

6. Military Leadership

As previously described in Chapter 2, we were surprised by how satisfied the soldiers were with leaders of both genders, as well as their peers, and the daily routines at the Army unit in the north – a unit that lies way up north, far from even the closest town. Here we found a superior work environment, better continuity, higher levels of well-being and less sexual harassment than what we found at the two other units included in our study. The culture that existed at the other two locations was more characterized by traditional masculine values, discriminatory physical and verbal rituals and discontinuity and variation among the leadership. We assumed such discrepancies indicated that different forms of leadership may play a role in creating different work cultures and/or serve to cement what already “permeates the walls”.

The legitimacy of the leadership in the north was dominated by military discipline, in line with the rest of the Armed Forces. However, at the same time, the leaders always had an open door. They had a complete overview of the unit, knew all of the individuals and their qualifications, and spent time to find the right man or woman for each position. Leaders at all levels were trained to consider the needs of both women and men – without easing up on the physical requirements. There was a well-integrated understanding at all organizational levels that both feminine and masculine attributes were needed to produce competent military leaders of both genders. Time was spent facilitating for the fact that some women would not be as physically strong as the men to start and would need a distinct training program to encourage them to draw on their own physical potential. For example, time and opportunities were set aside for women to supplement their training in order to compete under the same conditions as men. Furthermore, we found that many female soldiers in this unit were as physically strong – or stronger – than many of the male soldiers.

Thus, we feel that we have observed a form of flexible leadership style involving the use of “gender glasses” at the unit in the north. This style of leadership has resulted in (at least) three outcomes:

1. Use of mixed rooms to promote better communication and interaction between female and male conscripts;
2. Superior training of female recruits; and

3. Good selection of both genders for a broad range of tasks for which both physical and mental qualifications are taken into consideration.

The question then becomes, how did this so clearly happen in the north but not at the other units we visited? There is reason to claim that the unit in the north was a pioneer in dealing with the issue of gender equality and the introduction of mixed rooms, for which they received the military award for gender equality. It had previously been common for recruits to be placed in gender-specific rooms, while the cramped quarters of locations for continued service demanded that young men and women live quite closely together after the initial recruitment training. There was the additional problem that those who lived in the female quarters were kept out of the loop, often missing out on a lot of important information. Someone came up with the idea that mixed rooms should be introduced from day one. Is this a concept that originated from the thought processes of military leadership?

After having completed our case studies, leadership and leadership theory seemed to be an important research field to explore. Therefore, as part of a larger umbrella project ²⁵, we have carried out the following three sub-studies in order to approach the field:

1. A short review of central leadership theory in the Armed Forces;
2. Participatory observation of a particularly well-respected leadership course, including interviews of course participants; and
3. Interviews with a selection of high-ranking officers.

We have used an exploratory approach, which has provided the basis for some preliminary findings and assumptions in addition to a several new hypotheses. One primary issue has arisen from the findings in the north: to what degree are the pro-equality initiatives in the north rooted in general military leadership theory in Norway? Does the idea of gender equality and equality leadership have its foundation at the highest levels of the Armed

²⁵ The study of leadership in the military is part of the umbrella project, "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall, Who's the Most Powerful of Them All? Gender as a Symbolic and Social Structure in Organizations". Collaborating partners with the University of Oslo include Norwegian University of Science and Technology, University of Stavanger and Birkbeck, University of London. The project is financed by the Research Council of Norway's project entitled, "Cultural Conditions Underlying Social Change" (2013 – 2016).

Forces? Both questions are critical in understanding what we have observed during our studies, particularly in light of the newly-introduced general conscription that places gender equality leadership high on the list of priorities in the military.

Central leadership theory

According to the leaders in this study, a shift occurred in the Armed Forces during the 1980s; namely, from embracing a culture of military orders to encouraging a more modern leadership philosophy. This transition took place after the so-called “Vassdal accident” in March, 1986, in which 16 soldiers lost their lives. The soldiers died in a catastrophic avalanche that occurred during a large NATO exercise. The accident brought attention to a conflict between the top commanders of the exercise and the local population, lower-ranked officers and soldiers, in which the latter had warned about the danger of avalanche when the decision was made to take an engineering company into Vassdal (The Chief of Defence’s Fundamental View on Leadership in the Military 2012 - “Forsvarssjefens grunnsyn på ledelse i Forsvaret.”).

The new style of leadership that was then adopted was inspired by the “situational leadership” theory, developed by Hersey and Blanchard (SLT, 1969). In short, the theory is based on the idea that different situations require different types of leadership, meaning that the leader must continually adapt and adjust his or her leadership style (Matthiesen 2002). Leadership is defined here as a process in which the leader motivates an individual or group towards increased efforts in order to achieve a certain goal in a given situation. This means that the leader must have diagnostic skills, the ability to judge a situation and the capability of assessing the need for guidance, assistance and follow-up among his/her colleagues at all times. The leader has to be relation-oriented in addition to being adept at analyzing situations. The theory is mentioned in leadership literature as being popular and widespread in the business world (Matthiesen 2002). The motto we described in Chapters 2 and 5, that “all incidents should ideally be resolved at the lowest possible level”, probably has its foundations in this leadership theory. The theory is also connected to a more flexible style of leadership that may be necessary in order to function satisfactorily as a leader under rapidly fluctuating circumstances (Grønhaug et al. 2001).

One preliminary impression is that this relatively modern leadership philosophy does not need to get in the way of a “gendered” equality leadership. If the command manages to interpret and absorb the changes that occur when more women join the general conscription and fill positions at all levels, this flexible style of leadership may well promote the work of gender equality at the local level.

The new style of leadership was likely a prerequisite (though no guarantee) for what occurred at the unit in the north. The situation demanded a new arrangement of the recruit living quarters. However, the flexible, localized and general characteristics of the theory provide no guarantees for competent equality leadership; that requires something more. Perhaps this “something more” is provided at the leadership course?

The leadership course

Through The Norwegian Defence University College we gained access to a leadership development programme with an excellent reputation, having been referred to as one of the best the Norwegian Armed Forces have to offer. The programme was developed as a result of the challenges facing a modern leadership in the military sector, focusing on mid-level leadership.

In the curriculum for the leadership programme, it is noted that, “the term, leadership development methods in the military, must be perceived as something beyond traditional leadership development programmes”; it is more precisely adapted to the Norwegian Armed Forces. The definition used for leadership development is “to develop oneself within the role of leader; thus, leadership development is viewed as improved execution of the role through raised awareness, expanded leadership competence and similar concepts, along with increased understanding of one’s role”.

The “selected” mid-level leaders are in their 30s and 40s and are considered to be career people who are aiming at (even) higher positions in the Armed Forces. The educational programme lasts for one year, including four week-long workshops that take place at different locations across the country. We have followed a course with 21 participants – seven women and the rest men. In order to gain insight into how the participants perceived the course, and to hear their opinions on what they learned, we have followed the progress

of three men and one woman, interviewing them after each course meeting. These four were all members of separate groups during the meetings; thus, we have some knowledge of how others in each group viewed the course and what they talked about. We spent four days as participatory observers during the third week-long session, where we gained additional insight into teaching methods and had the opportunity to talk with both participants and teachers. At this meeting, the participants were given the task of introducing themselves and presenting their leadership platform. Additionally, we have had access to four randomly-chosen sets of “reflective notes” (2 pages) and four sets of working notes with the title, “My Leadership Philosophy” (10 pages)²⁶. In these documents there is a supplementary description of what they have learned about themselves and how they wish to develop their future leadership role.

What do the course participants say about their leadership style?

We will show some examples of how the participants perceive themselves and their own style of leadership. The point is to demonstrate the diversity of styles that are accepted in the military and to examine the degree to which these correlate with the leadership style we found in the north. They also respond to our questions on how they feel about gender and leadership, including their gender perspectives on themselves as both members of the military and leaders. We will also see how certain characteristics of military career patterns are at odds with the way some individuals would prefer to practice their leadership style. These are characteristics of military organization that we have previously pointed to that can often result in the transfer of good leaders to new units.

They all write that they have learned a lot about themselves and their strengths and weaknesses; that they have gained insight – and an outside perspective - into their own “personal inventories”. Furthermore, they have learned to clarify their own expectations and those of their closest superiors and subordinates. During the course, “you are challenged in a controlled way, which leads to individual development and personal growth”, says one of the informants. As commanding officers for both conscripts and

²⁶ The course leader randomly chose and sent us the material. The notes are also from other participants besides those we have interviewed.

younger officers, most are concerned with further developing a command that reflects this type of leadership, as we have previously illustrated in this chapter.

When they are asked to depict what characterizes their role as a leader, several variations are provided; for example, the “protective father role”, “the alpha male” or the “experienced leader”. We look more closely at the explanations we feel may shed light on the risk potential that the military may lose many of its most qualified leaders.

The protective father / the facilitator

This is a leader who refers to himself as a facilitator for his subordinates; one who gives of himself and is a father to them. He is a caring, protective leader who dares to show his feelings in the exercise of leadership, while also having a pronounced competitive instinct. After having gone through the mandatory tests for the course – a personality and a behavioural test – he has become even more capable of leading others. He has both an increased sense of self-reflection and more self-confidence. Despite the fact that some of the exercises have given him a “feeling of being on shaky ground”, he has become more confident in his “relation-oriented approach to his subordinates”. It is through this style of leadership that he wants his basic values to be transformed into “closeness, care and empathy”.

The family plays a key role in his account and, in all four interviews with him during the year, he underscores that his partner and children mean a lot to him. He is ambitious and would like to have a career – something his partner also wants – but at the end of the course he begins to have doubts. He says that he has suddenly realized he needs to decide soon whether he will go for a further career in the military. First of all, it means spending three years up north without his family, who he knows will not want to leave their work and school. Secondly, he really enjoys his job as commander of the unit he is in charge of now and gets a lot of positive feedback from his colleagues. What he describes coincides well with the tests he has been through and with what his subordinates, peers and commanding officer testify to. He enjoys working with women and has led a unit where the soldiers live in mixed rooms.

The alpha male

This leader, who is responsible for a unit with over a hundred staff members, conveys some of the same. “In the military, you have to say yes to a career; otherwise you lose opportunities and are crossed off the list,” he says.

“For me, selling myself to the military is no option. It means losing control over your own life – it’s the military that has the right to control, that’s why there are fewer women in leadership positions.”

His children are still in school and he has very consciously chosen to prioritize them over making a career of the military. He sees himself as an informal leader who practices “management by walking around”. He explains that he has an informal power position in the job and, being extremely qualified, he has become a “leader figure among the staff”. It is not so easy for him to show his feelings and, during the conversation, he refers to himself as an alpha male; it is his girlfriend who has pointed out this trait. An alpha male is the one who wins the power struggle in the wolf pack; something he recognizes in himself. He is noticed and listened to because he “stands out above most in the organization when it comes to both competence and speaking skills.” It was only at the end of the course that he felt he learned something new; he mentions the communication exercises as having been particularly educational for him. In the military, “you learn to take care of your men and a leader has goals that subordinates (soldiers) are meant to carry out ... what matters is responsibility, courage and respect”. However, as he says, “the challenge for me is how to lead women. I often have problems with how I should interpret them, what they say and how they react to what I say”. We come back to this subject a bit later.

The reflective and experienced leader

This leader is focused on being contemplative, conveying how he wants to build his leadership platform on many years of personal experience as a leader. He sees himself as an introverted type who is tough on himself. He genuinely enjoys being a leader; for him, positive leadership means working together with his subordinates towards a common goal. Leaders need to understand their surroundings and be adept at pointing people in the direction of the goal. Results are important to him and he feels that he has “a natural draw towards goals and results”. During the course he has become more aware of how he should

handle people. One area he could work on is in trying to improve interaction with his subordinates. He views the increased demands to combine work and family as a result of societal development.

“Normal military leadership means taking care of personnel and, 20-30 years ago, there was a cold war and everything military was ironclad. In more recent years, society has evolved and nowadays individuals have to be seen, you are supposed to realize your own potential and it should be meaningful; room for family and loyalty to your employer are less important. And if I’m not happy, I just quit. I think society has made it natural to look more generally at leadership – also in the military”.

Brief summary of various leadership roles

We see that the various leaders have a rather individualized perception of their own styles, roles and potential as leaders. The exception is the last leader, who reflects more on how military leadership changes in sync with society. At the same time, several of them want to establish their future leadership work in a position that maintains a balance between work and outside life (family) and develop themselves while remaining in a familiar workplace. The expressed wishes of the first two leaders seem to collide with the military’s requirements for career plans.

More on the learning and the tests

As we have discussed, the educational programme is known for having substantial requirements and the participants have to demonstrate the will to work on themselves. During the first year they are presented with opportunities to identify, strengthen and further develop their personal behaviour repertoire. Our material shows that the participants have learned a lot about themselves through personality tests, evaluations and the tough group sessions. All of them have been confronted with and received feedback on what they need to work on to become even better leaders. They have been challenged on how they themselves believe they will score when it comes to communication, feelings, mastering different situations and fostering enthusiasm. Being caring and empathetic are a part of the learning process. The message is that, as a leader, you need to be a role model

who can convince and command while also embracing the importance of listening to all voices before making decisions.

As we interpret the data (documents, teaching materials, interviews and observations), the leader roles chosen by the participants stem from their own experiences and the leadership competence they have brought to the table, along with what they have learned through theory and practice during the week-long sessions and group work. In other words, situational leadership, in practice, means that the leaders themselves may choose how and where they want to place emphasis on the leadership: present leadership, transformation or relation-based leadership, etc. They need to fill the role with what works best for each of them and then draw on the answers from all of the tests they have been through, including the feedback they have received on the types of leadership skills they exhibit and what they should work on developing further.

During one of the meetings, there was a summary of what types of leadership skills the 21 participants scored highest on. In the picture that was presented, over 70 percent of them were good at task-solving. According to the leadership theory that provides the fundamental basis for the military, there are (at least) three types of leader:

- 1) The mission solver, who is systematic, structured and conscientious, adept at solving missions and planning;
- 2) The compassionate leader, who is motivational, versed in the art of relationships and building up colleagues; and
- 3) The creative one, who thinks outside the box and challenges the system by saying, “why should we do it like that; is it because we’ve done it that way for 20 years?”

One of the participants, who was “diagnosed” as creative, questions the recruitment and selection process for the leadership educational programme. She feels it is problematic that the military employs mostly task-solvers but have few people who challenge the system. “It means that bad practices and habits get to survive far too long...”. Isn’t it precisely this type of person the military needs to have in situations of war, we ask? Her response is that, “the military has said they have too many leaders of this type and that more balance is needed

now". A modern military needs leaders who can also think outside the box, she says. "We need more leaders who are stronger on development," a statement that corresponds with the Defence Department's strategy for future competence, in which we find the following: "By forming people as copies of what already exists in the organization, we get old answers to new challenges" ... it is emphasized that the Armed Forces will need "greater breadth of perspectives among its staff" (Stortingsmelding nr. 14: Kompetanse for en ny tid (2012-2013) p.25).

The same female leader, who is relatively young and new in a unit with many older, traditional men, received a low score on her leadership evaluation from subordinates. She had been caught off-guard by this score; however, after having a chance to consider the reasons for it, she feels the test was "very educational" and has taken "the verdict" to heart. What surprised her most was that those who had scored highest on the test were the "old school" Army men.

It should be mentioned that this female leader has also wondered why the syllabus for a leadership development course contains so little about leadership: "... just two books so that we would all have the same basic foundation". These included the military's and "the Chief of Defense's fundamental view on leadership, which is mission-based leadership, and one other book". She concludes with the following: "I reckon this was a leadership development course where you worked with who you are regardless of who you are".

The women who participate in the course talk more about conflicts at work than do the male leaders. This may indicate that gender, age and experience are all significant aspects of a leader position, particularly when viewed in light of the fact that we know young women are exposed to sexual harassment more often than men. One woman, who has had to deal with an ongoing conflict at her workplace, makes it clear that she has gotten good feedback during the course and that, "the job now is to have a clear direction for the road ahead. (As a leader) I have to make sure that my co-workers are made accountable and that they're emotionally tied to the basic values and mission of the organization".

As we have heard, the leaders learn a lot about themselves; they gain tools to change themselves and become aware of their strong and weak points. Based on our case studies, we were naturally quite interested in what leaders learned on gender at the courses. Thus

we talked with course instructors and studied the course literature – without finding a “trace” of gender. After each week-long session, 4 times in the course of the year, we asked the informants a few questions about what they knew and had learned on the subject, and whether they felt it could be useful for them to know more about gender and leadership.

Course participants on leading women

What do the leaders say about gender and leadership; what do they feel a leader in the Armed Forces needs to know about this? Based on the fact that there has been a strong focus on getting more women to thrive and make a career out of the military in almost all political directive documents in the past 10 years, it was logical for us to assume that these issues would be a theme in a modern military leadership programme. However, we could also argue that these are issues that both the commercial and higher educational sectors discuss without it having any influence on the corresponding academic leadership programmes. What is unusual with the military is that last year (2016) they experienced a considerably larger influx of young women coming to live under these extremely special circumstances for a year, in a male-dominated organization. Women are no longer joining the military on a volunteer basis, which compels the Armed Forces to facilitate for a service that suits both genders.

None of the reflective notes on “My Leadership Philosophy” include any thoughts about the significance of gender. When we ask the informants directly, we get the following type of response, as shared by a male commander on what it means to be a leader for women versus men:

“There are several women in one group (at the course) and it hits me there, and in other close settings I’ve been in, that talking about a woman is wrong. Women are, after all, just as diverse as men. They have their strengths and weaknesses, and some have one thing they need to work on while others have something completely different. So to say that there is something particular that needs to be done for women to succeed, I’m not so sure that is the fundamentally right approach”.

Another leader, who has previously had female subordinates but does not currently have any, does not agree:

“There are definitely differences between women and men and, if the leadership isn’t clear on that, it’s not that leadership should only focus on women but should know what this (gender differences) is about. That there actually are two genders and what a leader has to do about that when this is a male-dominated workplace. What a leader should do, that is not a topic”²⁷.

He feels that he, as a man and a leader in a male-dominated organization, has a more substantial challenge when it comes to leading women:

“I’ve had them (female subordinates), but I don’t have any now but I get tested quite a lot through my girlfriend ... I’m often challenged by her when it comes to this understanding you women. It has something to do with feelings, and I haven’t taken in that emotional bit yet. I haven’t learned about how my behaviour affects them, there’s where I’ve surely got a lot to learn”.

When we ask if he reckons it would be useful to learn something about this topic at the course, he responds that many misunderstandings occurred when he had to work closely together with one of the women. What he has learned most about during the course is communication, and that you have to get to know those you need to communicate with in order to avoid over-interpreting or over-explaining what they say. This could be beneficial knowledge for male leaders in the military, he feels.

“What we learn in the military is, of course, to take care of our men, but during the education, we learn nothing about the challenge of leading women – and how to interpret them”.

His experience is that many women get quiet in various situations and, therefore, he would like to learn more about the dynamics between women and men. More knowledge about gender could make him a better leader and a better listener, he says. Then he could understand what he does not understand. He agrees wholeheartedly that the leadership programme should have a small segment on gender and he brought up the lack of gender perspective with his group at the last meeting.

²⁷ We are quite aware that there are more than two expressions of gender. Until recently, the Norwegian Armed Forces have not shown any interest in this topic, as opposed to the Swedish military. As far as we know, there is no research on how the Norwegian military handles, for example, homosexuality and transsexuality.

“They got the point, especially in relation to communication, but this was something they hadn’t thought about or been aware of (before). Of course, we often think of women as the nurturing ones who take care of older people, you know, the care professions are female-dominated, after all, while the military’s profession is to kill. The complete opposite – that’s our job”.

Another says he is flexible and tries to facilitate more if he has women in the unit, particularly if they are not happy:

“If there is something (they have) in common, it may be that women need more (sense of) security, a bit more time, maybe not as high tempo and perhaps you have to express yourself in a slightly different way ... I reckon that, for women to do well, you have to see them all for who they are (individually) and find out what needs they have”.

This leader shares both positive and negative experiences in leading women:

“There are lots of women in my unit, so the collaboration with men is mostly very good, in one way, but women often work poorly together ... The cases that come up, in fact, are often connected to female-to-female relationships ... Previously, I was second-in-command of a large unit with about 20 percent women and almost all of the conflicts I had to resolve involved only women, at times deep, difficult conflicts that arose when they were working and living closely together”.

The one who has led the unit with mixed rooms and a considerable percentage of female soldiers feels that it is completely unproblematic to lead women. We ask again if there are any gender-related topics at the course meetings. He shakes his head and says the same as the others:

“No, not really. The course is exclusively focused on the individuals who are there (in the military) as individuals, and not as women, men, in general. Maybe we have discussed it a bit during some of the breaks and such, informally, but no, there hasn’t been any focus on this at all”.

[Preliminary summary](#)

Gender and equality were not included in the syllabus and/or the subject matter of the course, and the conclusion here has to be much of the same as for the presentation of the

leadership theory. What one learns during a year of leadership education may bring about a thought process, wherein one recognizes the gender issue in the military through proximity and relational leadership and finds an optimal localized solution. The positive aspect of such locally-rooted solutions is that they likely have substantial legitimacy in that they are based on what is perceived as localized issues. The problem, as previously pointed out, is that you need to have the “gender glasses” on in order to see the issues in the first place. An additional problem is that everyone has to seek gains from the advantages they have and, if too many have the same advantages, there is little room for thinking differently or innovatively. On the other hand, it is surprising that a presumably hierarchical organization like the military is open to such a breadth of leadership styles, particularly rooted in individual strengths and preferences. We also see that many at the course refer to rather private experiences, on the edge of being stereotypical, when asked to consider what leadership with a gender perspective means. Most focus on the women, more or less, as a leadership problem, while few see the dynamics between the genders as interesting. We hear even less about problematic male cultures.

As presented in the material, there are few who reflect over what it means to be a leader in a male-dominated culture. Some touch on the idea that the increased proximity of women may contribute to changing the male-dominated culture, but what they do not see is that the men must enter the playing field as well, as they have done at the unit in the north; i.e. they have to facilitate more for the women to thrive.

High-ranking military leaders

We have asked a selection of top female and male leaders²⁸ what the prerequisites are for being a competent leader, what they themselves emphasize in their leadership and what challenges they feel female leaders face in the military. These leaders were recruited from a network we had established through three years of studying the Armed Forces. The leaders come from all branches of the military, from the highest levels of command; ranging from lieutenant-colonel up to general major.

²⁸ We have comprehensively interviewed four female and four male high-ranking military leaders. Each interview lasted from 30 minutes to 2 hours.

Several of the perceptions we found among the highest-ranking leaders are reasonably derived, more or less, from the general leadership theory. According to the theory, goals and framework for military leaders should fulfil certain requirements that are grounded in follow-up and control, among other things. This is often formulated such that the degree of follow-up and control is dependent on how well you know those who are serving under you and how experienced they are. The training already begins at the lowest levels and the most inexperienced receive a lot of guidance along the way, though they are eventually left more to their own devices as the soldiers are granted more freedom. Having free reins a commander who trusts you, and being seen – that's the recipe. It should be mentioned here that, to a great degree, leadership is about social and emotional intelligence.

The commander as a role model – the power of leading by example

The prerequisites for a competent leader are not only to delegate responsibility, demonstrate trust and make demands. Leaders must also keep an eye on the people who work for them. At the sharpest units, the goal is said to incorporate a culture that solves demanding missions in battle, with a minimum loss of life and civilian casualty. Furthermore, trust is created when the commander is at the lead as a positive role model.

In the depictions provided by the highest-ranking male leaders, battle and wartime situations provide the frame of reference; and military leadership is built on the power of leading by example. The uniform represents the visual power and can be read by all who are familiar with the uniform and its codes. However, what makes you a competent leader is the quality of the choices you make in critical situations. According to one of the highest-ranking commanders, leadership is what you do, not just what you say; thus, as a leader, you cannot place greater demands on your subordinates than you place on yourself. The basis for this is the extreme demands of battle, where soldiers must enter into the unknown; an environment involving gunfire and exploding bombs, where they are meant to establish themselves and seek a dialogue with insurgents. Such situations demand that the leader places himself at the front of the troop.

This corresponds with the Chief of Defence's Fundamental View of Leadership in the Military - "Forsvarssjefens grunnsyn på ledelse i Forsvaret". (2012, p.11):

“A good role model shows the way through a willingness to take risks, consistent conduct, positive attitudes and ethical judgements”.

The fundamental principles of leadership are built on clarity, consideration and results, while other qualities that are mentioned include respect, responsibility and courage. In common for all of the leadership traits highlighted is the element of manners and the code of honour, both of which point to the demands of war and reflection on what it means to take a life, as the professional military culture requires of its leaders. When we ask about characteristics of the best and most competent leaders, it is tackling the demands of war that is the highest objective. The mission that is instilled into the recruits from the get-go is formulated as such: “For everything we have and everything we are”. Taking care of the soldiers is about consideration, and this dimension is also built into the leadership from the start. But what does consideration actually mean in this context, we ask? One of the leaders responds, “It means that your life depends on your mate, and that makes loyalty in the team or troop very strong”.

Female authority = being just as clear as a man

What do the male leaders say about female leaders, and what does it take for women to gain authority? Some participants point to the danger of not understanding the military’s professional culture or the dynamics of war. In the military it is wartime experience that counts most when competence is discussed. Women who have not participated in international operations are less respected among the guys. They have lived under constant threat of losing their lives and explain that this is the reason why those who have battle experience develop stronger ties than others to the professional culture. As one man puts it, “If you’ve lost a mate, it’s not so unusual to see grown men hug each other and cry”. Others claim that it depends on the level the woman has reached in the organization. There is agreement that the more stereotypical perceptions of women are most prevalent among the men at lower levels and in battle situations. As one leader asserts, “it’s difficult for a woman to be out front leading her peers in a battle situation. And it’s not uncommon for the guys to feel they are stronger than you”. Now that gender-neutral conscription has been adopted, the young women have to get better acquainted with what harsh missions and war involve, something the leaders reckon can help more women to see the opportunities, which may

lead to increased applications to take on missions. According to the male leaders, this will strengthen both the Armed Forces and the women's authority.

Most leaders at this level now agree that greater demands are placed on women at the lower level, while they see that capable women at the middle leadership level are judged by the job they do and how they perform in a work context. At this level, the women have at least as much authority as men, it is claimed. But in some cases they see that older men, who are approaching retirement without having made a career for themselves, try to use some of the old domination techniques. Everyone agrees that "women have to prove something extra in this system". The other thing the top leaders are concerned with when it comes to promoting more women is what they refer to as performance anxiety (fear of failure) – "like the good-girl syndrome", as one says. They have observed that "women only apply for jobs they are absolutely certain they'll get, while the guys go after new jobs to learn something else". The explanation the leaders provide is that young men take greater chances, which leads them into higher positions more quickly.

When we ask the male leaders if there are any female heroes in the military, some women are pointed out by several. One of these women is depicted as "knowledgeable and very clear, just like a man. She's easy to read, but also soft. And humble". The portrayal is set in positive terms and is both feminine and masculine at the same time. At the same time, other female heroes may be equally adept in addition to being "more lively and able to create a good atmosphere". They are often good at relations while also being academically proficient. However, you also have "some who are male copycats", as one calls it, "but there aren't so many of those". It is mentioned that there are several competent women, "but we don't want them to be pulled up by their boot straps to get ahead" – i.e. to be carried up the career ladder. They have seen examples of that, where politicians want to have role prototypes who are then raised a bit too high, a bit too fast. In connection with this, one of the female leaders mentioned is someone we recognize from comments by several of the male informants in our preliminary study²⁹.

²⁹ Mentioned in Chapter 2.

What do the top-level female leaders say?

We have also interviewed several female leaders who are among the highest-ranking officers in the Armed Forces. The way they characterize a competent leader has several similarities to that of the male leaders, yet their descriptions differ in some areas. It seems they are less focused on the professional culture and battle experience than the males. When we ask if they can describe their own leadership and what makes a good leader, it is male commanders that are mentioned as the ideal. It may be leaders who are “quiet, calm and charismatic”, while others are “more extroverted and a completely different type”. These are leaders who have some strong basic values and demonstrate great integrity in everything they do. They live up to some of the core values one of the female leaders says she believes in: “It’s respect, courage and responsibility, use of legitimate power and accountability for the specific tasks we are meant to perform”.

Courage from a gender perspective – what is it?

As we have previously heard, the male leaders have many of the same values as the top female leaders; however, when they talk about courage, it is related to situations of war. The female leaders we have spoken with have gone on many missions to war zones and they agree that it is demanding. However, as one of the women put it: “For me, it’s making the unpopular decisions, bringing up the problematic cases and having the difficult conversations (that is) more demanding than being in risk situations”. Her experience is that women are more courageous than male colleagues when it comes to interpersonal conflicts, including everything from language use and harassment to other unfortunate events. For example, some young women experience a rough introduction to the “guy culture” and, as she says, “these are behaviours that need to be knocked down before they develop into a negative culture”. She is very clear on the point that, when she hears of such behaviour at the unit, it is a priority and her responsibility as leader to deal with it. The female leaders have a different viewpoint on gender relations, having greater focus on breaking down negative male cultures in their units.

The women say they agree with the male leaders that young women need more “push than the guys”, and several wonder why the competent women do not apply for top command positions; i.e. the positions that lead to a career. One says that when she asks the women,

“they often respond that, ‘no, he’s so much more qualified and I won’t get the job anyway’. They say this even if they have the most solid results, so we have to push a lot for them to believe it. So there’s a difference here”.

They themselves have been granted a lot of support and respect by their male colleagues, but there have also been some episodes that have made an impact on them. Some female leaders in our material have met strong opposition in the course of their careers, which is very sad for them to think back on. With time there are some who see that, earlier in their careers, they used a lot of energy on trying to fit in with the guys, both by dressing and behaving within the masculine definition. In later years, after climbing up the ranks, one of these has become a role model for women and been forced to reflect on this type of accommodation. Today, when there are uniforms for women, it is completely possible to go to work in a skirt – also as a woman in a top leadership position.

Two discourses

We have found two leading discourses in this study of high-ranking commanders, which may be interpreted as ambivalence surrounding what the most important traits a leader in the military should possess. One has to do with the point that the military wants to have, and facilitate for having, more women in leadership positions. In the other discourse, there is an underlying, unspoken message that war and conflict require “their man”. There is much talk of a type of competence that does not quite resonate with the new demands that have been addressed in policy documents in order to solve tomorrow’s challenges and problems, there is a desire for more substantial breadth of perspectives among staff, communication skills and diverse competence in the Armed Forces, to name a few of the requirements. “It’s not enough to recruit personnel who fundamentally represent diversity if they then have to use adaptive strategies in order to function within the organization...” (“Stortingsmelding nr. 14: Kompetanse for en ny tid” p.25).

Basically there is certain agreement among our informants on what the most important characteristics a leader in the military should possess. At the same time, there is the impression that the male leaders do not quite agree amongst themselves on the discussion of how the legitimate and most competent leader should be. Should professional requirements or diversity of competence apply? Several times in this book we have shown

that what is not clarified in this discussion is very significant to the assessment of those who apply for higher leadership positions in the Armed Forces. One of the questions we ask in this chapter is whether a woman can gain as much authority as a male leader. In our material it may seem that the male leaders construct a distinction between what are considered 'dangerous' and 'less dangerous' duties. The dangerous duties are thought to be of greater value than others, and this is where the varying interests come into play. The battle for who can be a competent player in the military field is more closely described and illuminated in Nina Rones' (2015) doctoral dissertation. By pointing out interests that various actors struggle over and contribute to, she finds that when traditional values and characteristics are challenged by some, and guarded by others, a social battle ensues over what is required of military personnel (Rones 2015). Is it in this discourse that the (male) military leader is legitimized and promoted before a female leader? In the leaders' accounts of honour, strength and courage, there is some doubt as to whether women have the same chance of succeeding in the competition; they should be twice as good as the men on that score.

Thus, the highest-ranking leaders, to a small degree, seem to connect gender equality with the type of initiative-oriented equality leadership we observed in practice at the unit in the north. Leadership and leadership qualities are rather rooted in classical professional cultures that place emphasis on the demands of war, including physical strength as an important factor.

General summary

The "new" style of leadership is a possible foundation for positive and locally-rooted gender equality initiatives, if local leaders actually manage to read the gender cultures and view them in relation to the local level's potential for solutions. As mentioned, such initiatives can gain particularly substantial legitimacy. However, it requires an understanding of gender and equality that "does not create itself" (NOU 2012:15, Andersen, Lilleaas and Ellingsen 2017).

The leadership education we have observed includes a "toolbox" that participants can use wherever they go. They gain faith in the idea that they can lead "anything and everything", which may be a natural solution in a military that is based on extensive and inconsistent

orders by leaders who want to climb the career ladder. It means that they must lead all types of people in many different cultures. Do they manage to take into consideration the prevailing culture in the unit they will lead – if that is even something to foster? Are they able to change negative cultures that should be changed?

The result of changing from a dogmatic and discipline-oriented leadership model, which emphasizes obedience and physical strength, to a flexible and relation-oriented style of leadership is demanding, precisely because it is up to the individual commander to decide whether and how women should be included. This may be one explanation for why the recruitment of women to leadership positions takes such a long time in the Norwegian Armed Forces. Even though it has been a prioritized topic in policy documents for many years, there has been very little focus on the fact that women, although treated more equally than before, have different bodies and experience/qualifications than men. At the unit in the north we met many young women who had both skills and physical strength on par with the guys; nonetheless, for some it was completely essential that the leadership facilitated for them to train extra to become even stronger. However, this means that leaders have to change sides on the professional culture; to see gender and the fact that women need a facilitative boost in order to become, if not equally adept as the men, as equally adept as possible. This may have consequences for how women are received and evaluated in a climate where the top leaders in the organization are most concerned with and place most emphasis on the professional culture, without taking into consideration the significance of having a gender and equality perspective among the leadership.

In the Norwegian Armed Forces, the prevailing male-dominated culture of unity is now being strongly challenged by the gender-neutral conscription reform and will continue to be challenged. A natural question is what the inevitable changes will do to the predominant culture and to what degree the leaders are armed to resolve the challenges to come. What type of knowledge and tools will leaders need to address this change? The organization will be dominated by men and male leaders who we have heard would like to welcome women, but who may also have limited knowledge on what it means to have women and men living and working so closely together. We feel that what distinguishes the experience of women and men, and what a competent leader in the military ought to know something about, are

important topics; particularly when the unique challenges facing the military make it unlike most other workplace.

We have now seen the military's gender culture from below, from above, in the present and in retrospect. We have worked quantitatively and qualitatively and across branches. In the next chapter, we make an effort to summarize some major findings and place the most important ones into a theoretical context.