviewee has to say (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). However, the goals of interviews differ depending on the chosen research method. When there is a predetermined hypothesis that is based on prior research or theory, the goal of the interviews is to test the validity the hypothesis (Knox & Burkard, 2009; Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). To test a hypothesis, it is common to use structured interviews, meaning that the questions and analysis are standardized. The structure of standardized interviews is set in advance and the interview process is highly regulated. The idea is that the influence of the interviewer should be minimal (Knox & Burkard, 2009). It is common that standardized interviews are used for quantitative research and that closed questions are used, i. e. questions in which the answers will be yes or no. The advantage with standardized interviews is the uniformity across the respondents. However, a standardized interview technique can inhibit the exploration and understanding of respondents' experiences (Knox & Burkard, 2009).

In contrast, unstructured interviews can be said to be guided conversations. The researcher will have a topic in which the interview will circle around, but not any pre-set questions. The lack of pre-set questions can make it difficult to compare findings between the respondents since they might have answered different questions depending on the direction of the conversations in each interview (Knox & Burkard, 2009). Unstructured interview are therefore often used to get a greater insight of a topic and as a complement to observational studies (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Neither structured nor un-structured interviews are appropriate for this thesis. Instead, semi-structured interviews are the most suitable. The framework and central focus of the thesis had been developed before the interviews were conducted and the purpose of the interviews was to get an understanding of the respondents' experiences and perceptions of the topic. Semi-structured interviews are based on questions prepared in advance and these questions serves as a guide throughout the interview (Knox & Burkard, 2009). The questions in semi-structured interviews are often open-ended (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006) and the interviewer can modify the order of the questions according to the flow of the interview (Robson, 2011). The fact that the interviewer has the ability to ask further questions when needed (Robson, 2011; Knox & Burkard, 2009) ensures that the full story of the respondent can be covered (Knox & Burkard, 2009). Moreover, when respondents are asked the same initial questions, as they were in the interviews for this thesis, it is possible to compare the answers (Knox & Burkard, 2009).

## 2.4 The selection of interviewees

Single interviews have been conducted for the thesis. The choice of single interviews is supported since the topic for the interview can be effectively examined during one interview session and that the interviewees have limited time (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Since the aim of interviews is to find shared understandings of a certain group, the interviewees should be homogenous and share critical similarities associated to the research question (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Therefore, all of the interviewees have an equestrian background and are business leaders. The author of the thesis got in touch with Karin, the first interviewee, through a mutual contact that knew Karin had an equestrian background. The second interviewee, Sara, was also contacted through a mutual contact. The author contacted Gabriella since her name came up when searching for leaders with an equestrian background on Google. Jessica and Lisa were contacted since two other leaders, found through Google searches, thought Jessica and Lisa would be more suitable for the study since they had more equestrian experience.

## 2.5 Personal interviews versus phone interviews

The interviews with Karin and Sara were held in person at their offices. The advantages of face-to-face interviews are that non-verbal data, such as facial expressions and gestures, can be observed. These non-verbal expressions can deepen the meaning of the verbal communication (Knox & Burkard, 2009). Moreover, it may be easier to create openness and trust in face-to-face interviews and make the interviewees share their experiences in a more effective way than in phone interviews (Knox & Burkard, 2009).

In spite of the advantages of face-to-face interviews, three interviews were conducted by phone. The main reason for choosing phone interviews was the far distance to the interviewees. Knox and Burkard (2009) say that one advantage with phone interviews is that they allow an efficient use of economic and human resources. Some interviewees may be more comfortable and open in phone interviews since they know that they probably will not meet the interviewer again (Knox & Burkard, 2009). Another advantage with phone interviews is that they may yield a better interviewer uniformity in the delivery and standardization of the interview questions (Knox & Burkard, 2009).

Since the topic in the present study is not a delicate matter, there was no reason for Karin and Sara to feel less comfortable in their face-to-face interviews. However, since the interviews with Karin and Sara were longer than the phone interviews, they may have shared their experiences in a deeper and more detailed way than the other interviewees. However, that does not mean that they contributed more to the study than the other interviewees. The reason why the phone interviews were shorter can be that they were more structured and focused on getting the essence out of each question.

## 2.6 Ethical issues

The interviewees must be informed why the interview is held and what is expected of them in order to decide if they wish to take part in the study or not (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). This is especially important when dealing with sensitive matters. Further, it is necessary to establish a positive relationship with the interviewees and build trust. If the interviewees are not sure that the interviewer will respect the information they reveal, they might not reveal the full story (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Moreover, the interviewer and the interviewee must come to an agreement concerning the anonymity for the interview. The reason why interviewees may want to be anonymous is that they may reveal information that can jeopardize their relationships and position in a system (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). That is why interviewee anonymity must be the number one priority.

The transcription phase will be easier for the interviewer if the interview is recorded (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). It allows the interviewer to listen to the interview several times to make sure that the interpretation will be correct. However, before the interview is recorded the interviewer needs to have the interviewee's approval. The interviewees might be hesitant to a recorded interview because recorded data is incontrovertible. To minimize the suspiciousness of the recording, the interviewer should inform the interviewee that the recording only will be used for transcribing the interview and that the recording will be destroyed afterwards. Moreover, the interviewer should also send the transcript of the interview to the interviewee for confirmation. Sometimes the interviewee wants to change an expression or make clarifications.

All interviewees for the thesis were informed about the interview topic before the interview was held. Furthermore, an agreement concerning the anonymity was also established. Since four of the interviewees agreed to a non-anonymous interview while one interviewee wanted to be anonymous it was decided to keep all interviewees anonymous. All interviewees gave their consent to the recording of the interview. The recorded data was destroyed after the transcription process was over and a transcript of the interviewees was sent to the interviewees for confirmation.

## 2.7 Quality assurance in the research process

The topic of the thesis is relatively new. The literature review is therefore built on up-to-date research of which most is peer reviewed. The theoretical framework is built upon peer-reviewed research, which enhances the validity of the thesis.

During the interviews, open-ended questions were used and when more detailed answers were needed, the interviewees own words were repeated but as a question. This minimizes the risk of interviewer interference and misleading answers as a result of leading questions (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The interviews were recorded and a summary was sent to the interviewees after each interview for validation. The interviewees were also sent a final version, as it would appear in the thesis, to get their approval before publishing.

## 3 Theoretical framework and literature review

The first section in this chapter present the literature review and the second chapter presents the theoretical framework that the thesis is built upon.

### 3.1 Literature review

The literature review gives an overview of how horses have been used throughout the history and their role in today's society. Research about how horses can help individuals to develop leadership skills are presented as well as literature about leadership development programs that use horses.

#### 3.1.1 Horses in human enterprise

Horses were domesticated because of the meat, but have been used for transportation, agricultural work (Hausberger, Roche, Henry and Visser, 2008) and in the military (Plymoth, 2012). Historically, the equestrian sport has been seen as masculine, where a good horse was a male status symbol representing class (Plymoth, 2012). Nowadays, much of the gender perspective has changed, and horses are mostly used as companion animals and for leisure and sports (Persson, 2005). Moreover, horses are increasingly being used for therapeutic purposes (Porter-Wenzlaff, 2007; Burgon, 2011) and leadership purposes (Blymoth, 2008; Forsberg, 2008; Keaveney, 2008; Hausberger *et al.*, 2008; Duff, 2010; Evans *et al.*, 2009).

Horses are playing a significant role in maintaining Sweden's rural areas, giving many people a reason to settle down in these areas. Another contribution horses make in rural areas is grazing fields, which prevent them from overgrowing. Apart from being a source for economic growth in urban areas, incomes are generated from horses used for competition in various ways, breeding businesses and riding-schools (Persson, 2005). However, even though statistics show that the number of horse related businesses in Sweden are increasing, most equine businesses only make small profits, and most horse ownership comes with significantly greater costs than revenues (Persson, 2005).

In spite of the facts above, the equine sector generates a substantial amount of money each year and involves a great number of people. The equine sector has a multi-billion turnover and the main source of income comes from businesses providing products and services for horses and their riders (Persson, 2005). These products and services include equipment, clothes, feed, stall, farriery, education, transportation and veterinary services. The people involved in the equine sector are not only the people working for these businesses, the equine sector also involve stable attendants, riding instructors, riding school pupils and others. Persson (2005) identify a number of groups within the equine sector that are especially important. The businesses, organizations and individuals that arrange competitions and games have a major economic significance for the equine sector, and so do the people that bet when these competitions are held. Farmers that provide feed and other services for horse owners are also important as well as all the people taking riding classes and participate in trail riding and similar activities.

When it comes to the equestrian sport, the majority of practitioners are female. 85 per cent of the riding-school pupils are women and girls, and 65 per cent of the pupils are under the age of 18 (Persson, 2005). The equestrian sport is unique since men and women are able to enter the same competitions and compete against each other (Blymoth, 2008). Hedenborg (2009) writes about how the equestrian sport is distinguished from other sports since more focus lies on the caring aspect rather than the competitive. Since only 15 per cent of the time spent in the stable goes to horse riding, much time is spent on learning how horses behave and how to take care of them. Hedenborg (2009) lifts the idea that it is the caring focus of the equestrian sport that has led to the feminization of the sport and Plymoth (2008) says that this in turn has contributed to the rather childish picture of horse girls that 'just want to cuddle with their horses'. However, the research on how horses can help individuals to develop leadership skills can erase this picture of the equestrian sport. Instead of being connected with caring and cuddling horse girls, the equestrian sport is now starting to be acknowledged for the leadership qualities it fosters.

### 3.1.2 Horses and the development of leadership skills

Most research about horses has focused on horse behavior and how to handle and train horses (Miller, 1995; Miller, 1996; Birke, 2007; McGreevy, Oddie, Burton & McLean, 2009). The new era of research focuses more on horses' unique abilities to influence and develop humans. There are many studies on how horses can be used in therapy (Porter-Wenzlaff, 2007; Burgon, 2011). However, the newest field of research is about how horses can help individuals to develop leadership skills (Blymoth, 2008; Forsberg, 2008; Keaveney, 2008; Hausberger *et al.*, 2008) and how horses can be used in leadership programs (Andersen, 2009, Duff, 2010, Evans *et al.*, 2009).

In line with the new research about how horse experiences can help individuals to develop leadership skills, the childish picture of the equestrian sport has started to disappear (Plymoth, 2008). The image of the sport is moving away from girls cuddling with their horses to a tougher impression of the sport where people realize the risks of the sport and the skills the equestrian sport requires from its practitioners. In Plymoth's (2008) article, horse girls are said to learn to be brave, take responsibility, co-operate, plan and to fight for what they want. It is said that it is hard to find tougher girls. Other skills the stable environment fosters are; strength, independence and the ability to make fast decisions (Plymoth, 2008). Clear leadership is important when it comes to handling horses and is an essential part of safety. The horse needs to respect but also understand the handler, meaning that it is important to handle horses in a consistent way and apply the same rules. Communication skills are important when handling horses, and it is also important to be alert to small signals, and to lead and to be able to interpret situations from the horse's perspective if the desired reaction from the horse is to be elicited and undesired situations are to be avoided.

Plymoth's (2008) article also highlights that skills and competencies learned from volunteer work in the stable can be of use in a professional career. Furthermore, the article also brings up the career coach Nina Jansdotter's view that horse girls should market their knowledge and skills more since horse people are popular in the labor market. She says that horse people are good at leadership, can take responsibility and are self-motivated, something that can be transferred to the market environment.



Lena Forsberg (2007) points out the uniqueness of the equestrian sport. Her study shows how kids and teenagers benefit from the stable environment in their identity creating processes. They learn how to take the leading role in the interaction with the horse and to become clear, determined and responsible. Equestrian sport practitioners develop independence and an inner strength that makes it possible for them to deviate from the traditional gender roles. They also develop a power to act.

In Susan Keaveney's (2008) study about the human-horse relationship, she found that humans better understand themselves and their relationship with others through horse experiences. Horses teach their handlers to control their own emotions since frustration and anger is usually detrimental if transmitted when handling a horse. Patience, trust, empathy, respect, confidence, responsibility and attentiveness to others are other skills that can be learnt from horse experiences. Persuasion is another skill that humans learn in order to assure the horse to follow their lead (Keaveney, 2008). Communication skills and the ability to understand how and when to give rewards and punishment are also needed to convince the horse to follow the handler's lead. Keaveney (2008) says that the persuading skills can be transferred to a human-human relationship.

Keaveney (2008) comments on experienced riding and the unique physical union that is created between the rider and the horse. This physical union can be compared to sports like ballroom dancing with the difference that horse riding includes the interaction with another species. While Keaveney (2008) highlights the uniqueness of shared communication and the sense of teamwork and partnership that is built between the horse and the rider, she also notes that it is common that horse owners develop a community with feelings of belonging and togetherness with one another.

Hausberger *et al.* (2008) writes that even though horseback riding is one of the most dangerous recreational sports, not enough research has been done on how to interact and handle horses in a safe way. The authors talk about the importance of upholding a positive relationship with the horse and how every interaction should be influenced by previous interactions when developing a relationship. This allows the horse and the rider to have expectations on each other's behavior and build on good memories instead of bad memories. Excessive use of punishment can lead to motivational conflicts and poorly timed rewards and reinforcements can become meaningless for the horse and sometimes have the wrong effect. If a horse gets inconsistent orders, it can create confusion, stress and neurotic behaviors. Hausberger *et al.* (2008) states that an effective cooperation between the horse and the rider is necessary to perform well. Riders must be able to handle the different characteristics and reactions of the horse but at the same time have full control of the body and mind of his or her own. Riders must be focused and calm at all times but still stay positive and alert to be able to communicate with the horse in an effective way.

### 3.1.3 Leadership development programs with horses

As a consequence of the research stating that horses can help individuals to develop leadership skills, leadership development programs that use horses has been developed. The reason why these programs have gained more attention is that traditional leadership programs lack taking the participants' individual and contextual differences into consideration (Hotho & Dowling, 2009) and they have also been criticized for not having a long-term effect (Duff, 2010). Moreover, traditional leadership programs have also been criticized for having an overly didactic approach (Hotho & Dowling, 2009). Daniel Goleman states that true leadership is about behavior and that it needs to be taught based by experience (Duff, 2010).

Leadership development programs that use horses are based on immediate experiences. Gehrke's (2009) research suggests that leadership development programs with horses can contribute to more efficient and authentic leadership. One benefit of using horses in leadership training is that they respond immediately on humans' emotional state of being without any judgment (Gehrke, 2009). Horses mirror feelings, body language and emotions back to the human (Andersen, 2009). This will make the participants aware of the consequences of their emotional and physical presence and also allow them to see what happens if they change their way of being since the horse will reflect this. Leadership development programs with horses help people to read other people and situations and to understand non-verbal signals (Duff, 2010). The programs can also improve a number of aspects that improve the everyday work at the office, such as responsibility, assertiveness, work ethics, relationship building and communication. Furthermore, since every horse is different, the participants of these leadership programs learn to be flexible in their leadership styles and make necessary adjustments to be able to handle the different horses (Duff, 2010).

It has been shown that life skills can be enhanced with horse related training programs. The life skills are patience, assertiveness with others, awareness of own body energy, social confidence, understanding of verbal and non-verbal communication, confidence as a leader, confidence with authority figures and self-awareness (Evans *et al.*, 2009). Interestingly, the individuals that had experience of handling horses before the training program showed less improvement of the life skills after the training program was over.

Parallels can also be drawn from the way a horse herd interacts to the everyday situations within organizations (Gehrke, 2009). In a horse herd there is always a true leader. The lead horse is responsible to ensure that the herd is safe. Usually, there is also a dominant horse in the herd. The dominant horse may try to become the leader and it might look as he or she is in control, but the herd will never accept this horse as their true leader. Similar characters can also be seen in the business world (Gehrke, 2009).

## 3.2 Theoretical framework

This section presents the theoretical framework the thesis is built upon. It includes leadership skills acquisition and development and the theory of emotional intelligence. Leadership skills found to be essential for effective leadership in the leadership literature is presented in the emotional intelligence framework together with the leadership skills that can be developed through horse experiences.

### 3.2.1 Leadership skills acquisition and development

Research about leadership skills acquisition has focused on skills acquisition when people practice certain tasks but also on the process involved when people acquire skills through various domains of experience (Mumford *et al.*, 2000a). Performance improves with practice, but it is not the same factors that contribute to skill acquisition throughout the career. Intelligence and other broad common abilities normally have the strongest influence early in the skill acquisition process, while performance is more influenced of narrow abilities in the skills acquisition's later stages. In other words, the base concepts and principles, i.e. to learn what is expected of a leader, must be acquired before these concepts and principles can be applied and elaborated with in order to solve problems in more complex settings. The ability to use previous leader experiences is crucially influencing skills development.

Skills and knowledge are capabilities that develop over time according to experience and education (Mumford *et al.*, 2000c). Leadership skills are not restricted to only a few gifted individuals. On the contrary, many individuals possess the potential to become leaders. It is a question of experience and the capacity to benefit and learn from experiences. Abilities, personality and motivation influence the experiences and thus the skills that will be developed. The experiences leaders acquire throughout their career influence whether necessary skills and knowledge are available for problem solving (Mumford *et al.*, 2000c). Since problem-solving skills are essential for leader performance, experiences such as mentoring, appropriate training, job assignments that tackle novel problems and hands-on experiences of problem solving are important. Studies have showed that it normally can take seven to ten years to acquire skills needed for top-level leadership (Mumford *et al.*, 2000c). However, for organizational leaders where various forms of expertise and multiple skill sets are required, this period can be much longer. Without appropriate developmental experience and without the abilities needed to develop skills from these experiences, it is impossible to become an effective leader. Thus, leaders are not born or made. Instead, leadership depends on the way experiences shape inherent potentials that enable the development of necessary capabilities needed to solve important social problems. The development of leadership skills needed at the high levels in an organization is a slow process as they, similarly to leadership skills needed at the lower levels in organizations, are a function of practice.

Studies have shown that leaders are brighter than others, indicating that there is a positive correlation between intelligence and leadership (Mumford *et al.*, 2000c). Intelligence is not the only ability that influences the acquisition of leadership skills and thus performance. Cognitive abilities such as oral and written expression and comprehension are also needed in order to acquire, manipulate and exchange information in problem domains (Mumford *et al.*, 2000c). Acquisition of requisite leadership skills and skills development not only depend on intelligence and other abilities, it also requires a willingness to face situations where these skills must be exercised, often to solve organizational problems. Therefore, it is expected that individuals' motivation and personality influence the development of leadership skills and leader performance.

Leadership skill requirements increase with organizational level (T. Mumford *et al.*, 2007). There are a number of abilities, skills and personality characteristics that are common when it comes to advancement to middle management, these include human relation skills, cognitive skills, creativity, decision-making, planning and organizing skills, oral communication, resistance to stress and desire for advancement, motivation, energy, emotional stability, tolerance for ambiguity, high work standards and diversity in interests (Connely *et al.*, 2000). Individuals that possess these abilities, skills and personality characteristics, and thus have managerial potential, are more likely to get challenging assignments that lead to faster promotions.

There are different requirements in terms of leadership skills at various career phases (Mumford *et al.*, 2000a). Across all organizational levels, it is the cognitive skills that are most required while interpersonal skills are required to a higher degree than business skills and strategic skills. The need for business skills and strategic skills increase the further up in the organization a leader is active, that is why the acquisition of these skills are more important in the advancement to executive positions than the acquisition of cognitive skills and interpersonal skills. However, all skills increase in importance the higher up a leader is in the organization. This means that the cognitive skills and the interpersonal skills needs to develop with organizational level as well, but that the acquisition of business skills and strategic skills becomes more essential at higher organizational levels. At higher organizational levels, business skills and strategic skills increase with a greater rate compared cognitive skills and interpersonal skills. Leadership skills can therefore be said to be cumulative rather than exclusive. The nature of leadership requirements changes with advancement in the organization, both because the complexity of the problems and challenges increase but also because a greater involvement in the environment is needed.

### 3.2.3 Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is a central underlying attribute of top-level leadership (Palmer *et al.*, 2001) and the need for leaders to possess emotional intelligence has been asserted (Higgs & Aitken, 2003). Emotional intelligence refers to an individual's ability to manage the individual's own emotions but also other peoples' emotions (Palmer *et al.*, 2001). It does not matter how much training or technical skills a person has, he or she will never become a great leader without emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2001).

Emotionally intelligent leadership is necessary to create a working climate that encourages employees to perform, hence the increase in both individual and business performance that emotional intelligence creates (Goleman, 2001). Studies show that leaders who possess many emotional intelligence competencies also reach better financial results, compared with leaders who only possess a few of the competences (Goleman, 2001). Emotional intelligence is essential for effective leadership (Palmer *et al.*, 2001; Goleman, 2001), this can be related to the fact that emotional intelligence correlates with most components of transformational leadership which has been proven to be a more effective leadership style than the transactional leadership style (Gardner & Stough, 2002; Palmer *et al.*, 2001). However, effective leaders use many different leadership styles depending on the situation and emotional intelligence is an essential component in most of the leadership styles used today (Goleman, 2000).

Emotionally intelligent leaders are more likely to be effective, manage a productive group, feel satisfaction with their job and take responsibility when needed (Palmer *et al.*, 2001). Contingent rewards, normally associated with transactional leadership, flexible planning skills and creative thinking abilities have also been associated with leaders that have high levels of emotional intelligence (Palmer *et al.*, 2001). Leaders who understand and manage their emotions act as role models for followers as they can display self-control (Gardner & Stough, 2002). This will enhance followers' respect and trust for the leader. Emotionally intelligent leaders can understand others' needs and react accordingly. Leaders with emotional intelligence will display conviction, generate loyalty, trust, pride, cooperation, commitment and confidence and consider the abilities, needs and aspirations of others. They will also employ constructive reward for performance and desire success. The ability to understand and manage both positive and negative emotions within themselves and others makes it possible for them to inspire and motivate subordinates to work towards common goals, create a vision for the future, provide encouragement and stimulate new ideas and new ways of doing things (Gardner & Stough, 2002; Palmer *et al.*, 2001). It also allows them to find and address problems before they escalate and to improve the decision-making process (Gardner & Stough, 2002), but also to see subordinates' achievements and need for development (Palmer *et al.*, 2001). In order to see development needs, a leader must understand if given tasks are challenging enough for the subordinates or if the tasks are too challenging. Leaders must also understand when feedback is needed. The ability to manage emotions makes it possible for leaders to handle frustrations, stress, joys and disappointments at work.

Effective leadership styles are built upon the ability to identify the emotions of oneself and of others and the understanding of those emotions. Equally important is the ability to manage negative and positive emotions within oneself and others. Another reason why understanding emotions is important for effective leadership is that it makes it possible for leaders to understand their own view but also others' point of view (Goleman, 2001). Daniel Goleman (2000) describes that emotional intelligence consists of four central capabilities and that each capability has specific competencies and traits, which is illustrated in table 1 below.

Table 1. The four central capabilities of Goleman's (2000) emotional intelligence framework (own processing)

<p><b>Self-awareness</b></p> <p><i>Emotional self-awareness:</i> The ability to understand your own emotions and recognize how they influence work performance and relationships.</p> <p><i>Accurate self-assessment:</i> To be able to evaluate your limitations and strengths.</p> <p><i>Self-confidence:</i> A positive and strong sense of self-worth.</p>
<p><b>Self-management</b></p> <p><i>Self-control:</i> The ability to control emotions and impulses.</p> <p><i>Trustworthiness:</i> Integrity and honesty in a consistent display.</p> <p><i>Conscientiousness:</i> The ability to handle yourself and your responsibilities.</p> <p><i>Adaptability:</i> The ability to adjust to changing situations and to overcome obstacles.</p> <p><i>Achievement orientation:</i> The drive to live up to internal expectations of excellence.</p> <p><i>Initiative:</i> The readiness to see and seize opportunities.</p>
<p><b>Social awareness</b></p> <p><i>Empathy:</i> The ability to sense and understand other people's emotions and take interest in their concerns.</p> <p><i>Organizational awareness:</i> The ability to understand what is happening within the organization and to build decision-networks and handle politics.</p> <p><i>Service orientation:</i> The ability to see and meet customer needs.</p>
<p><b>Social skill</b></p> <p><i>Visionary leadership:</i> The ability to take control and inspire with a convincing vision.</p> <p><i>Influence:</i> The ability to persuade.</p> <p><i>Developing others:</i> The ability to strengthen other people's abilities through guidance and feedback.</p> <p><i>Communication:</i> To be able to listen and to send convincing, clear and well-tuned messages.</p> <p><i>Change catalyst:</i> The ability to generate new ideas and lead people in new directions.</p> <p><i>Conflict management:</i> The ability to handle conflicts and reach resolutions.</p> <p><i>Building bonds:</i> The ability to creating and maintaining relationships.</p> <p><i>Teamwork and collaboration:</i> The ability to build teams and create cooperation.</p>

Table 1 above illustrates and explains the four capabilities of emotional intelligence. The first capability, self-awareness, is the basis of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2000). When you recognize and understand your own emotions and how they affect your performance, it is also possible to understand the effect they have on others. Self-awareness makes you aware of your strengths and limitations and builds self-confidence. When you are aware of your own emotions, it is also possible to control them. With self-management, it is possible to control and be in charge of your own actions, even under pressured situations. A person with high levels of self-awareness and self-management is also likely to be trustworthy, conscientious and to easily be able to adapt to new things. Achievement orientation refers to having an optimistic state of mind in order to improve performance. Being initiative, or in other words proactive, is described as a key to outstanding performance.

Empathy, which makes people aware of the needs, emotions and concerns of others, is an important competence within the third capability, social awareness. Individuals with empathy skills can be aware of others' feelings in a non-verbal communication. Individuals who possess empathy skills also possess self-awareness since these two are connected, and the understanding of other people's feelings comes from the awareness of our own feelings. Social awareness enables organizational awareness, i. e. the ability to read groups in terms of emotional currents and political realities. It is also possible to understand customer needs if the social awareness is high. The ability to objectively read situations makes it possible to respond effectively. The last capability is social skills. These include the ability and desire to develop others, the ability to influence others and manage persuasion. Communication is an important competence as well as the ability to handle conflicts. The ability to establish and maintain relationships as well as the ability to create cooperation is an essential part in creating an environment where people can get inspired and motivated and work towards the same goals.

### 3.1.3 The emotional intelligence framework combined with leadership skills from the leadership literature and leadership skills that can be developed through horse experiences.

One of the most essential leadership skills is the ability to solve complex problems (Mumford, *et al.*, 2000b; Mumford *et al.*, 2000c). The problem solving skills is about being able to define and gather information about problems and formulate ideas and plans to solve them. The problems leaders have to deal with are many times distinguished from other problems since they often are ill defined, novel and that there is information ambiguity (Mumford *et al.*, 2000c). Leaders can have the greatest impact on organizational performance during the problem solving phases. A part of being a leader is making decisions without all information at hand and with a limited time frame. Even though the best solution not always is reached, it is often more important to have a solution that works at the right time (Mumford *et al.*, 2000c). The ability to identify problems and come up with solutions that work in within the organizational context are not the only skills leaders need to possess, it is as important for leaders to get the employees to work towards the solutions. Mumford *et al.* (2000b) believe that the key aspect of leadership is the social context and the interpersonal interactions within an organization.

Emotional intelligence affects problem solving and the interpersonal relationships within organizations. Many of the leadership skills needed for complex problem solving and thus effective leadership can be connected to the four capabilities of emotional intelligence; self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness and social skills. The leadership skills that are needed for effective leadership according to the leadership literature can be seen in the second column in table 2. Most of the leadership skills that horses can help people to develop can also be placed under the emotional intelligence framework. The third column in table 2 illustrates how these leadership skills can be grouped under the four capabilities of emotional intelligence. The leadership skills found in the leadership literature and the leadership skills that can be developed through horse experiences have previously not been divided according to the emotional intelligence framework. However, the emotional intelligence framework was appropriate to use as an illustration of how the leadership skills are linked together. The high match between the skills Goleman (2000) uses to describe the competencies of emotional intelligence and the leadership skills in column two and three can be seen in table 2.

Table 2. Illustration of how the different leadership skills can be grouped in the four categories of emotional intelligence (own processing)

Golemans' framework	Leadership skills in the leadership literature	Leadership skills developed together with horses
<b>Self-awareness</b> Emotional self-awareness Accurate self-assessment Self-confidence	<b>Self-awareness</b> Self-reflection and self-objectivity (Mumford <i>et al.</i> , 2000c) Self-confidence (Mumford <i>et al.</i> , 2000c)	<b>Self-awareness</b> Confidence (Plymoth, 2008; Forsberg, 2008; Keaveney, 2008; Evans <i>et al.</i> , 2009) Independence (Plymoth, 2008; Forsberg, 2008) Improved self-awareness (Keaveney, 2008; Evans <i>et al.</i> , 2009; Gehrke, 2009)
<b>Self-management</b> Self-control Trustworthiness Conscientiousness Adaptability Achievement orientation Initiative	<b>Self-management</b> Emotional control (Lord & Hall, 2010) Trustworthiness (Lord & Hall, 2010)	<b>Self-management</b> Responsibility (Plymoth, 2008; Forsberg, 2008; Keaveney, 2008; Duff, 2010) Assertiveness (Duff, 2010; Evans <i>et al.</i> , 2009; Forsberg, 2008) Power-of-action (Forsberg, 2008; Plymoth, 2008) Emotional control (Keaveney, 2008) Planning (Plymoth, 2008)
<b>Social awareness</b> Empathy Organizational awareness Service orientation	<b>Social awareness</b> Social perceptiveness (Mumford <i>et al.</i> , 2000c) Empathy (Lord & Hall, 2005) Awareness of the changing social environment (Mumford <i>et al.</i> , 2000c; Mumford, Campion & Morgeson, 2007)	<b>Social awareness</b> Attentiveness to verbal and non-verbal signals (Plymoth, 2008; Keaveney, 2008; Duff, 2010; Hausberger <i>et al.</i> , 2008; Evans <i>et al.</i> , 2009)
<b>Social skills</b> Visionary leadership Influence Developing others Communication Change catalyst Conflict management Building bonds Teamwork and collaboration	<b>Social skills</b> Communication and persuasion (Mumford, Campion & Morgeson, 2007; Mumford <i>et al.</i> , 2000b; Mumford <i>et al.</i> , 2000c) Relationship building (Mumford, Campion & Morgeson, 2007; Mumford <i>et al.</i> , 2000b) Visionary leadership (Mumford <i>et al.</i> , 2000c)	<b>Social skills</b> Communication and persuasion (Plymoth, 2008; Keaveney, 2008; Hausberger <i>et al.</i> , 2008) Relationship building (Keaveney, 2008; Hausberger <i>et al.</i> , 2008) Cooperation and teamwork (Plymoth, 2008; Duff, 2010; Hausberger <i>et al.</i> , 2008)



Table 2 shows how the different leadership skills can be grouped in the four categories of emotional intelligence. The first column shows the skills Goleman (2000) ascribe to the four capabilities of emotional intelligence. The second column illustrates the leadership skills found to be necessary for effective leadership in the leadership literature. These skills have in turn been divided into the different capabilities of emotional intelligence. The same thing has been done for the leadership skills that can be developed through horse experiences, these are shown in the third column.

The second column in table 2 illustrates how the leadership skills found as essential for effective leadership can be placed in Goleman's emotional intelligence framework. Mumford *et al.* (2000c) state that self-reflection and self-objectivity are capabilities that have an important impact on leader performance. Self-reflection and self-objectivity can be connected with self-awareness, which is the first capability of emotional intelligence. Mumford *et al.* (2000c) also mention that leaders must be willing to handle difficult and challenging problems and be willing to exercise influence in order to turn these problems around and use them as vehicles for growth. Self-confidence, which is a capability within self-awareness, is influencing leaders willingness to tackle problems and the possibility for leaders to use resources effectively in a stressful and turbulent environment.

Lord and Hall (2005) says that effective leaders do not only need to be aware of their own emotions, they also need to be able to manage their emotions and communicate appropriate emotions to others, particularly in times of crisis. The ability to manage your emotions i.e. self-management, is the second capability in Goleman's framework. Lord and Hall (2005) ascribe emotional skills to the higher leadership positions since it can be difficult to be aware of your own emotions and to regulate and communicate them in a suitable way. Emotional skills are very individual and develop at different times and as a result of different contingencies. Consequently, managing emotional skills is very individual, an emotional regulation strategy that is optimal for one leader can be completely wrong for another. Leaders ability to manage emotions is important since the emotions they choose to communicate to their follower will create reactions.

Some individuals are more sensitive to motivational approaches and positive emotions while other individuals are more attuned to negative emotions (Lord & Hall, 2005). The motivational and behavioral reactions that are evoked in followers contributes to the followers understanding of the leader. Showing positive emotions may be especially important since positive emotions create creativity. The trust and willingness to follow leaders will diminish if leaders are perceived as being inauthentic and chameleon-like. In order to be authentic, it is suggested that leaders adjust their motivational and behavioral approaches and identities according to their values instead of the situation. Authentic leaders are leaders that behave in consistency with their own values and beliefs, have transparency in interactions with others and generate collective identities and positive emotions. Moreover, there is a strong connection between values and identities since conformity to suitable values is an essential part of self-evaluation. Additionally, the values leaders adapt, and thus symbolize through their actions, will establish identities and self-reflection processes in their followers.

Leader performance seems to depend on social perceptiveness (Mumford *et al.*, 2000c). Social perceptiveness is the ability to be aware of other peoples' reactions and understand the reasons causing the reactions (Mumford, Campion & Morgeson, 2007). It is about seeing the to goals, demands and needs of different organizations which in turn allow leaders to see emerging problems and to understand the effect problem solutions have on others (Mumford *et al.*, 2000c). It is important that leaders can adjust their own behavior and be flexible based on their awareness of others. Another word for this is emotional empathy (Lord & Hall, 2005). The ability to perceive and respond to the emotions of others is connected to social awareness, which is the third capability in Golemans' emotional intelligence framework.

Leaders' capability to "go outside themselves" and assess others' reactions of situations is crucial in order to build support for implementation to problem solutions. Since the employees are the ones implementing the plan, the leader needs social cognition and thus knowledge of the people implementing the plan in order to communicate a vision, establish goals, motivate, support, monitor and provide guidance in the implementation process. The leader also needs to be flexible and be able to adjust plans according to the people and the changing social environment. A key leadership skill is to be able to understand and monitor the social dynamics around the problem (Mumford *et al.*, 2000c) and to understand the context in which the leader is active (Mumford, Campion & Morgeson, 2007).

Social skills are the last capability in Golemans' emotional intelligence framework and it is a capability that is frequently mentioned in the leadership literature. Mumford, Campion and Morgeson (2007) describe social skills as the ability to influence and interact with others and establish relationships, but also to coordinate, negotiate and persuade people to work efficiently towards organizational objectives. Mumford *et al.* (2000b) add decision-making skills to their description while Mumford *et al.* (2000c) state that the social skills include coaching, communication and persuasion, conflict management and negotiation.

Social skills are necessary for effective and successful problem solving in organizations since it is important to be able to communicate a shared vision and be flexible in the implementation phase (Mumford *et al.*, 2000c). The implementation of a plan is crucial for performance and leaders need social skills to implement the plans they have formulated. Mumford *et al.* (2000c) state that persuasive skills are essential to get subordinates to adopt a proposed solution plan or vision. Furthermore, social skills are also needed to be able to adjust to others (Mumford *et al.*, 2000b) and to understand and respond to changes in social settings (Mumford *et al.*, 2000c). Social skills can be learned, leader at lower levels are likely to have more problems in learning social skills since task activities get the most attention, making social factors secondary (Lord & Hall, 2005). Leaders at higher levels are likely to be more in contact with others and thus find refinement of the social skills easier.

Social skills can also be of use in organizational changes. Leaders who label situations as a threat will cause avoidance and a chaotic approach while leaders who instead refer to a situation as an opportunity will create a more creative and supportive approach (Lord & Hall, 2005). Moreover, another important aspect in creating a supportive environment where the employees do their best is to build trust and this is done when followers see their leader as just. If a leader is to be perceived as just, he or she needs to have social skills.

The third column in table 2 illustrates the leadership skills that can be developed through horse experiences. Horses increase humans' self-awareness since they provide instant feedback on humans' feelings, body language and emotional state of being (Gehrke, 2009). Horse experiences can help humans to get a better understanding of their physical and emotional presence (Keaveney, 2008). Horses are also said to build an inner strength and create confidence in their handlers (Plymoth, 2008; Forsberg, 2008; Keaveney, 2008; Evans *et al.*, 2009). It is also said that the stable environment fosters independence (Plymoth, 2008; Forsberg, 2008).

Furthermore, horses teach humans to control their emotions i.e. self-management. For example, if frustration and anger is transmitted when handling a horse there is a great risk of negative consequences for the horse and the handler (Keaveney, 2008). Horses and the stable environment also make people willing to take responsibility and develop a power to act (Plymoth, 2008; Forsberg, 2008; Keaveney, 2008; Duff, 2010). Assertiveness is another skill that is developed by handling horses (Duff, 2010; Evans *et al.*, 2009; Forsberg, 2008). It is crucial to be the leader of the horse and being assertive is important to avoid dangerous situations. Planning is a skill that also can be learned in the stable environment (Plymoth, 2008).

Social awareness is a vital skill in the stable. When handling horses it is important to be alert to small signals and to be able to interpret situations from the horse's perspective (Plymoth, 2008). People in stable environments therefore often have a good understanding of both the horses and other people since they are able to understand non-verbal communication (Keaveney, 2008; Duff, 2010; Evans *et al.*, 2009). Riders continuously need to read and be aware of the surroundings to be ready to handle every reaction of the horse (Hausberger *et al.*, 2008). Since every horse is different, riders need to handle every horse in a different way.

Horses also help people to develop a number of social skills. Communication skills are important when handling horses (Plymoth, 2008; Duff, 2010). In order to avoid dangerous situations horses needs to be communicated with in a consistent way to ensure that an understanding is reached (Plymoth, 2008). It is important to create a positive relationship with the horse that is built on good experiences (Hausberger *et al.*, 2008). People who handle horses also need persuasion skills to assure the horse to follow their lead (Keaveney, 2008). The ability to know when and how to give rewards and punishment are included in the persuasion skills. The shared communication between horses and riders creates a sense of teamwork and partnership (Keaveney, 2008), this is important since cooperation between horse and rider is essential to perform well (Hausberger *et al.*, 2008). It is also common that horse owners develop a community where they feel belonging and togetherness with one another (Keaveney, 2008)

### 3.1.4 Concluding comments on the theoretical framework

The reason for placing the leadership skills in table 2 above is to give a clear illustration of how the leadership skills in column two and three correlates with column one, which shows the skills Goleman (2000) have placed under the capabilities of emotional intelligence. Many of the skills can be seen in all three columns. For example, confidence can be seen in all three columns under self-awareness. Emotional self-awareness and accurate self-assessment in the first column can be connected to self-reflections and self-objectivity in the second column and improved self-awareness in the third column. In the self-management boxes, self-control in column one can be connected to emotional control in column two and three. Moreover, trustworthiness in column one and two can be related to responsibility in column three. Achievement orientation and initiative in column one can be connected to power-of-action in table three while conscientiousness in the first column can be related to planning in the third column. When it comes to the third capability social awareness, empathy in the first column can be linked to social perceptiveness and empathy in the second column and attentiveness to verbal and non-verbal signals in the third column. Organizational awareness in the first column can be connected to awareness of the changing social environment in the second column. In the social skills box, communication and influence in column one can be linked to communication and persuasion in column two and three. Visionary leadership can be seen in the first and the second column. The skills of building bonds and teamwork and collaboration in column one can be connected to relationship building in column two and three but also cooperation and teamwork in column three.

The leadership skills in column two and three match the skills Goleman (2000) uses to describe the capabilities of emotional intelligence to a great extent. Therefore, the analysis in the thesis is built upon Golemans' (2000) framework of emotional intelligence and the skills showed in table 2.

## 4 The empirical study

This chapter presents an introduction of the interviewees followed by the interview results. The first section presents the careers and current leadership roles of the interviewed leaders. A description of the interviewed leaders' equestrian backgrounds is also given. The interviewees will be anonymous and have therefore been given other names.

### 4.1 Introduction of the interviewees

The first interviewee, Karin, is executive vice president and head of communications for a large insurance company that has about 3,5 million customers. She started her career at an advertising agency as an account director for a large beverage company, which in turn led to a role as a marketing manager for the largest Norwegian brewery. She continued her career working as a global marketing manager for a large liqueur company a couple a years before she took the role as marketing director, first at a pharmaceutical company and then at a telecommunications company. Before her current position at the insurance company, she has also been executive vice president and head of communications at a bank and head of communications at a humanitarian organization. Throughout Karin's career, she has also had a number of positions of responsibility.

Karin describes herself as a traditional horse girl. She started to take riding lessons at the riding school from the age of six but quit when she reached 14. At the age of 16 she moved to the U.S. as an exchange student, and worked at a cattle ranch for a year. She rode horses almost every day during her time at the cattle ranch and learned about natural horsemanship. She described the time as very exciting but also tough since she had to ride with cowboys who did not show any concern for her. Initially the cowboys thought Karin was in their way but this made her want to prove them wrong and show that she could be useful, which she also showed them after a while. After a couple of years back in Sweden with no horse riding, Karin bought herself a horse. Karin entered a few show jumping competitions, but she does not describe herself as a competitions rider. Karin had her horse throughout her career and started to ride another horse when her own died. Karin is not riding at the moment but says that she will start again eventually.

The second interviewee, Sara, is CFO of a large company that produce packaging material. She also has a couple of board of directors' assignments. She started her career as a trainee at a telecommunications company and then she continued her career within the same company. Sara had many different positions within the company and worked abroad for a number of years. She worked as a CFO at the telecommunications company and the last couple of years she was head of advisory services. She continued her career by becoming president and head of advisory services at another company for a couple of years. Just before she landed her current job she was project manager for a project at large company producing hygiene and forest products.

Sara grew up on a farm and got her first horse at the age of 11. In the beginning she had the horse at the farm but when she started her university studies she stabled the horse at a riding school and had it there for a couple of years. Today she has her horses on her own farm. Sara competed during her youth and competed for the junior national team. Sara has always had horses throughout her career but stopped competing when she was young. Today she is not riding much but she is in the stable every morning and night to look after the horses. Sara's son is competing at a high level so today she is mostly supporting him.

The third interviewee, Jessica, is CFO for a company with a 1,7 billion turnover and 450 full time employees. Jessica worked as a business administrator in the U.S. where she lived in the beginning of her career. When she moved back to Sweden she got her first job as a controller and then she landed her first job as a CFO. Jessica has worked for many different types of companies, but in recent years she has been CFO for publishing companies.

Horses have always been Jessica's hobby. She took riding lessons at the riding school and rode other peoples' horses when she was young. She bought her own horse when she was 20 years old but sold it after a couple of years when she moved to the U.S. and started to work as a horse-breaker for a year. She and her husband, who also was a rider, moved to Florida and had horses for many years until they got their first baby and moved back to Sweden. Jessica did not continue to ride in Sweden due to the time constraints with small kids and demanding jobs. She says that she misses the horses but if she would start again she would have gone "all in", because to train and compete is what she loves about the horses. At the moment she has no time for horse riding but she hopes that she will come back to it eventually.

The fourth interviewee, Gabriella, is division manager and head of production for an electronics company. The plants she is responsible for has about half a billion turnover and almost 425 employees. Gabriella has been working within the electronics industry for all of her working life. She started to work at the warehouse, then she became a purchaser at the same company and it did not take long until she became purchasing manager. After a couple of years as a purchasing manager she wanted to do something new and started to work with sales and after a couple of years she became sales manager. It did not take long until she was asked to become CEO for the company. Gabriella worked as a CEO for nine years and the company went through a successful expansion during those years. Then she quit the job and became CEO for a competing company instead. Her responsibilities grew within the new company and today she is head of production for several plants.

Gabriella started her horse career at the riding school when she was in fourth grade and continued to take lessons at the riding school until she bought her own horse. Gabriella took riding instructor courses and became a riding instructor. For several years, she had riding lessons at the riding school in the evenings alongside her job at the electronics company. She was also chairperson for the equestrian club at the riding school and was one of the persons that started the era of handicap riding. During this time she had one to two horses of her own. Gabriella left her riding school commitments when she got her second son and started with small scale breeding instead. She had between five to six horses during this time and competed a little to be able to sell a horse once in a while. Gabriella has been riding throughout her entire career and has always had horses. She has two horses at home today, but since Gabriella travels much in work she only rides occasionally. She has a daughter-in-law that helps her out with the horses.

The last interviewee, Lisa, is a quality and operational excellence manager at a large industrial company. She began her career as a trainee and got her first managerial position after three years at the company. She started as a production manager but quickly moved on and became a project leader. When the project was finished she became head of production for the whole unit and had at the time four managers reporting to her. When she got back from maternity leave, she took a job as lean coordinator at another unit within the company. She has now changed position again and is quality and operational excellence manager for the same unit.

Lisa started to ride at the riding school when she was eight years old. She took riding lessons twice a week and got the second lesson as an exchange for working in the stable during weekends. She was active in the youth board at the riding school and she also helped a competitions rider who had the horses stabled at the riding school. Lisa got her first horse at the age of 16 and competed in show jumping. She had that horse for three years but sold it when she started her university studies since she did not have enough time. Occasionally she rode her friends' horses during her university studies but she did not have her own horse during this time. Lisa has not been horse riding during her career, she tried to take it up one time when she found a person who needed help with her horses, but she thought the horses was stabled too far away and that the horses was not ridden enough to live up to her expectations. However, today she is back at the riding school taking riding lessons once a week. She and a couple of friends decided to start again and Lisa says that it is even more fun than she thought it would be and describes that the social part of it plays a great role. Lisa also joined the riding school board.

## 4.2 Interview results

This section presents the responses of the interview questions. The answers from all five interviewees are presented under each question in the same order as the interviewees where presented in the section above.

*Why have you had such a successful career?*

Karin has never planned her career. She has been headhunted for all her jobs except one. She described that even though she thought she was under-qualified for many of the jobs she was headhunted for, she always said yes. Karin's father told her to never say no to a job. Her father said that even if she felt that she might fail, it would be a good experience and she would learn something from it. He also told her that she had to do her best, but ultimately it is the company hiring her that is responsible for her work success. Karin said that this way of thinking has made it possible for her to take jobs that she initially thought were too advanced for her. She was never afraid of challenges.

Sara always wants to change and improve things. She is not a person that can do the same things day in and day out since she gets bored with that kind of work very easily. Her driving force is to create change and try new things. Therefore she is better at developing, changing and restructuring than administration. Sara mentioned that she has a sister that is exactly the same and lifts the idea that their way of being might come from the way they were raised.

Jessica said that her great work capacity has helped her through her career. She is efficient and has the ability to plan and prepare things in advance. Jessica also mentions that she likes to take the leading role. She thinks that it is fun to be in charge and be able to influence things and to work with people. Jessica has not actively planned her career. She thinks her advancements have come naturally since she likes to be in a leading position.

Gabriella mentioned the equestrian sport as an important driving force. It has always been necessary for Gabriella to have a well-paid job to be able to have horses and train and compete the way she did. Gabriella said that it is important to like the people you work with and makes a parallel to animals. "If you have a horse you don't like you sell it. It is the same thing with your coworkers. If you don't have good coworkers in your surroundings you have to change that too. And have the guts to do it".

Lisa's driving force is her goal orientation and her willingness to change and influence things. She also likes to work with people and to get the team to strive for the same goals.

*How do you describe yourself as a leader?*

Karin is very competent to act. She is not afraid to make decisions and question things. She is also willing to try new ideas and experiment, something that has been important within her field of work. Karin is always available for her coworkers. She said that she is very prestigeless and explained that she likes to be the one in charge but she does not need to be the one that is always right. She mentioned that she is good at recruiting good coworkers, which is crucial in order to be successful. It is important for Karin to develop her coworkers and let them take more and more responsibility as they grow. She explains that when she takes a new job she has an idea of rationalize herself, to see how long it takes before she is not needed anymore. This way of thinking comes from the fact that Karin normally gets bored when she works with the same things for too long. In order to be able to change jobs regularly she delegates tasks to her coworkers to empower them so that they would do fine without her if she feels it is time to move on to a new challenge.

Karin is very clear and direct in her communication. Her directness is appreciated of many, but some people can perceive her as too direct, almost brutal in the way she communicates. She mentioned that her impatience is something she has worked with. She realize that some tasks are repetitive and have to be done over and over again, but today she has found more efficient ways of doing these tasks so she can spend more time doing things she likes. However, she realizes that her impatience probably has been a reason for her fast advancements and successful career. Karin also described herself as very solution oriented, which sometimes makes her spend too little time with examining the problem. She said that she often needs to stop herself so that she does not jump into the solutions before the problem has been analyzed enough. Her impulse is to take action immediately.



Karin described that she almost always has taken the leading role, both professionally and privately. She gives an example that when participating at private dinner parties where people do not know each other in advance she often feels a responsibility to ensure that everything is going well, to create a good atmosphere and make everyone feel involved. However, today she is happy to let someone else take the leading role. "As long as something happens", she added. At work, she does not feel that conflict situations are uncomfortable; instead she deals with them as soon as they appear. She has a rational point of view and sees her job as a job. She says that conflicts appearing in private settings are always harder to deal with.

Sara described herself as very clear and direct in her communication. She does not say anything she does not mean and vice versa. She says that this has been appreciated and built trust among her coworkers. "What you see is what you get", she said. When she was younger, her coworkers sometimes said that she was brutally honest. However, she said that she has learnt to express herself in better ways today. Sara was very impatient when she was younger and became very upset if a coworker had not finished a task in time. Today she has learnt to accept that all people do not have the same speed as her. She does not get as upset if someone fail to deliver on time, she described that she has a more calm way of handling those situations today. Sara said that she is a great listener and that she always has her door open so that the coworkers can come and talk to her. She has the ability to read other people well, understand them and feel empathy. Sara said that doing the same things day after day bores her; instead she wants to create change and try new things and ideas.

Jessica is very goal oriented and solution focused. If she has a target she finds the solutions to reach that target. She also said that she gets much work done with her high work capacity. Sometimes she needs to be more patient and communicate more during the work process, not only focus on the goal. She can experience that she has to slow down and make sure that the coworkers get involved and understand the goal of the process. Jessica's coworkers describe her as very determined and clear in her communication. She said that people who not know her well would probably describe her as rather serious. Jessica said that she has a straightforward way of communicating. She thinks that it should be enough to say something once but is aware that sometimes she needs to work on her communication and say things more than once and in different ways. Jessica deals with conflicts straight away when they appear. She does not feel uncomfortable in a conflict situation and speaks her mind without hesitation.

Gabriella described herself as an active and positive person who sees possibilities in everything. She does not have a problem finding time for her horses and family while having a full-time job. She thinks that you have to be prepared for a heavy workload when you are a leader. She said that she is very clear and straight forward in her communication and easy to talk to. She is also a good listener. She thinks that people feel safe with her. Sometimes she can feel that she needs to stop herself and wait for the others. But today she is better at being patient and not to hurry through things. She realizes that she needs to accept and understand that people work in different speed. Gabriella is not the person who talks much in groups with people that she does not know. On the contrary, she does not say much until she feels comfortable and really knows what she talks about. However, in her own team where she feels well settled, she takes a prominent role and gets listened to. But she also makes sure to be an active listener and let the others contribute with their viewpoints. Gabriella emphasizes the importance of having a good boss since it is the manager that develops you. Gabriella has always had good bosses throughout her career.

Lisa described herself as a very driven and highly structured leader with a clear and straightforward communication. She thinks it is important to motivate her coworkers since it is important for her that they have fun at their jobs. Lisa says that she can be too impatient at times when she wants things to proceed in a faster pace than they currently are. However, she realizes that she sometimes must slow down and make sure that everyone understand and can keep up. She is always very hands on during meetings. There has to be a goal with the meeting and the participants need to focus on reaching that goal, Lisa does not like to discuss things without a purpose. An exact plan must be done which has to be followed up after it has been implemented. She describe that she is always very engaged since she is passionate about her job.

*In what way has your horse experiences been of use throughout your career and in your role as a leader?*

“The fact that you can control and cooperate with such a large animal has strengthened my confidence,” said Karin. She said that the most important contributions are the strengthened confidence, increased braveness and that the horses have made her more certain with herself and what she can do. The confidence Karin got from the horses has been useful in her career, she said. She got that special boost that made her brave enough to try new things. Karin described that she was shy and insecure when she was young and that she thought that horse riding was scary. “My belly was filled with butterflies every time I were about to ride,” she said and mentioned that she has been in several accidents and has gotten hurt a couple of times. “You know that you can meet loose dogs and that you have to ride through traffic and that everything can happen when you ride a horse. It always feels like a victory when you get back to the stable,” she said. She compared the feeling before she mounts the horse with a parachute jump; that it is scary but exhilarating and how good it feels once you have done it in spite of the initial fear. That it is about pushing you own limits.

Karin also believes in the wordless relation you build with the horse and that you have to communicate with horses through your body language and be responsive towards the horses’ signals. Karin explained that this in turn increases your self-knowledge and makes you more aware of your own strengths and weaknesses since the horse gives you direct feedback on your actions. Karin has become more aware that she needs to work with her impatience because she cannot be impatient when handling the horse. Karin said that she has become more aware of what she needs to work with and to become more observant of the horse’s signals since you have to use encouragement with horses and not punishment. Karin think that people with equestrian backgrounds may be more self-knowing and explained that self-knowledge is an important quality for leaders. Karin said that her equestrian background might have made her more responsive towards humans’ signals as well since she has a good intuition and quickly can figure out if she and another person can cooperate well with another and would complement each other. She is good at recruiting the right people and see who will be suitable for the job. She said that it is the same with riders and their horses, all riders do not suit all horses and vice versa.

Karin said that she has never has taken a leader role in the stable and mentioned the hierarchies that exist in the stable culture. The fact that she never took a leader role has to do with that she never competed and that there were always people who were better riders than her. When she looks back, she thinks it has been good that she was far down in the stable hierarchy. It has kept her down to earth, something she needed since she got her first executive job at the age of 25. However, Karin thinks that the stable hierarchies can be more negative than positive. She said that hierarchies and the bullying in the stable could potentially harm the confidence that girls build together with the horse alone.

Karin also highlighted the horses' importance as a therapy purpose. She has always seen the stable as a recess. It was like therapy for her. She described how annoyed or stressed out she could be when she came to the stable, but how the stress and irritation was gone when she was on her way home. The stable has been a way for her to reboot since a total presence is needed when you handle horses. If you are not 100 percent focused you can and will get hurt, she said. It was also good for her to be able to vent her feelings at the stable during her career since she worked much internationally and often got questioned as a young female executive. She said that if she had not had her horse during her career she would not have been able to handle the stress. During the busy periods she could have been working day in and day out if it was not for her horse. When her career was in its busiest phase was the time when her horse demanded the most. She did not plan it that way but when she looks back she realize that it was good. She made it clear for everyone at work that she had a horse and therefore needed to leave work no later than 5 pm to have time to take care of the horse and do stable chores. She said that this rule of hers was good. She set an example for her coworkers that there is no point to stay at work until eight at night and think that you are ambitious. Eight hours a day should be enough, she said. She explained that this rule made her more efficient at work. She has noticed that she is not as stress hardy today when she is not horse riding. "In a way you can compare it with mindfulness," she said and explained that when you have a horse, you get it continuously.

Karin also said that the equestrian background has been good in terms of communication. She explained that you need to be very clear with a horse and that she has taken that with her in her in her professional life; her clear, simple and straight forward way of communicating. She lifted the idea that maybe she could have had it within herself but she said that if so, it has absolutely been strengthened in the relation with the horse. She also mentioned that she has had several dogs and that you need to have a very clear communication with them too, that it might be animals in general. Furthermore, Karin said that she has learnt how to adjust her leadership to specific individuals and situations at leadership development programs. But she said that she can see parallels to the horses since every horse is different and needs to be ridden and handled differently. "No size fits all," she said. She has also learnt to handle conflicts during her career. "This is something you learn to do well with experience," she said and continued, "to confront issues in time and in a clear way". Karin does not think her equestrian background has been helpful in handling conflicts.

Sara said that she has been thinking much on this subject since there have been many articles written in media about how the stable culture creates future leaders. But Sara herself has not good experiences of the stable culture. Sara felt bullied when she moved from the countryside and stabled her horse at a riding school. The riding school students shut her out since they thought she was too fancy because she had her own horse. The riding school climate Sara experienced was very hierarchical. The better you were, the longer you had been riding at the riding school and the closer relationship you had with the riding instructor, the higher up in the hierarchy you came. Sara claimed that the stable culture certainly did not shape her and said that it is frightening if the stable culture that she experienced is fostering future leaders, as they say in the media.

“What possibly can be useful from the equestrian background is the directness and assertiveness you learn when you handle horses,” Sara said. “When you break in and train horses you need to be very clear set boundaries for what is acceptable and what is not. You have to be the leader in the relationship with the horse to avoid dangerous situations,” she explained. Sara said that this is probably the only thing that can be reflected in her leadership and added that it can be useful at work since you can make decisions and direct people in a clear way.

Sara said that horses, and animals in general, come with a great deal of responsibility. If you have a horse you cannot say “I have no time” or “I do not feel like going to the stable today” because it has to be done every day. Having horses is both time consuming and very expensive, which means that there might not be time or money to do fun things with friends every day. Sara means that having horses is fostering in that sense. However, she is not sure if it fosters leaders and questions if leaders would be more responsibility taking than regular coworkers.

Sara said that you have to adjust your way of being with horses since every horse is different and has different needs. She said that she is a great listener and easily understands other people. However, she is unsure if her responsiveness of other people’s state of mind comes from her equestrian background. She said that it is more likely something that is connected to her personality and something she has learnt throughout her career.

However, Sara said that the stable has been like a therapy during her career. It has been a place where she has been able to ventilate feelings and clear her mind. “You can tell the horses whatever you like and they will not get offended,” she said. Sara mentioned that her horses have been especially important when work has been very busy and stressful. She said that the horses are good since you have to be outside, it involves physical labor and that you can be yourself in the stable.

Jessica said that her equestrian background has given her a great work capacity. That she is not afraid of hard work. She also highlighted the fact that you learn to plan at a young age since it takes time to groom the horse before the riding lessons and you have to get your horse ready before the lesson starts. “You learn to be determent at a young age since horses are big animals that you have to be able to control,” Jessica said. She also said that you have to be unafraid because if something happens when you are hacking, you as a rider need to be determent and show that you are the one in charge and deal with the situation. Jessica mentioned the fact that you learn to interact with different types of people at various ages and be a part of the daily work in the stable.

Jessica feels that her equestrian background taught to become responsibility taking and that has been useful in her career. The more she helped out and worked at the riding school, the more responsibility they gave her. She described how she helped to arrange competitions when she was only 14 years old. Jessica does not know if her straightforward way of communicating comes from her equestrian background or it comes from her upbringing. Either way, she said that it comes very natural for her. She said that the fact that she likes to deal with conflicts straight away and do not back down might come from the horses since you have to act immediately in conflict situations with horses as well. But she said that it is difficult to say. But she is certain that she has become fearless from handling horses and that this in turn helps when she deals with conflict situations. She is not sure if it is her equestrian background that has made her very driven or if it is a personality trait.

Gabriella said that her equestrian background has taught her what hard work is like. Since she always has had her horses at home, her days has started at 6 am with stable work and after a full day of work she got home and grabbed a bite to eat before she went out to the stable again to ride her horses. “The ability to feel pleasure in hard work and constantly be on the move is important. And to have fun along the way,” she said. Gabriella also explained that she has experienced more setbacks when dealing with horses than in her professional work and that it is a good experience to learn how to tackle setbacks and then get back on the right track again. Sometimes she thinks that you learn more from all the setbacks you experience with horses rather than the progress.

Gabriella can see many parallels between being the leader of the horse and her leadership at work. She said that you cannot force a horse to do something and that you cannot force a human to do something. Therefore you as a leader need create motivation, both in your horse and within the coworkers. “Motivation is important because you need your horse and coworkers to be happy and satisfied in order for them to perform well. In order to reach your goals with the horse, the horse need to think that it is fun to train and thus be willing to train hard,” Gabriella said. She said that it is the same thing with humans; she wants her coworkers to find their job fun so that they want to work hard. Gabriella also said that her clear way of communicating comes from her experiences with horses since you need to give very clear signals when working with horses.

Gabriella said that the horses have given her discipline. She explained that it is important to be consistent and to have a plan with the training in order to get results and that there are no shortcuts. She said that the discipline is useful at the workplace since you need to be on time to work and do what you are supposed to. Gabriella said that surely her coworkers know when she comes to work in the mornings and when she leaves at night. She also said that she can see how the girls in the stable learn to take responsibility when they take care of the horses and when they work in the stable. When Gabriella began to ride at the riding school the instructors were servicemen, hence the hierarchy was very clear. “You did what the servicemen told you to do,” she said. Gabriella explained that the riding schools have changed but that there still exists hierarchies and bullying at places.

The horses have been stress releasing for Gabriella who described the stable as a free zone where she can forget about her workday and clear her mind. She said that if you can disconnect your brain for a while you start to view things clearer. "This often makes you realize that the problems you are experiencing are not as big as they seem," she said. She explained that the horses are one part of the therapy and the fact that you are outside working is the other part. Gabriella has never found herself thinking about work when she is horse riding. When she is in the stable doing other chores, she also thinks of other things than work. She thinks that having the horses was especially good at times when it was really busy at work.

Gabriella said that having a nice horse that you can train strengthen your confidence because you always have to push your limits with horses. To dare to mount a colt, jump a high fence or enter a dressage competition. A good confidence is in turn good for the career since it gets you in a positive spiral where you dare to take on new challenges and develop. However, she thinks that it is difficult to say if it is solely the horses that her confidence comes from or if it is in her personality and from how she was raised.

Gabriella has learned to be more patient during her career and to spend more time analyzing problems before she takes action. She feels that she has developed in the way she interacts with the horses as well. She described that she is more calm with the horses today and does not get angry at the horse if it misbehaves or does something wrong. She has experienced that if you get upset with the horse, it can take long time to repair the relationship. She mentioned that it is the same with humans; it can take long time to get the respect back and the relationship to work again if you have said or done something bad.

Lisa learned to take responsibility in the stable at an early age. When she worked in the stable at the age of 12 she was responsible for 20-30 horses during the weekends. She said that you get the authority that is necessary when you handle horses since you need to be the leader. She stated that you have that with you later in life, the fact that you have experienced that kind of leadership. Lisa also mentioned that horses are different and that you cannot treat them in the same way. A method that works on one horse might be completely wrong for another horse. She explained that it is the same with humans; they need leadership that is adjusted after the individual and the situation.

Lisa said that much of her personality has been built in the stable since she has spent so much time there. She mentioned how she had to go to the stable early mornings to feed the horses and how she planned her training. She also mentioned how orderly everything had to be in the stable and how neat and tidy she became. "The stable, the horses and their equipment had to look perfect," she said. The hierarchies in the stable have not negatively affected Lisa, she said that the more you get involved and engaged the more you become a part of the group. Lisa does not know if her clear communication comes from the horses but it is not something she has practiced on later in life. She said that it might come from the horses but Lisa said that she has developed her way of communicating throughout her career. She explained that you have to communicate more with people than with horses and that she had to practice to get everyone to come together and work towards the same goal. She said that horses can have their own will but that you cannot compare it with people. Conflict situations are also something she had to practice on in her career. Lisa said that horse riding is relaxing and that it is impossible to think about work when you are horse riding since you need to have full focus on what the horse is doing.

*Media has written about how horses help individuals develop leadership skills, however, even though the majority of equestrian practitioners are female, men still dominate the leading positions within the business world. What is your thought about this?*

Karin said that she does not know if it is the equestrian background that has made these women leaders or if there is something else. She said that the equestrian background has been good for her, but she does not know if she would have been at the position she is today even without the equestrian background. Karin explained that she is a driven person and ultimately she thinks that she might have been able to take advantage and use that in a better way thanks to her equestrian background.

Sara does not think that the majority of people in the stable will be leaders. Instead, the reason why many female leaders have an equestrian background may be the fact that almost every woman has an equestrian background nowadays. "Hanging around in the stable does not shape any leaders," she said. However, she said that having the full responsibility over a horse and becoming the leader of the horse at the age of 11, as in her own case, certainly makes you more responsible and forces you to grow up in a way. Sara believes that it may be the element of competition that fosters leaders. "It is when you have had your own horse, competed with it and seen it as a sport it can be useful," she said and added that there are many successful athletes with successful careers.

Jessica thinks that the articles about how an equestrian background shape leaders are correct. She said that it is active girls who are not afraid to make decisions and take action. She does not know why there are not more women at leading positions but said that it is a male-dominated society that can be hard to advance in as a woman.

Gabriella thinks that women in general are more careful and reserved and does not claim their space as men do. But once women step forward and claims their space they show that they are very good at what they do. Gabriella said that you have to dare to take on challenges and said that maybe women does not believe in themselves enough or that they are afraid that it would be too much work with an executive position. "Maybe too many women choose to quit their riding career too early and focus on work instead," she says. She explained that in those cases they would lose contact with some of the skills they developed from their equestrian background. Gabriella said that maybe that is the reason to why many of the stable girls do not become leaders.

Lisa is certain that an equestrian background creates leadership skills. However, she said that these skills could be of use in different professions. For example, she said that a nurse has also a great deal of responsibility but in a different way. No one of the people she was horse riding with back in the days are leaders but the people that she takes riding lessons with today are all leaders.

*Imagine that you have two candidates but you can only recruit one. The two candidates have exactly the same background and experiences, except that one has an equestrian background. Would you be more willing to recruit the candidate with an equestrian background?*

Karin said that she would probably recruit the one with an equestrian background. Mostly because she likes people who like animals. She thinks that being fond of animals is important because they enrich you as a person. If she would interview someone who did not like animals she would get suspicious because she would think that empathy or something else would be missing in that individual.

Sara does not think that the equestrian background would affect her decision. She would have recruited the one who felt best talking to. She said that she does not have very positive experiences of horse people and explained that they can be rather close-minded. She said that the only thing she thinks that can be of use from an equestrian background is the assertiveness and directness that you get. Jessica said that she probably would recruit the person with an equestrian background since it is more likely that she would feel more communion with that person. Gabriella thinks that she would recruit the person with an equestrian background since she would expect that person to be goal oriented and used of hard work. Lisa said that she probably would recruit the one with an equestrian background since she has the same background.

*What are your thoughts of leadership development programs that use horses as a way to make the participants develop leadership skills?*

Only Gabriella had heard of the leadership development programs that use horses. None of the interviewees saw a great potential in these programs. Sara said that you learn leadership skills without horses at traditional leadership development programs. Gabriella said that the relationships you have with horses are very individual and she thinks it would be hard to make these courses good. Karin said that it is important to not over-intellectualize the relationship between horses and the development of leadership skills while Jessica said that she probably would not let her employees participate in such a program.



## 5 Analysis

This chapter analyses the leadership skills that can be developed through horse experiences and their usefulness for the interviewed leaders in their role as business leaders. The theory of emotional intelligence serves as a basis for the analyze since the theory chapter shows that the leadership skills found to be essential for successful leadership in the business world and the leadership skills that can be developed through horse experiences correlates with the leadership skills in Goleman's (2000) framework of emotional intelligence.

### 5.1 The emotional intelligence framework and the leadership skills usefulness in business settings

Table 2 illustrates that the leadership skills that can be developed through horse experiences can be placed in Goleman's (2000) framework of emotional intelligence together with the other leadership skills found to be useful for business leaders. However, if the leadership skills that can be developed through horse experiences are useful in business settings are still unknown. Therefore, the following subheadings will analyze the interviewed business leaders experiences of the usefulness of their equestrian backgrounds in comparison to the leadership skills illustrated in table 2.

#### 5.1.1 Self-awareness

Self-awareness, the first capability in Goleman's (2000) emotional intelligence framework, is the foundation of emotional intelligence because the understanding of your own emotions and reactions makes it possible to control them. Also, the understanding of other people's feelings comes from the awareness of our own feelings. Self-awareness is necessary in order to understand the social networks in the surroundings and to have the social skills to navigate in those surroundings (Goleman, 2001).

During the interviews for the thesis, the business leaders described that they have developed skills from their equestrian background that match the skills in the first capability of emotional intelligence. Karin was certain that her experiences with horses has given her improved self-awareness, which supports the findings of Evans *et al.* (2009), Gehrke (2008) and Keaveney (2008). Gehrke (2009) stated that horses increase humans' self-awareness since they give direct feedback on peoples' body language, feelings and their emotional state of being. Keaveney (2008) said that the direct feedback horses provide help people to understand their physical and emotional presence better. Karin described that the wordless communication, when you communicate through your body language and have to be responsive towards the horses' signals, gives a direct feedback on your strengths and weaknesses and makes you more aware of what feelings you transmit to the horse. For example, Karin became more aware that she needed to work on her impatience through her horse experiences. She said that people with an equestrian background might be more self-knowing than others and that self-knowledge is an important quality for leaders. Mumford *et al.* (2000c) stated that self-reflection and self-objectivity are capabilities that have an important impact on business leader performance. The fact that Karin became more aware of her own weaknesses from her horse experiences showed that she had the ability to objectively reflect her way of being in relation to the horse.

Many of the leaders mentioned confidence as something they gained from their equestrian backgrounds, something that also Plymoth (2008), Forsberg (2008), Keaveney (2008) and Evans *et al.* (2009) state is a skill that can be learned through horse experiences. Self-confidence in turn will affect business leaders' willingness to tackle problems and their ability to use resources effectively in stressful and turbulent situations according to Mumford *et al.* (2000c). Karin said that the most important contributions from her equestrian background was the strengthened confidence, increased braveness and the fact that the horses made her more certain with herself and what she can do. When she learned to control and cooperate with such a large animal the shyness and insecurity that she had as a child disappeared. The horses gave her a boost and made her brave enough to try new things and take on challenges. This has been useful in her career. She thought that horse riding could be scary when she was younger but described that she did it anyway due to the exhilarating feeling she had before she mounted the horse and how good it felt afterwards when she managed to do it in spite of the initial fear. Karin meant that it is the pushing of your own limits that is good for building confidence.

Jessica also mentioned that she has become more confident from handling horses. She described that the braveness she acquired from her equestrian background can be of use at work, for example when she deals with conflicts. Similarly to Karin, Gabriella also talked about that you have to push your limits with horses and that this increases your confidence. A good confidence is in turn good for the career since it gets you into a positive spiral where you dare to take on new challenges and develop, but also to face and deal with problems or conflicts. Gabriella also described that she has experienced more setbacks when dealing with horses than in her professional career and that it is a good experience to learn how to tackle setbacks and then get back on the right track again. The ability to fight through difficulties has been valuable in her career. Karin, Jessica and Gabriella support Mumford *et al.* (2000c) who says that an increased confidence, which the business leaders gained from their equestrian background, makes you more willing to take on challenges and deal with problems. However, Gabriella also said that it is difficult to say if it is solely the horses that her confidence comes from or if it is in her personality and from how she was raised.

None of the interviewed business leaders mentioned independence as a skill they learned from their equestrian background, even though independence was mentioned as a skill that can be acquired through horse experiences according to Plymoth (2008) and Forsberg (2008). However, it is likely that the confidence the leaders get from their equestrian backgrounds also makes it easier for them to be independent since the confidence makes them believe in themselves and to be brave.

### 5.1.2 Self-management

Self-management is the ability to control your emotions (Goleman, 2001). Having control over your emotions makes it possible to be trustworthy, conscientious and to have an optimistic state of mind in order improve to performance. It also allows you to be initiative, which is a key to exceptional performance (Goleman, 2001).

Duff (2010), Evans *et al.* (2009) and Forsberg (2008) pointed out that the ability to be assertive is learned when handling horses since it is crucial to be the leader of the horse and be assertive to avoid dangerous situations. During the interview for the thesis, Sara explained this further and said that you have to be the leader in the relationship with the horse to avoid dangerous situations and that you therefore need to be very clear and assertive when handling horses in order to set boundaries for what is acceptable and what is not. Sara said that the assertiveness and directness that she learned from her equestrian background has been of use in her career since it has enabled her to make decisions and direct people in a clear way. Jessica also stressed the importance of being the leader of the horse and that you need to be determent and show that you are in charge. Lisa said that you get authority when you handle horses since you have to be the leader of the horse. The fact that Lisa experienced that kind of leadership from her equestrian background has been useful in her career.

Plymoth (2008) states that planning skills can be learned in the stable environment. Only Jessica mentioned that this was a skill she learned in the stable environment. She described that it was when she prepared the horse for the riding lessons that she needed to plan when to start in order to be finished on time. Even though the other interviewees did not mention planning skills during the interviews it is likely that they have similar experiences.

That the stable environment fosters individuals who are not afraid of taking responsibility is stated in research of Plymoth (2008), Forsberg (2008), Keaveney (2008) and Duff (2010) and the majority of the business leaders interviewed for the thesis said that they have become more responsibility taking due to their equestrian background. Sara said that having horses comes with a great deal of responsibility since you cannot say that you do not have time or feel like taking care of the horse. The owner must take care of the horse every day and she means that it is fostering to have horses in that sense. However, Sara could not see that this had any impact in her career and questioned if leaders are more responsibility taking than their co-workers. Jessica explained that she learned to be responsibility taking when she helped out at the riding school and arranged competitions at a young age, and that this skill has been useful in her career. Similarly to Jessica, Lisa also learned to be responsibility taking when helping out at the riding school when she was young. She mentioned the orderliness in the stable as something positive and explained that the horses and their equipment had to look perfect at all times and that this taught her to become orderly. Gabriella said that the horses gave her discipline since progress comes with consistent and well planned training. She said that this discipline has been useful in her career and gave an example of the importance of being on time for work and to do what you are supposed to do.

Forsberg (2008) and Plymoth (2008) state that individuals with an equestrian background become initiative and competent to act. This is something that can be reflected in all interviewed business leaders. They are all very driven and work at a high pace. All of the interviewees said that they are impatient and often have to remind themselves to spend enough time to analyze problems before they jump into the solutions but also to stop and make sure that their coworkers keep up with them since they are aware that everyone does not have the same speed. The leaders expressed their willingness to influence and change things as well as making decisions and to have a head on approach when dealing with situations of various kinds. However, the leaders said that their driven personalities might come from the way they were raised or be personality traits, and that it probably not only comes from their equestrian background.

Keaveney (2008) stated that it is crucial to be able to control your emotions when handling horses since the consequences of transmitting frustration or anger when handling a horse can be severe. Gabriella said that she has experienced that no good comes out of transmitting anger or frustration to the horse if it does something wrong. She said that it could take long time to repair the relationship if you cannot control your emotions. She also said that the same thing applies for humans.

The business leaders also pointed out the therapeutic aspect of horse riding meaning that this is a way of emotional control. They described that it is impossible to think of work when horse riding since full focus needs to be on the horse and that you need to be 100 percent present in the moment. The leaders see the stable environment as a free zone where they can disconnect their minds from work and get new energy. Gabriella said that the problems at work always feel smaller after an evening in the stable. It helps her to put things in perspective and get a clearer view of the problems. Karin, Sara and Gabriella said that the horses were most important during the times when work was at its busiest stage since it was their way to de-stress. Karin said that she could have been working day and night during the busy periods if it was not for her horse. She does not own a horse today and can feel that she is not as stress hardy as before.

Lord and Hall (2005) highlighted that the emotions business leaders transmit will affect their trustworthiness as leaders and the co-workers willingness to follow them. Emotional control is necessary to be able to behave consistently in the way that is expected from the co-workers. An important aspect in creating a supportive environment where the employees do their best is to build trust. The trust and willingness to follow leaders will diminish if leaders are perceived as being inauthentic and chameleon-like. The fact that the stable was a place where the interviewed business leaders could de-stress allowed them to get a more objective view of problems and find new energy helped them at work.

### 5.1.3 Social awareness

Social awareness is about being aware of the needs, emotions and concerns of others, even in a non-verbal communication (Goleman, 2001). Social awareness makes it possible to objectively read situations (Goleman, 2001), which is a vital skill in the stable. It is important to be alert to small signals and to be able to interpret situations from the horse's perspective when handling horses (Plymoth, 2008). Riders need to be aware of and read the surroundings to be ready to handle every reaction of the horse (Hausberger *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, riders need to handle every horse in a different way since every horse, similarly to humans, is different. This skill can be useful in a business setting since flexible leadership is needed (Hausberger *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, the literature also reveals that people in stable environments often have a good understanding of both horses and people since they are able to understand non-verbal communication (Keaveney, 2008; Duff, 2010; Evans *et al.*, 2009).

During the interviews, Both Karin and Sara said that they are responsive towards humans' signals and that they can read and understand people well and feel empathy. Sara however is unsure if her responsiveness of other people's state of mind comes from her equestrian background. She thinks that it is more likely something that is connected to her personality and something she has learnt throughout her career. Karin on the other hand said that it is possible that her equestrian background have made her more responsive towards humans' signals. Nevertheless, Karin said that these abilities have been useful in her business career since it has helped her to recruit the right people. Karin, Sara and Lisa also highlighted that you have to adjust your way of being with horses since every horse is different. A method that works on one horse might be totally wrong for another and that it is the same thing with humans; they need leadership that is adjusted after the individual and the specific situation. Mumford *et al.* (2000c) and Lord and Hall (2005) highlighted that it is important that leaders can adjust their own behavior and be flexible based on their awareness of others. The awareness of others is crucial in order to understand the context in which the leader is active (Mumford, Campion & Morgeson, 2007) and to communicate a vision, establish goals, motivate, support, monitor and provide guidance in the implementation process (Mumford *et al.*, 2000c).

### 5.1.4 Social skills

The social skills include communication skills, the ability and desire to influence and develop others and to manage persuasion (Goleman, 2001). The ability to establish and maintain relationships is included in the social skills as well as the ability to create cooperation, which is an essential part in creating an environment where people can get inspired and motivated and work towards the same goals (Goleman, 2001).

The literature on how horses help people to develop leadership skills state that horses can help people to develop a number of social skills. A clear and consistent communication is needed when handling horses to ensure that an understanding between horse and rider is reached (Plymoth, 2008). Hausberger *et al.* (2008) state that cooperation between horse and rider is essential to perform well and Keaveney (2008) says that the shared communication creates a sense of teamwork and partnership.

During the interviews, all interviewed leaders said that they have a very clear and straightforward way of communicating. Both Karin and Sara said that they have been perceived as almost brutal in their way of communicating in the beginning of their careers. Karin and Gabriella said that they have been able to take this clear, simple and straightforward way of communicating in the stable and use it in their career. However, Karin lifts the idea that maybe she could have had it within herself but she says that if so, it has absolutely been strengthened thanks to her equestrian background. Moreover, neither Jessica nor Lisa know if their clear and straightforward way of communicating comes from their equestrian background or if it comes from their upbringing. Lisa says that it is possible that it comes from the horses but that she has developed her way of communicating throughout her career. Both Sara and Gabriella said that they are good listeners and that they feel that people trust them.

Mumford, Campion & Morgeson (2007), Mumford *et al.* (2000b) and Mumford *et al.* (2000c) state that communication and persuasion is important for business leaders since they need to interact with others to establish relationships and to influence their co-workers in a way that motivate them to efficiently work towards organizational objectives. Furthermore, Lord and Hall (2005) mentioned the importance of labeling situations as opportunities instead of threats in order to create a creative and supportive approach to problems among the co-workers instead of a creating avoidance and a chaotic approach. To enter problem situations with a positive way of thinking can be compared to Keaveney's (2008) thoughts on building positive relationships with horses. Keaveney (2008) stated that it is important to know when and how to give rewards and punishment in order to create teamwork (Keaveney, 2008). This is important because a positive relationship built on positive experiences is necessary to make the horse motivated to perform (Hausberger *et al.*, 2008).

Karin acknowledges the fact that the relationship with the horse needs to be built on encouragement and not punishment. Similarly, Gabriella explained that the key to good performance is to keep the horse motivated and make the training fun. Gabriella said that she could see many parallels between being the leader of the horse and her leadership at work. She said that you cannot force a horse into doing something and it is the same thing with humans. Therefore you as a leader, no matter if you are the leader of a horse or a human, need create motivation to make your followers feel that their work tasks are fun and thus be willing to perform. All interviewed leaders expressed that they thought it was fun to work with people and make them thrive.

The literature states that it is common for horse owners to become a group where they feel belonging and togetherness with each other (Keaveney, 2008). Jessica said that the good thing about the stable environment is that you learn to interact with people in different ages and to be part of the daily work in the stable. However, Karin, Sara and Gabriella highlighted that there still exists hierarchies with grouping and bullying at many riding schools and that this environment is negative since it can harm the confidence of the exposed. Only Sara was exposed to the bullying but it did not affect her confidence later in her career.

## 5.2 Concluding comments about the analysis

There are a number of leadership skills that can be developed through horse experiences according to the research. However, only five leadership skills received much support from the interviewed business leaders when it came to the leadership skills usefulness in business settings. Table 3 below illustrates the leadership skills that can be developed through horse experiences. The five skills that proved to be more important than the others are marked in bold text. As the table shows, confidence is a leadership skill that received much support and can be connected to self-awareness in Goleman's (2000) framework. Assertiveness, power-of-action and emotional control received much support as well. These skills can be connected to the competency self-management. The last skill that received much support is communication, which can be connected to social skills.

Table 3. The leadership skills that can be developed through horse experiences in Goleman's (2000) emotional intelligence framework (own processing)

<i>Self-awareness</i>	<i>Social perceptiveness</i>
<b>Confidence</b> (Plymoth, 2008; Forsberg, 2008; Keaveney, 2008; Evans <i>et al.</i> , 2009) Independence (Plymoth, 2008; Forsberg, 2008) Improved self-awareness (Keaveney, 2008; Evans <i>et al.</i> , 2009; Gehrke, 2009)	Attentiveness to verbal and non-verbal signals (Plymoth, 2008; Keaveney, 2008; Duff, 2010; Hausberger <i>et al.</i> , 2008; Evans <i>et al.</i> , 2009)
<i>Self-management</i>	<i>Social skills</i>
Responsibility (Plymoth, 2008; Forsberg, 2008; Keaveney, 2008; Duff, 2010) <b>Assertiveness</b> (Duff, 2010; Evans <i>et al.</i> , 2009; Forsberg, 2008) <b>Power-of-action</b> (Forsberg, 2008; Plymoth, 2008) <b>Emotional control</b> (Keaveney, 2008) Planning (Plymoth, 2008)	<b>Communication</b> and persuasion (Plymoth, 2008; Keaveney, 2008; Hausberger <i>et al.</i> , 2008) Relationship building (Keaveney, 2008; Hausberger <i>et al.</i> , 2008) Cooperation and teamwork (Plymoth, 2008; Duff, 2010; Hausberger <i>et al.</i> , 2008)

Confidence is a leadership skill that received much support. Karin said that the most important contributions from her equestrian background was the strengthened confidence, increased braveness and the fact that the horses made her more certain with herself and what she can do. Karin and Gabriella pointed out that you have to push your limits with horses and be brave enough to take the leader role at all times when handling the horse, even though some situations are challenging. Jessica also said that she became more confident from handling horses. Karin, Gabriella and Jessica think that the confidence they gained from handling horses makes them more willing to take on challenges and deal with problems at work. It is likely that the confidence has led to the leaders' fast career advancements since they have not been afraid of taking new challenges.

Moreover, the equestrian background made the leaders able to tackle problems and fight through setbacks while being clear and trustworthy leaders. Clear leadership where appropriate emotions are communicated to the co-workers is crucial, especially during crisis situations (Lord & Hall, 2005). This can be one reason as to why the interviewed leaders have been able to have such successful careers. They have had the confidence to meet difficult situations in a calm way and been able to transmit appropriate emotions to their co-workers so that the co-workers have felt trust and been able to work efficiently.

Assertiveness is another leadership skill that can be developed through horse experiences. This leadership skill received attention from Sara, Jessica and Lisa. Sara said that the assertiveness and directness that she learned from her experiences with horses has been of use in her career since it enables her to make decisions and direct people in a clear way. She explained that she learned this since you need to be the leader in the relationship with the horse to avoid dangerous situations. She said that you therefore need to be very clear and assertive when handling horses in order to set boundaries for what is acceptable and what is not. Lisa said that the experience of this type of clear leadership has been useful in her career. The leaders learned from an early age to be assertive and take leader role in the relation to the horse. It is likely that this is the reason as to why leadership comes natural for them and that they do not have any problems of being assertive or make decisions.

All interviewed leaders were very driven, initiative and not afraid of hard work, which are useful qualities for leaders. Gabriella said that she learned what hard work is like from working in the stable and Jessica says that her equestrian background gave her a high work capacity that is useful in her role as a leader. This supports that an equestrian background create power-of-action. Having horses is not all about horse riding; it also includes clearing the dung out, feeding and other necessary but not very tempting chores. Since people with an equestrian background are used to this, it is likely that their way of addressing issues straight away and not being “too good” for some work tasks comes from their experiences with horses.

Karin, Sara, Gabriella and Lisa, the business leaders who were horse riding during their career, acknowledged the important therapeutic aspect of horse riding meaning that this is a way of emotional control. Karin, Sara and Gabriella said that when their work was at its busiest stage, it was even more important to go to the stable since the horses were their way to de-stress. The stable environment was a free zone where they could disconnect their minds from work. As a result they could come back to work with new energy and with a more objective view of problems. It is possible that other sports or activities would have the same therapeutic impact as the horses and the stable environment. However, why an equestrian background stands out for this purpose is that the horses give immediate feedback of your emotions and that you need to be able to control your emotions since impatience or aggression could lead to dangerous situation. For the same reason, horses require 100 percent attention, which makes it impossible to think of other things when handling horses.

Another leadership skill that received much support of the business leaders is communication skills. Communication skills can be developed through horse experiences and the interviewed leaders reflected this since all of them have a very clear and straightforward way of communicating. It was not certain that the way you communicate with horses can be useful when communicating with humans, but Karin and Gabriella said that they have been able to take this clear, simple and straightforward way of communicating in the stable and use it in their careers.



Some of the leadership skills found in the literature on how horses can help individuals to develop leadership skills received less support when it came to the leadership skills usefulness in business settings. Karin described that self-awareness is an important quality for leaders but she was the only one of the interviewed business leaders who said that horse experiences could give you an improved self-awareness. Furthermore, none of the business leaders mentioned independence as a leadership skill they had learnt from their equestrian background. Jessica was the only leader who said that the stable environment taught her planning skills but she did not say that these planning skills came to use in her role as a business leader. Lisa and Jessica said that they learned to take responsibility at the riding school while Sara and Gabriella said that being the owner of a horse comes with a great deal of responsibility although Sara questioned if leaders are more responsibility taking than their co-workers. Gabriella however pointed at the discipline that is needed when training horses in order to get results. She said that that the discipline has been useful in her career since she knows the importance of being on time for work and to do what you are supposed to do.

When it comes to being attentive to verbal and non-verbal signals, Karin, Sara and Lisa said that you have to be responsive towards the horses' signals and adjust your way of being with horses since every horse is different. They made parallels to humans saying that humans need leadership that is adjusted after the individual and the specific situation. Karin said that her equestrian background might have made her more responsive towards humans' signals and that this is a good quality at work, but none of the other leaders explicitly said that their ability to be responsive towards horses' signals could be of use at work even though they could see parallels.

When it comes to relationship building, cooperation and teamwork, Karin stated that the relationship with the horses must be built on encouragement instead of punishment while Gabriella explained that the key to good performance is to keep the horse motivated and make the training fun. Gabriella was the only leader who mentioned that there are parallels between how you motivate and make the horse follow you and how to motivate and make the co-workers follow. Jessica said that it is good that you learn to interact with people in different ages at the stable and to be part of the daily work. However, Karin, Sara and Gabriella pointed out that there still exists hierarchies with grouping and bullying at many riding schools and that this environment is negative since it can harm the confidence of the exposed. This means that riding schools may be more negative than positive for their practitioners if the riding schools are not run properly.

Three out of five leadership skills that were pointed out as being useful for business leaders in their careers are connected to the competency self-management. One skill was connected to the competency self-awareness while another skill was connected to the competency social skills. This means that experiences with horses are good in terms of self-management. Individuals who work with horses learn to control their emotions. However, self-management comes from self-awareness meaning that you need to be aware and understand your emotions before you can control them (Goleman, 2000). This means that horses probably can be useful when it comes to the development of self-awareness too.

## 6 Discussion

The analysis showed that the business leaders had developed the leadership skills; confidence, assertiveness, power-of-action, emotional control and communication through their horse experiences and that these skills are useful in business settings. The other leadership skills that could be developed through horse experiences according to the research received less attention among the interviewed leaders. Many of these leadership skills were mentioned by the leaders, but their transferability to business settings were not as clear as for the leadership skills that received more support.

It can be discussed if the leadership skills above really come from the business leaders' equestrian experiences or if they come from their upbringing or if they are personality traits. The leaders expressed some unsureness regarding where the leadership skills were developed. However, even though it is likely that the leadership skills are affected by the business leaders' upbringing, personality traits and on-the-job experiences, the interviews reveal that the horse experiences has had a significant impact on the business leaders and that the leadership skills that received much support have been useful in their careers.

If more research is conducted and the findings in this thesis are strengthened, the equestrian sport is likely to receive more attention for its important contributions. Recruiting agencies may turn their focus towards the equestrian sport to find individuals who possess leadership potential. Or more likely, an equestrian background might become a deal breaker in a resume. If this would become a reality, there is a chance that more women would become leaders in the business world since the majority of equestrian practitioners are female. In the best of the worlds, the gender imbalance in the business world would be evened out and so would the gender imbalance within the equestrian sport. If the equestrian sport would be a recruitment arena for leaders, it is likely to assume that men would want to be active on that same arena.

The fact that there are so few women at leading positions in the business world can be questioned by looking at the findings from this study. However, it is possible that the leadership skills learnt from horse experiences can be used in other settings than in the business world. Furthermore, there might be other sports that help individuals to develop even more leadership skills. The reason as to why the equestrian sport has received much attention for this purpose is that equestrian practitioners need to practice leadership at all times when handling horses since it is crucial to be the leader of the horse to avoid dangerous situations. If more research is conducted about the leadership skills that can be developed from horse experiences it would not only mean that an increased potential for the equestrian sport but also a potential to open up a new recruitment arena for business leaders.

## 7 Conclusions

The aim in this this thesis was to get a better understanding on how useful the leadership skills that can be developed through horse experiences are perceived to be in business settings. In order to fulfill the aim of the thesis, the following research question was investigated: How do business leaders with equestrian backgrounds feel that their horse experiences have helped them through their career?

The literature on how horses can help individuals to develop leadership skills mentions a number of leadership skills that can be developed through horse experiences, these include; self-awareness, confidence and independence, responsibility, assertiveness, power-of-action, emotional control, planning skills, attentiveness towards verbal and none-verbal signals, communication and persuasion, relationship building and cooperation and teamwork. The business leaders interviewed for this thesis felt that they developed confidence, assertiveness, emotional control, power-of-action and communication skills, through their horse experiences and that these leadership skills have proven to be useful in their business careers. Therefore, these leadership skills are not only useful in equestrian environments and in relation to the horse; they can also be of use in business settings.

The confidence that can be developed through horse experiences is a useful leadership skill since it makes the leaders unafraid to take on challenges and deal with problems. The leaders stated that you learn to be assertive when handling horses and that it is important for leaders to be assertive in order for the co-workers to accept their leadership. A clear and straightforward way of communicating is another skill that is learned when handling horses and this skill is important for leaders to possess in order to direct their co-workers in a clear way and to keep them motivated. The interviewed business leaders stated that the horses were important during their careers since it was a way for them to de-stress and reboot, or in other words, a way of getting emotional control. Furthermore, the business leaders head-on approach to problems and their driven personalities can be linked to their equestrian background since horse experiences foster a power-of-action.

Confidence belongs to the capability self-awareness while assertiveness, emotional control and power-of-action belongs to the capability self-management. Communication skills on the other hand are social skills. Since most of the leadership skills that proved to be useful for the interviewed business leaders can be connected to self-management, it can be said that horse experiences mostly help individuals to control their emotions. However, since self-management comes from self-awareness it can be concluded that horse experiences help individuals to become aware of their emotions and to control them.

The other leadership skills; self-awareness, independence, responsibility, planning skills, attentiveness towards verbal and none-verbal signals and relationship building, cooperation and teamwork received less support among the interviewed business. These skills usefulness in the business leaders' careers was not as clear as the earlier mentioned leadership skills.

## 7.1 Further research

The findings in this thesis are built on five interviews. Studies with more respondents are needed in order to generalize the findings. This study showed that the leadership skills confidence, assertiveness, emotional control, power-of-action and communication skills were useful in the careers of the interviewed leaders. However, if five other leaders were to be interviewed, the study might have shown something different.

Many of the interviewed business leaders were unsure if they had learnt some of the leadership skills from their equestrian backgrounds or if it was thanks to their upbringing or specific personality traits. It is likely that interviews need to be combined with observational studies in order to address this issue since the interviewed leaders had problem identifying these issues by themselves.

Furthermore, it can also be questioned if there are certain types of people, individuals with higher leadership potential, that start horse riding. Horse riding is a relatively expensive sport. Therefore, it is likely that parents of young practitioners have an academic education. The likeliness for their children to also get an academic education would therefore increase and so does the chances on becoming a business leader in the future. More research is needed to address this issue.

Moreover, maybe the leadership skills that can be learned from experiences with horses can be used in other settings than in the business world. It can be other explanations for the limited number of female leaders in the business world. Furthermore, it is possible that there are other sports that can help individuals to develop even more leadership skills than horse experiences. More research is needed to address these issues.

Nevertheless, this study has shown that horse experiences can help individuals to develop leadership skills that are useful in business settings. Future studies should focus on the leadership skills confidence, assertiveness, emotional control, power-of-action and communication skills since these leadership skills received most support among the interviewed leaders in this thesis.

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## **Personal messages**

Karin. Interview through a personal meeting the 27<sup>th</sup> of April 2015.

Sara. Interview through a personal meeting the 7<sup>th</sup> of May 2015.

Jessica. Interview by telephone the 11<sup>th</sup> of May 2015.

Gabriella. Interview by telephone the 12<sup>th</sup> of May 2015.

Lisa. Interview by telephone the 13<sup>th</sup> of May 2015.



# Appendix 1: Interview questionnaire

Namn:

Position:

1. Berätta om din karriär och din nuvarande ledarroll.
2. Berätta om din hästbakgrund.
3. Vad har gjort dig till den ledare du är idag, dvs. vilka är dina personliga drivkrafter?
4. Vilka är dina styrkor som ledare? Vad är det som du behöver förbättra?
5. Vad kännetecknar ditt ledarskap? Hur skulle dina medarbetare beskriva ditt ledarskap?
6. Vilken roll får du oftast i en grupp?
7. Vilka egenskaper tycker du är extra viktiga som ledare?
8. Vilka färdigheter har du utvecklat tack vare din hästbakgrund? Har din ridbakgrund påverkat ditt sätt att agera i olika situationer?
9. Exakt hur och i vilka tillfällen har du utvecklat dessa egenskaper? Förtydligande; är det i själva interaktionen med hästen från marken/ när du rider/ på grund av ansvaret för hästen/i interaktionen med de andra i stallet?
10. Hur har din hästbakgrund kommit till användning i dina olika ledarroller och när du har avancerat i karriären? I vilka skeden under din karriär har du haft mest användning av din hästbakgrund?
11. Vilka egenskaper har du behövt utveckla under karriären där du inte har haft användning av din hästbakgrund?
12. Media har skrivit mycket om att framtiden ledare kommer att komma från ridsporten, hur ser du på dessa påståenden? Om de stämmer att ridning skapar ledaregenskaper, varför har vi då inte fler kvinnliga ledare på höga positioner?
13. Det sägs att individer med ridbakgrund har ett bra rykte på arbetsmarknaden. Hur ser du på detta? Skulle du vara mer positivt inställd till att anställa en person med ridbakgrund jämfört med en person utan ridbakgrund givet att de i övrigt har samma kompetens och bakgrund?
14. Vad anser du om de ledarskapsutvecklingsprogram som använder sig av hästar under sina utbildningar? Skulle du tänka dig att skicka dina anställda på något sådant?