Tampere University of Applied Sciences

Evaluating a Pilot Online Leadership Training Initiative

Case Study: Basic Leadership Training Course (BLT)

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ABSTRACT

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HÄMÄLÄINEN MINNA:
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The purpose of this study was to observe the implementation of Operation Mobilization's first leadership training initiative offered completely online, Basic Leadership Training course. The researcher's role was to gather information about the course participants' and facilitators' experiences to be able to identify potential challenges and outcomes and to evaluate the course's effectiveness as a tool to develop new leaders. The study was conducted in the initiative's pilot phase, which consisted of two different courses, BLT pilot course and BLT pre-launch course.

The data were collected using a multimethod approach, starting from gathering background data, to observation and semi-structured interviews. On the BLT pilot course, the researcher took a role of a participant-observer and observed the learning process of eight participants, who represented different nationalities and who were relatively new in the organization or in their leadership role. During the BLT pre-launch course, the researcher acted as a complete observer and conducted semi-structured interviews with all four participants after the course. The pre-launch course participants were experienced trainers or professionals in education and/or experienced leaders. The course facilitator was interviewed after both courses.

The results were analysed through the lens of the Community of Inquiry framework and other relevant e-learning evaluation models. The findings indicate that the online medium works well for training leaders in a globally scattered organization. Despite of the asynchronous nature of the course, the participants were able to engage in social interaction with each other creating a trusting and supportive climate. Through individual reflection, open and risk-free discourse with other learners along with facilitator support, they were able to enter higher levels of cognitive inquiry and integrate knowledge from the course, from their own experiences and from each other's different perspectives. The biggest challenges found had to do with workload and time management as all participants were completing the course alongside their normal work responsibilities. One person also experienced technical challenges. The results also suggest that there may be a link between the amount of social interaction with other learners and persistence in studies. However, further research would be needed before making causalities based on these results.

Key words: online training e-learning leadership pilot

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS

BLT	Basic Leadership Training
CoI	Community of Inquiry
FLighT	Foundational Leadership Training
MKO	Most Knowledgeable Others
OM	Operation Mobilization
PI	Practical Inquiry Model
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research topic

The research topic was chosen based on the researcher's own interest in online learning and a current need in the organization. Operation Mobilization (hereafter referred to as OM), founded in 1957, is a globally operating Christian mission organization. OM's 3300 employees represent over 100 nationalities and are placed in over 110 countries and on one ship, MV Logos Hope. To support its leaders on their job, OM has offered leadership training courses on-site, but those courses have not been accessible to everyone due to cost- or schedule-related issues.

According to Thomas (2018), International Director of Leadership Development at OM, the online Basic Leadership Training course (hereafter referred to as BLT), was developed for a more accessible, sustainable and systematic way to equip the organization's leaders. The BLT is designed for people who have been working for the organization less than two years, and who may be coming to a leadership role for the first time. The new course is modified from a previous on-site course called Foundational Leadership Training (hereafter referred to as FLighT) and designed to function as the first step on OM's leadership development pipeline and as the recommended pre-requisite to the next-level leadership development training.

This thesis will concentrate on examining and evaluating the organizations' online leadership training initiative in its pilot phase. There has not been any prior research done at OM around the topic of online learning (Thomas 2018), so the observations, outcomes and the data gained from this thesis will provide the organization with information to help continue developing the BLT course and other online training programmes in the future.

1.2 Research questions

The aim of this thesis is to gather information about the participants' and the facilitator's experiences during the pilot phase of the course. *The objective* is to understand the impact of the potential challenges to people's learning experience, and to study the effectiveness of the online course as a tool to equip new leaders. *The purpose* of this research is to look at the online leadership training from both, the participants' and the course facilitator's perspectives to get a full view of how the BLT course is experienced, how the possible challenges can be met and how the course can be developed to better serve as a starting point of a longer leadership journey. The results can be used to focus the efforts on improving the main areas that need to be focused on, and as a reference for evaluating the future status of the course. After this research, the following steps that are needed to be taken, can be determined.

The main *research questions* are:

How is the new online leadership training course received and experienced in its pilot phase?

- *What are the elements of the BLT course that are being found challenging/helpful?*
- *How do the learners engage with each other and with the course content in the online environment?*

The first sub-question aims specifically for answering the first aspect of the main research question: how the new course is *received*, and the second sub-question draws attention to the aspect of how the course is *experienced*. Since the BLT course is the organization's first leadership training course taking place entirely in the online environment, an emphasis is given to observing how the learners navigate in this new medium both with the content, and with each other.

1.3 Research approach

The research was formed around two case studies: the BLT pilot course and the BLT pre-launch course, both of which had a different purpose set by the course design team. The purpose of the BLT pilot course was to test the online course with a cohort of participants who would represent well the cultural diversity of the organization and who would be able to evaluate their learning process critically and thus provide beneficial feedback to the course design team (Zacharias 2018a). The purpose of the BLT pre-launch course was to introduce the course to experienced trainers or people involved with leadership development, and to get a "buy-in" from them before moving forward launching the course to the entire organization. Also, there was a hope that some of these trainers could later operate as facilitators on the future BLT courses (Zacharias 2018b).

To ensure a wide and reliable view, multi-method approach was used. It included studying organizational documents and gathering background data, observing two online courses and conducting seven semi-structured interviews. Evidence was gathered by recording all the interviews and saving the data from the course materials and online discussions. Table 1 introduces the research activities.

TABLE 1. Research activities diagram

Literature review			
Preparation-phase	**Case 1: BLT pilot course** (9 participants, 2 facilitators)	**Case 2: BLT pre-launch course** (4 participants, 1 facilitator)	**Evaluation & analysis**
• Theory & literature • Building relationships to stakeholders • Research plan and strategy • Familiarising with organizational LD goals and aims • Interview with the International Director of Leadership Development. • Recording, transcribing and storing the data on a secure server	• Participant-observation, taking notes • Familiarising with the course content • Post-course interview with the course facilitator • Follow-up email to the participants • Clearing the data from any identifying factors, storing data, dividing it into units and coding it • Revisiting literature	• Complete observer –role • Semi-structured interviews as a main data gathering tool • Interviewing four course participants and the course facilitator • Recording and transcribing the intrerviews, clearing the data from any identifying factors and storing the data on a secure server • Revisiting literature	• Revisiting the literature • Analyzing the results in the light of theory • Making further suggestions based on the results
Gathering, processing and analyzing data			
Evaluation Process			

A seen in the above table 1, the main emphasis of the literature review and building of theories took place in the beginning of the research, but literature was revisited at each research stage enabling adaptation to the occurring changes and bringing in new aspects from the existing theories. The amount of information was increased during the different phases of the research and both, the research process and the evaluation process became clearer. The main evaluation and analysis phase took place at the end of the research, but the evaluation process began already in the preparation phase and evaluation was conducted in each stage, both for the validity and relevance of the research activities and for the course evaluation process itself.

1.4 Data analysis

Data was analysed using mixed analysis methods. The data received through observation on the BLT pilot course, were gathered, stored on a secured server, divided into smaller units (504 in total), categorized by using a coding system introduced by Garrison (2017) and analysed through the lens of the Community of Inquiry model (See Appendix 1 and 2).

The data from the semi-structured interviews were categorized with the help of the research questions in search of combining themes and analysed in the light of the literature and existing theories.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured in a following way:

Chapter 2. The theory of evaluating online projects is being discussed along with several frameworks that have been used in e-learning evaluation. The framework chosen to function as a lens for this study, the Community of Inquiry model, is being discussed in more detail.

Chapter 3. The chosen approach and methodology for different phases of the research are being presented in this chapter. A timeline describing the practical actions and data collection process is introduced.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Results obtained through observation and interviews are being introduced and discussed in several chapters in the following order. 1) information obtained through the background information interviews, 2) results from the BLT pilot course observation, follow-up emails and facilitator interview, 3) results from the BLT pre-launch course observation and interviews. The chosen theoretical framework is being used as a lens through which the results are being discussed.

Chapter 7. Synthesis and validity of the results are being discussed, conclusions are being presented and suggestions for further development and research are being made.

It is to be noted that the identity of the BLT pilot course participants and the BLT pre-launch course participants who took part in this study is being kept confidential and therefore pseudonyms such as P1, X or “interviewee” are being used in this thesis to discuss individual participants’ contributions.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework formed for this thesis derives from literature review around the topic of e-learning and more specifically, e-learning evaluation. The purpose of the literature review was to study the suitable models for the e-learning evaluation process design, explore the existent models of evaluating e-learning projects, and choosing the best approach and methodology for this research. The literature review formed the first phase of the research and determined the approach and practical steps for implementation. However, due to the iterative nature of the pilot project itself, the theoretical framework was revisited many times during the research process and practical adaptations and additions were made as needed.

2.1 Literature review

2.1.1 Terminology

The terms *e-learning* and *online learning* are being used in this thesis interchangeably, even though it is to be noted that they can be considered to have a slightly different meaning. Garrison (2017, 2) defines the term e-learning as: “the utilization of electronically mediated asynchronous and synchronous communication for the purpose of thinking and learning collaboratively.” He sees e-learning as a wider term that includes both online and blended learning and extends the meaning of the “e” in e-learning to enhancing and extending the learning experience rather than merely describing the electronic learning environment (Garrison 2017, 3-5).

The BLT course is a fully online course that requires Internet-access. The learners access the course materials from different locations around the world and there are no face-to-face meetings. In its simplest form, online learning can be defined as “communicating for the purpose of learning through networked computers” (Garrison 2016, 43). Online learning is sometimes mistaken as a more

developed version of distance education, which is a more passive format of information delivery. However, online learning evolved out of the field of computer conferencing, the focus being on engaged learning and two-way communication. (Garrison 2016, 43.)

The BLT course is *asynchronous,* meaning that within the given timeframe (three weeks), the learners can access the course materials and complete the assignments at the times most convenient to them. However, there is a given timeframe for each module and a suggested schedule to follow with a few days of flexibility as per assignment. The aim is to have many learners interacting with each other on the discussion forums around the similar timeframe and to engage in reflective discourse.

As a summary, even though the BLT course is a fully online course, asynchronous and text-based in nature, it is using interactive elements such as discussion boards for pursuing to create a forum for collaborative reflection and discourse. Therefore, in course evaluation, it is important to consider the interaction on the discussion boards as a focus of observation, as that is where the interactive discourse is expected to happen.

Training *evaluation* can be defined in multiple different ways. The Business Dictionary (n.d.) offers the following definition: “Step in training cycle where data is collected to ascertain if the training program is achieving its objective(s).” In the BLT case, merely studying the program objectives and how they have been met, would not be adequate, as a major part of the new initiative is played by the new environment where the course takes place, the online medium. It is therefore important to include the study of the online environment into the evaluation process.

As this research takes place in a pilot phase and the research subjects are pilot course participants specifically recruited for testing the course, the evaluation of how well the course objectives have been met, could not be generalized or compared to the “real” course participants. It is more important to evaluate how the research subjects navigate in the online environment, engage with each other and with the course content. Therefore, in this thesis, a following definition of evaluation is being used:

A process of gathering and analysing data in multiple ways and from multiple sources, in order to gather useful information on how the online BLT course is being received and experienced, and to discover the potential challenges in order to make suggestions on further development of the course.

2.1.2 The iterative e-learning process

As a new initiative, the BLT course was decided to be piloted with a test group of participants prior to launching it fully to the entire organization. It was clear from the beginning that the project would be iterative, and the research approach and the chosen methodology would therefore need to follow an iterative structure. According to Khan (2004, 33) a typical e-learning process consists of six different stages: planning, design, development, evaluation, delivery, and maintenance. Even though this model presents evaluation as a separate stage, ongoing evaluation and revision should be included in all stages of the e-learning process due to its iterative nature (Khan 2004, 33). Figure 1 presents the iterative model of e-learning process.

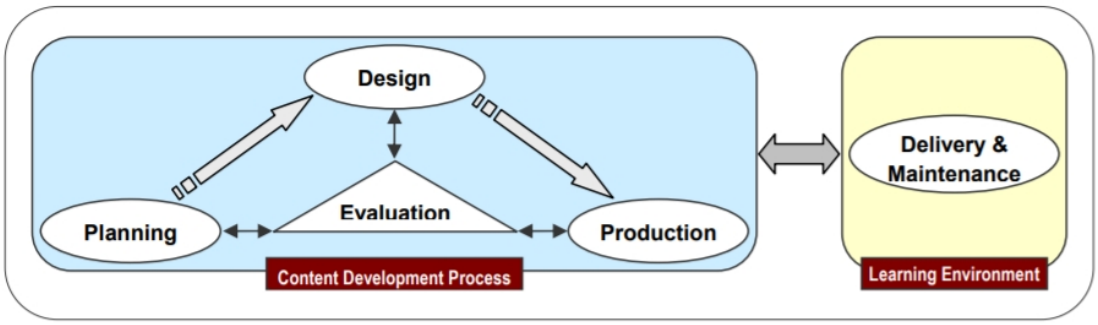

FIGURE 1. The iterative process of e-learning (Khan 2004, 35)

The initial content development process of the BLT course was conducted by a course design team assigned for the job of planning, designing and producing a new leadership training course online. After the content development phase, the course was delivered online, in its natural learning environment, to a diverse group of pilot course participants (figure 2). This forms the first case for the observation in this thesis. In addition to the evaluation having taken place in the initial development process, the course was observed and evaluated in its pilot

phase. The observations from this phase were then taken back to the course design team for further evaluation and adjustments prior to the next course, which was the BLT pre-launch course offered to area training officers and people involved in leadership development. The BLT pre-launch course forms the second case-study within the pilot phase.

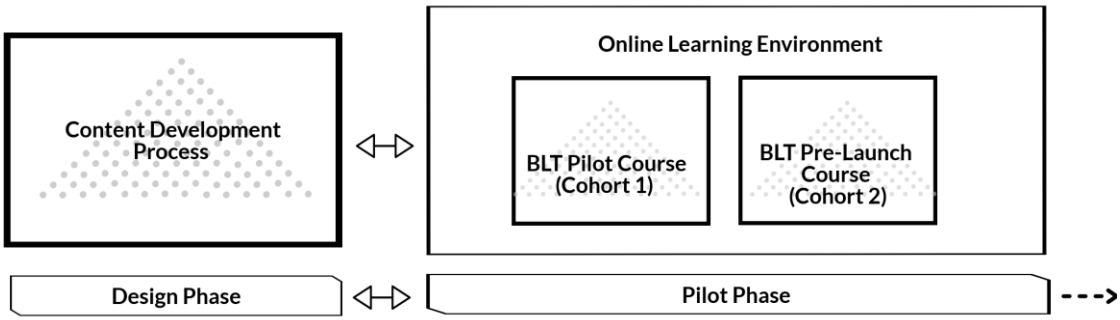

FIGURE 2. The Iterative Development Process of the BLT Course (based on the iterative process of e-learning by Khan 2004, 35)

Phillips, McNaught and Kennedy (2012, 50) suggest that in the process of studying the effectiveness of e-learning initiatives, a mixture of evaluation and research needs to be involved. According to Phillips et al. in this process:

- evaluation is gathering information to help make judgements about the value and worth of an e-learning artefact or environment that can inform decision-making
- research is gathering information to assist our understanding of how people learn using an e-learning artefact or environment (Phillips et al. 2012, 50)

Like Khan, also Phillips et al. state that evaluation activities are not one-time phases but can be applied several times throughout the e-learning life cycle and with a different approach (Phillips et al. 2012, 50). Table 2 on the next page describes different scenarios and goals that can be taken in different stages of the e-learning process. Phases B and C in the table describe the initial trial/piloting phase of the e-learning initiative (Phillips et al. 2012, 115, 117), where the emphasis is on evaluating whether the learning environment works as intended, but also in gaining deeper understanding of the characteristics of the environment which facilitates the learning processes. Phase D describes a live-phase where the e-learning initiative is being deployed to learners. The approach in this phase

can be directed more towards judging how well does the e-learning environment work to support learning. (Phillips et al. 2012, 115.)

TABLE 2. Descriptions of evaluation research across the e-learning life cycle. (Phillips et al. 2012, 51, modified)

Evaluation research description			
Scenario	**Focus**	**Activity**	**Goals**
A	Exploration	Evaluation ← → Research	Exploring potential
B1	Learning environment	← →	Judgements about the project management
B2	Learning environment	← →	Judgements about the usability of the designed e-learning artefact in the context of the particular learning environment
B3	Learning environment	← →	Understanding the characteristics of e-learning environments which effectively facilitate learning processes and learning outcomes
C1	Environment & Process	← →	Judgements, derived from actual use, about the way the learning environment was designed and how it could be improved
C2	Environment & Process	← →	Seeking deeper understanding about ways that learners use and interact with the e-learning environment
D2	Process & outcome	← →	Judgements about whether the e-learning environment works. How effective was it in facilitating its desired outcomes?
D3	Process & outcome	← →	Seeking deeper understanding about how and why the learning environment engaged particular learning processes and led to particular learning outcomes.

Reflecting on the table above, the focus and activities of the BLT course were mainly on the B and C scenarios (learning environment and learning processes). However, since the BLT pilot was deployed live for pilot learners, some parts of the scenario D (learning processes and outcomes) could also be applied. The profile of the learners on the BLT course was carefully considered when touching the possible learning outcomes.

2.1.3 Online learning evaluation

According to Phillips et al. (2012, 3) evaluating the effectiveness of e-learning is a complex task and it is difficult to evaluate how well the technology-based environment supports learning. They summarize the key findings from the report of the National Research Council in the United States of America by Bransford, Brown and Cocking (2000), and conclude that it is not enough for the learners to

know about something, they need to have the ability to transfer their knowledge into other contexts. The participants might like the e-learning environment because it is relatively easy to access or because they do not have to make an effort, but it does not proof that they have learnt something. (Phillips et al. 2012, 5-6.)

Before beginning the evaluation process, it is important to determine the approach suitable for the case (Phillips et al. 2012, 18). Phillips et al. also point out three questions that can be used when investigating the effectiveness of e-learning initiatives:

> 1) How does the (new) innovation using e-learning compare with the old course?
> 2) What are students learning from the new course?
> 3) How do students learn from the e-learning components in my course?
> (Phillips et al. 2012, 18)

These three questions provide three different research approaches that can be taken: 1) a comparative study between the old and the new course, 2) a study which concentrates on examining the learning outcomes, or 3) a study of the learning processes (Phillips et al. 2012, 19-21).

The BLT course was developed from organization's previous onsite leadership training course, FLighT. Taking the first option suggested by Phillips, would have meant comparing the old onsite-course FLighT with the new online version BLT. In practise, however, it was not possible because there was no data available to the researcher of the previous FLighT courses and the BLT course had been modified and changed to the extent that it was not the same course anymore. It was a completely new initiative that should be studied on its own. Furthermore, it would have been difficult to determine the causality of the possible positive results gained by comparing the learning outcomes. As Phillips et al. conclude:

> If a change is made to a learning environment, and if an improvement in outcomes is observed after the change, then it is attractive to assume that the improvement can be attributed to that change. However, such clear pathways of causality are hard to establish when considered more deeply. (Phillips et al. 2012, 19)

The second option presented by Phillips et al. in the form of a question: “What are students learning from the new course?”, would also focus on learning outcomes, but without a need for comparison (Phillips et al. 2012, 20). The approach could be either quantitative, conducted by pre- and post-course tests to study how the learning outcomes set for the course have been met by the learners, or qualitative and focus on a more descriptive methodology, pursuing to discover what the learners own view of their learning is and what do they think led to a particular understanding. A mixed-method research would also be possible. (Phillips et al. 2012, 20-21.)

The context of this research presented challenges to choosing the quantitative approach and conducting reliable pre- and post-course tests. OM is a global organization and the profile of the learners is very diverse. The employees and volunteers represent multiple nationalities, cultures, generations, occupational fields and educational backgrounds. This means that even though the BLT course is aimed for people who are at the very beginning of their OM career, their pre-course level would still vary greatly, and it would have been very challenging to develop a standardized quantitative test that considers all these differences. It was therefore concluded that a qualitative method would enable a deeper and more personal approach to the matter.

The third question presented by Phillips et al.: “How do students learn from the e-learning in my course?”, concentrates more on the *process* of achieving (or not achieving) the desired learning outcomes, rather than the learning outcomes themselves. In this approach it is not necessary to assess the learning outcomes at all, but the researcher can instead decide to focus “their attention on the patterns of relationships between the components of the learning environment” and form a rich analysis and picture of how the learners interacted within the online environment, how the different elements seemed to affect their learning, what the learners themselves thought about their own learning process, what was found beneficial and what was not. (Phillips et al. 2012, 21.)

Finally, Phillips et al. conclude that: “Students learn within learning environments, going through learning processes in order to achieve learning outcomes” (Phillips et al. 2012, 22). They visualize this three-folded idea in their LEPO-framework

(figure 3), which is based on several earlier models, such Biggs' 3-P model (Biggs, 1989), Laurillard's conversational framework (Laurillard 2002), Bain's Learning-centred evaluation framework (Bain 1999), Reeves's Interactive learning model (Reeves 1997) and Goodyear's (Ellis & Goodyear 2010) problem space of educational design (Phillips et al. 2012, 28).

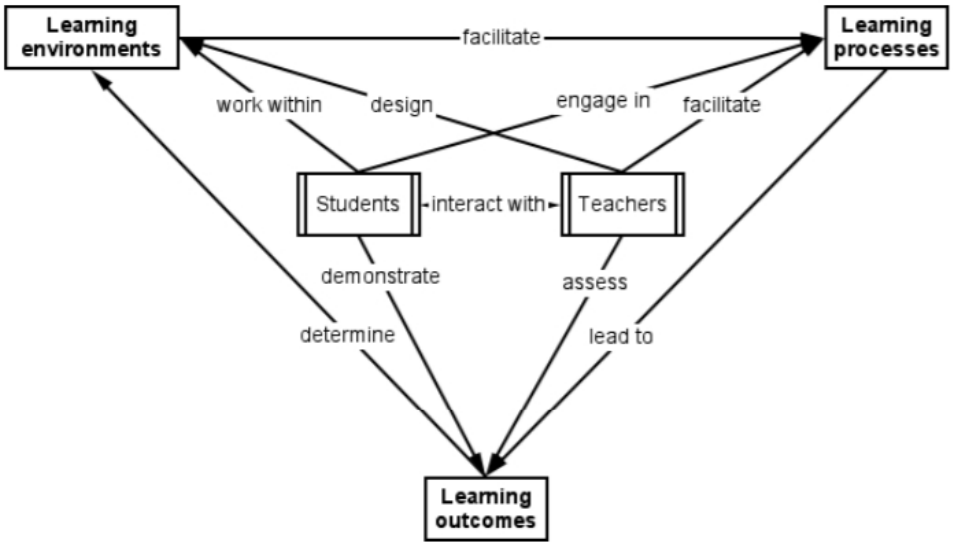

FIGURE 3. Model of the LEPO-framework (Phillips et al. 2012, 27)

In the LEPO-framework the environment is considered to facilitate learning processes and these in turn are expected to lead to learning outcomes. The learning outcomes furthermore determine the learning environments within which the learners work and engage with their teachers. (Phillips et al. 2012, 27.) Since this study aims for gathering information of the pilot phase participants' experiences it can be looked at as one evaluation tool for the organization to evaluate whether the online learning environment supports the participants' learning process and whether that process is beneficial for achieving the desired learning outcomes set for the leadership training course. The results can be used as a base for future decisions in terms of learning environments.

The Five Stage Model

Another online teaching and learning model against which e-learning initiatives could be evaluated is Gilly Salmon's Five Stage Model (figure 4). In this model the presumption is that successful online learning has a scaffolded support and

development structure at place, which enables the participants to get the support they need to build expertise in learning online (Salmon 2018).

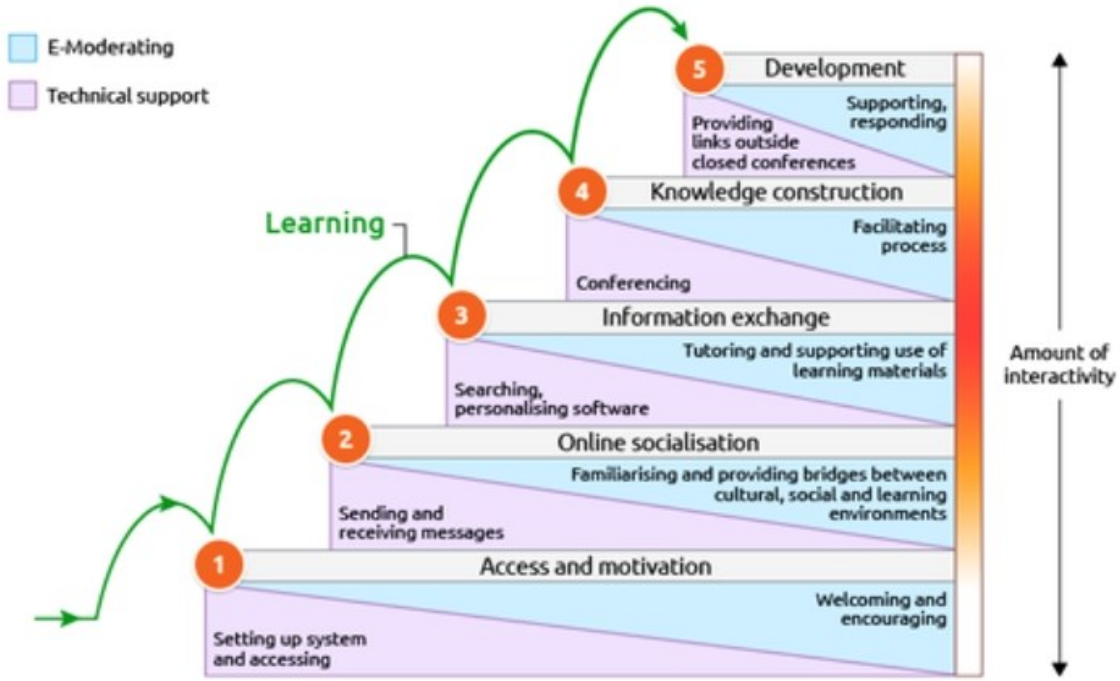

FIGURE 4. Gilly Salmon's Five Stage Model (Salmon 2018)

Like the LEPO-model, also the Five Stage Model considers the learner (participant) who brings in the motivation, and the facilitator (teacher, e-moderator, tutor). In the Five Stage Model, the role of the e-moderator is to scaffold the learning process from the beginning to the end and this means not only assuring that the learners have access to the e-learning environment and know how to navigate in it, but also to welcome, support, encourage collaboration and motivate the learners to go on (Salmon 2013b). The process leads step-by-step to stage five where the participant is a confident e-learner and able to integrate the knowledge what s/he has learnt online to his/her work life (Salmon 2018).

If considering these two models for e-learning evaluation, the LEPO framework offers a broader angle to the e-learning evaluation, whereas the 5-stage model concentrates more on the development and scaffolding of the actual learning process. Phillips et al. confirm that the LEPO-framework provides a broad view and does not describe *how* the learners and teachers (or facilitators/e-moderators) interact. Therefore, they suggest that other models can be included or added as subsets, to make the framework whole. (Phillips et al. 2012, 41.)

Looking at the LEPO-framework (figure 3), it seems as if the framework does not consider the interaction that happens between the students (learners), but mainly concentrates on the interaction between students and teachers (learners and facilitators). However, the LEPO-framework draws from Laurillard's (2002) conversational framework in which other learners are also considered (Phillips et al. 2012, 34). On the other hand, even though the Five Stage Model emphasizes the roles of the learner and the facilitator/e-moderator, a great emphasis is also given to group formation, team work and collaboration. From the beginning, the aim is to help the e-learning participants to take part, respond to others and through online socialisation to start forming teams and collaborate with each other. (Salmon 2018.)

2.1.4 The Community of Inquiry Framework

Another helpful model for examining e-learning, is the Community of Inquiry framework (hereafter referred to as CoI). Thinking about the three questions presented by Phillips et al. (2012, 18), the CoI framework is concentrating more on the third question: *how* the students learn on the e-learning course. For this reason, the CoI framework was chosen to function as the lens through which the BLT course would be looked at.

Background

The CoI framework has become a useful tool for studying online learning (Rienties & Rivers 2014, 4). The framework was developed by Garrison, Anderson and Archer in 2000, and it is inspired by earlier research conducted by several researchers (Garrison 2007, 61). One of the researchers behind the inspiration was Henri (1992), who introduced a framework that included social and cognitive aspects of online learning (Garrison 2007, 61). Henri (1992) presented a model with five different dimensions: "participation, interaction, social, cognitive, and meta cognitive" (p. 117) with a goal to enable educators to better understand the learning process of the distant learners (Henri 1992, 117).

Dewey (1859) and his observation about the collaborative elements in educational process, has also influenced the CoI framework (Garrison 2000, 92). In his

book, Experience and Education (Dewey 1938), Dewey emphasized that the focus of the traditional education should rather be on the learner's learning experience than the delivery of the predetermined knowledge (Bates 2016, 6).

Along with Dewey, also Vygotsky has contributed to the "socially situated transactional view of learning" (Garrison 2017, 10). Vygotsky believed that social interaction with other learners, family, friends and teachers, whom he called as Most Knowledgeable Others (hereafter referred to as MKO's), can greatly enhance the individual's knowledge construction processes and enable them to achieve higher levels of development than what they could achieve as individuals (Bates 2016, 16). The following figure 5 presents the model of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) developed by Vygotsky, which also included his concept of **scaffolding** (Bates 2016, 16).

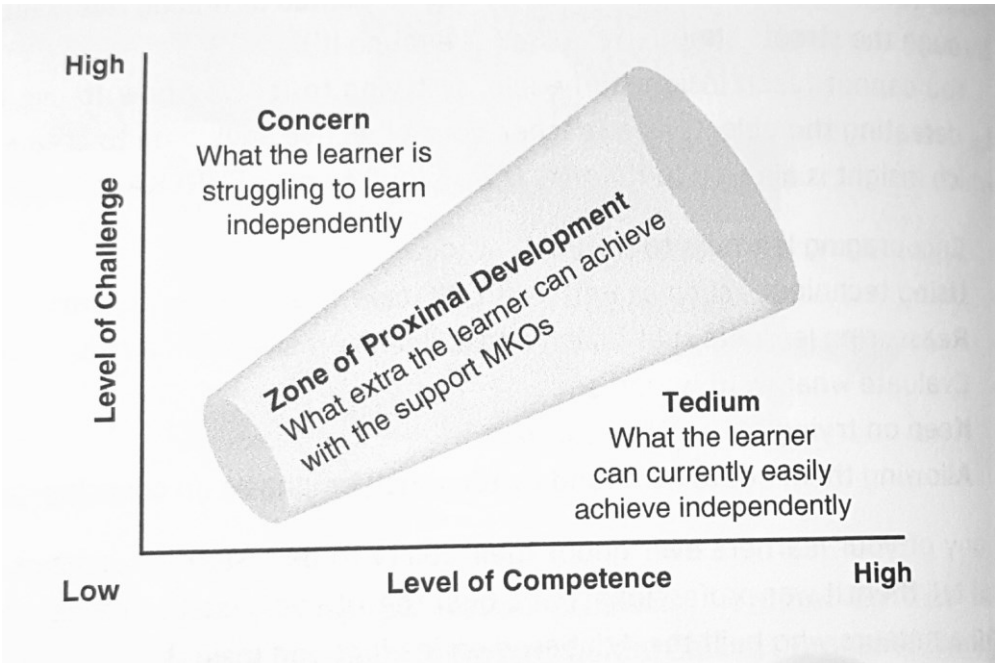

FIGURE 5. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (Bates 2016, 16)

By scaffolding Vygotsky meant the support offered by the teacher that would enable the learner to conquer the challenges they could not conquer alone, and thus reach higher level of knowledge and competence (Bates 2016, 16). From the teacher's point of view scaffolding could mean for example engaging with the learners, operating as a role model, breaking a bigger task into smaller partial goals while at the same time maintaining the focus in the main task (Bates 2016, 16).

Both Dewey and Vygotsky believed that focussing merely on learning outcomes and neglecting the process itself, would be a great mistake (Garrison 2016, 55). Instead of focussing on outcome-driven approach, Garrison (2016, 55) suggests that it would be more productive “to ensure a deep and meaningful learning experience through collaborative inquiry” and this would then naturally lead to quality learning outcomes.

Introducing social presence, cognitive presence and teaching presence

According to Vaughan and Garrison (2009, 63) “CoI is a generic framework that directs attention to the process of constructing and confirming deep understanding”. In the framework, a distinction is made between cognitive presence, social presence and teaching presence (figure 6).

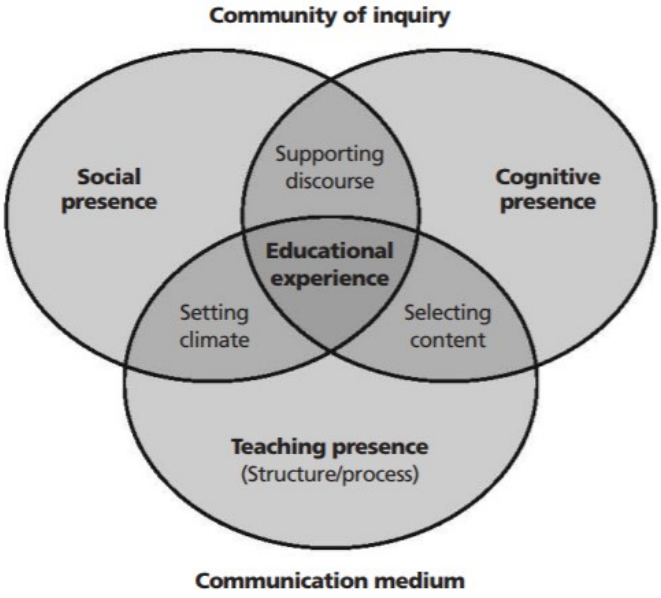

FIGURE 6. Community of Inquiry framework (Vaughan & Garrison 2009, 64)

According to Swan, Garrison and Richardson (2009), the CoI model suggests that for online learning to be effective, a community needs to be developed. The CoI framework describes the multidimensional and interdependent core elements needed for the development of both, the community and the inquiry itself. The model can be applied to any educational environment. (Swan et al. 2009.)

The CoI framework was chosen to function as a main lens through which the BLT online course would be evaluated. The three different dimensions of the CoI

framework enabled to examine the learners' process within the online environment as they interacted with both, the course content, other course participants and the course facilitators. Thinking about the research questions, the framework helped to examine how the BLT course was received and furthermore, *experienced*.

Social Presence

As seen before in the Five Stage Model, online socialisation is considered as an important stage in the development of the learning process and collaboration with other learners (Salmon 2018). The CoI model also emphasizes the role of social presence as an important part of the inquiry. Garrison et al. (2000, 94) have defined social presence as:

> the ability of participants in a community of inquiry to project themselves socially and emotionally, as ``real'' people (i.e., their full personality), through the medium of communication being used.

This definition emphasizes the need for self-disclosure, which indicates that the environment needs to support the process. Several years later Vaughan & Garrison (2009, 64) defined social presence as:

> the ability of participants to identify with the interests of the community (e.g., the course of study), communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop inter-personal relationships by way of participants projecting their individual personalities.

In this definition social presence connects with purposefulness of the inquiry. First, the learners share a common interest (in the BLT case that would be leadership) with which everyone can identify. Thinking about the Five Stage Model, this would be the stage one in the process, an initial motivation to study (see figure 4). The environment (or climate) needs to be trusting to support open self-disclosure and enabling risk-free communication with other participants. This way the participants can engage in a purposeful dialogue with others, which will then enhance their learning experience.

In what comes to the role of the social presence, Rienties and Rivers point out that many researchers (Caspi et al. 2006, Giesbers et al. 2013 and Van den

Bossche et al. 2006) have confirmed that creating a social learning space in online and blended settings, is very important for the development of critical discourse (Rienties & Rivers 2014, 4). Garrison (2017, 37) also states that a high-quality e-learning environment is both, *intellectually challenging* and *respectful*, *critical* and *inclusive*. He continues that social presence has an important role in creating and supporting a climate where deep and meaningful learning is possible and lists three things that help creating this climate and thus building such conditions where people feel free to engage in a meaningful discourse with each other:

- interpersonal/affective communication
- open communication
- sustained group cohesion
  (Garrison 2017, 38).

The social presence of the CoI model reminds of the “online socialisation stage” of Salmon’s Five Stage Model (figure 4). In both models one important aspect of social interaction is to provide a good starting point for deeper cognitive learning process. Wright (2015, 21) who has studied and compared the two models, points out that in the socialisation stage of the Five Stage Model the learning tasks are meant to be designed with a goal of helping to establish the online community. Salmon (2013b) states that team formation is an important part of online socialisation stage during which the participants learn how to take part, respond to each other, contribute and collaborate.

As mentioned earlier, group cohesion is an important part of social presence in the CoI. Garrison (2017, 39) states that: “Social presence is enhanced when individuals identify with the group and its purpose as opposed to connecting with specific individual members.” Like in the Five Stage Model, also in the CoI model group cohesion does not merely consider building social relationships with other learners, but forming a team, or a study group which shares a common interest and purpose of study together.

Cognitive presence

The cognitive presence in the CoI model describes the learners’ process as they engage with the topic and the content of the course/study. The process can be visualized in the form of Dewey’s Practical Inquiry model (figure 7). According to

Vaughan and Garrison (2009, 64) “practical inquiry represents phases (problem, exploration, integration and resolution) of collaborative-constructive educational experience”.

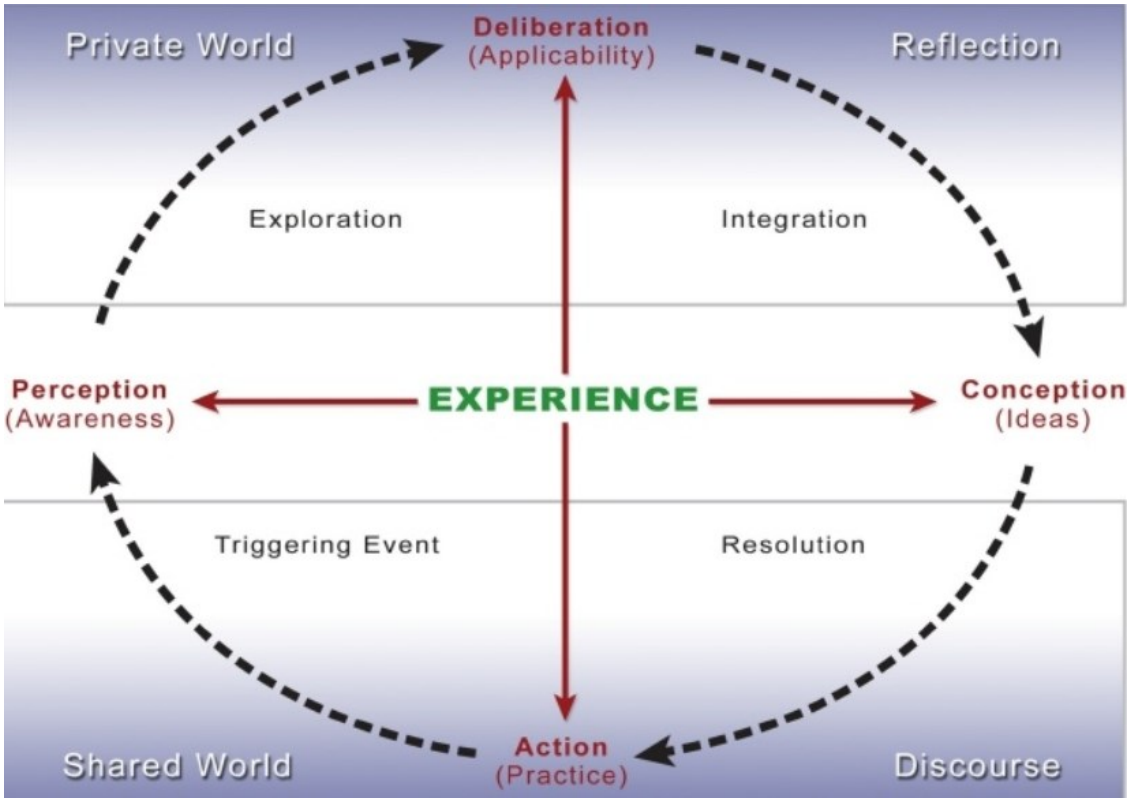

FIGURE 7. Practical Inquiry Model, modified from Garrison and Archer 2000 by Mota (Mota 2009)

According to Garrison (2017) deep and meaningful learning is possible when the learner is exposed to multiple inputs. This includes expressing one’s own ideas, applying them and getting feedback from others. For this to happen, the environment needs to support it. (Garrison 2017, 11.)

If taken to the context of the BLT course, the discussion forums can be considered as the shared online world where the interaction happens. Ideally, the participants are being exposed to “triggering events” in this shared world, and the process continues as exploration in their private world (offline reflection). During the reflection process, they start integrating their reflections with previous knowledge and come back to the shared world (online discussion forums) to continue reflecting with others, sharing ideas and gaining new perspectives to take the process all the way to resolution, applying the learnt in practise.

In the Five Stage Model the highest level is called “Development” (see figure 4). According to Wright (2015, 23) the development phase “reflects the same outcomes as the resolution phase” as the aim is for the students to be able to apply the learnt into new situations through self-reflection and critical evaluation. According to Salmon (2018), the fifth stage is about looking back and evaluating your own learning process throughout the different stages, as well as looking forward integrating and applying that knowledge in practise.

Teaching presence

The third element of the CoI model is teaching presence, and like social and cognitive presence, also teaching presence is present throughout the learning process. Vaughan and Garrison (2009, 64) define teaching presence as a dimension of the CoI that “provides the leadership that focuses and sustains a productive collaborative community” and divide teaching presence into three different dimensions of educational experience: design, facilitation and direction.

Garrison (2007, 67) summarizes the earlier research conducted around teaching presence by concluding that based on the evidence, teaching presence influences on “student satisfaction, perceived learning and sense of community”. In more recent literature, he states that “while there must be full and open participation in a community of inquiry, there is also an inherent need for an architect and facilitator to design, direct and inform the transaction if it is to be productive and sustainable” (Garrison 2017, 27). There are many similarities to the Five Stage Model, which has a strong emphasis on scaffolded learning process. In the Five Stage Model the e-moderator’s role is to help to keep the students engaged all throughout the learning process by building a scaffold with different components, such as designing engaging learning activities (e-tivities), encouraging collaboration and knowledge exchange and supporting the students in the process (Salmon 2013b).

However, there are differences as well. In the Five Stage Model, the teacher (e-moderator) and the learner have clearly separate roles (as presented in figure 4). In the CoI model the teaching presence is not restricted only for the teacher (or facilitator/e-moderator), but instead everyone participating in the course participates in the process of constructing meaning and thus assumes also teaching

presence to some extent even though the course facilitator most likely reflects it more. (Garrison 2017, 29.)

The idea of teaching presence in the CoI also differs from the role of the "teacher" in the LEPO-framework. In the LEPO framework (see figure 3), the teacher has a separate role from the learner, a role to design, facilitate and assess (Phillips et al. 2012, 39) whereas the learners' role is to work, engage, interact and finally demonstrate learning outcomes (Phillips et al. 2012, 27). In the CoI model there is no such "teacher" or "learner" presence (Garrison 2017, 29). However, it needs to be kept in mind that the LEPO-framework does not seek to answer the question "how learners and teachers interact with learning environments, processes and outcomes" but rather provides a broader framework, which enables embedding other models as subsets (Phillips et al. 2012, 41).

The CoI elements, categories and indicators

The following figure 8 describes how the different elements (social, cognitive and teaching presence) of the CoI model can be categorized and introduces the indicators that can be used to identify the different presences. In this thesis, a similar indicator-list was used to help coding and analysing the data received from the BLT pilot course discussion forums and categorizing them into social, cognitive and teaching presences (Appendix 1).

ELEMENTS	CATEGORIES	INDICATORS (examples only)
Social Presence	Open Communication Group Cohesion Affective Expression	Risk-free expression Encourage collaboration Emoticons
Cognitive Presence	Triggering Event Exploration Integration Resolution	Sense of puzzlement Information exchange Connecting ideas Apply new ideas
Teaching Presence	Design & Organization Facilitating Discourse Direct Instruction	Setting curriculum & methods Sharing personal meaning Focusing discussion

FIGURE 8. Community of Inquiry elements, categories and indicators (Garrison & Arbaugh 2007, 159)

Emotions in the CoI

After conducting research among 217 students on 19 courses, Cleveland-Innes and Campbell (2012) argued that there should be a fourth presence added to the CoI framework: *Emotional presence* (Figure 10), which they define followingly:

> Emotional presence is the outward expression of emotion, affect, and feeling by individuals and among individuals in a community of inquiry, as they relate to and interact with the learning technology, course content, students, and the instructor (Cleveland-Innes and Campbell 2012, 283).

Cleveland-Innes & Campbell conclude that the changing learning environment and new technologies can cause emotional responses and the emotions can have an impact on the actual online learning experience (Cleveland-Innes & Campbell 2012, 269). Rienties & Rivers (2014, 6) alike support adding emotional presence to the CoI as described in figure 9. They also point out that emotions can occur at any stage of the learning process and may lead to vastly different emotions for learners ranging from curiosity or joy to anxiety or depression depending on the person and the situation (Rienties & Rivers 2014, 6).

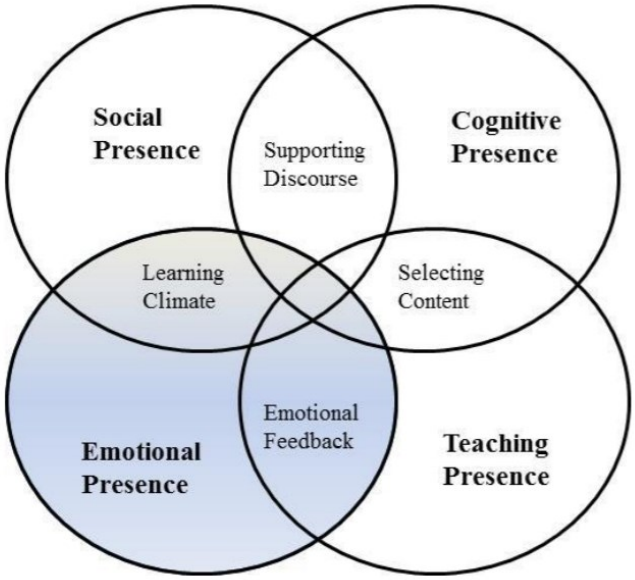

FIGURE 9. Community of Inquiry framework for online learning added with emotional presence (Rienties & Rivers 2014, 5 adapted from Stenbom et al. 2014)

Garrison (2017) defends the original three-dimensional CoI framework and states that the argument for adding the emotional presence as a separate element, would only increase the complexity of the framework as the emotional elements

are already largely presented in the social presence which has influence on all aspects in the CoI (Garrison 2017, 31). What is agreed by all (Rienties & Rivers 2012, Cleveland-Innes & Campbell 2014 and Garrison 2017), is that emotions do affect the online learning experience and further study is needed to better understand the influence of emotions.

In this thesis, the original three-dimensional CoI framework (figure 6), was used as a lens through which the online learning initiative was observed. There was first an attempt to include emotional presence as the fourth dimension, but in the actual coding process it was found complicated to differentiate emotional presence from the social presence as they were often very similar. The researcher felt that more expertise would have been needed to reliably differentiate between these two elements. The simpler model functioned better for the validity of the coding process and the research results. The different aspects of the social presence answered well to the needs of coding the learners' emotions in this research.

2.2 Synthesis of theories

Combining the different theories discussed in the literature review part, it is evident that the e-learning process is iterative, and so is the e-learning evaluation process. According to Phillips et al. (2012, 16) e-learning evaluation is "a reflective and ongoing process which has a different emphasis at each stage of the e-learning life cycle, but which has the same general steps." In addition to identifying the problem and working out questions to ask, these general steps include the important decisions of who should be asked, which strategies should be used, developing an evaluation plan, collecting and analysing the data and deciding on further action points and making further decisions based on the results (Phillips et al. 2012, 16).

Inspired by the three questions -approach introduced by Phillips et al. (2012), and their three-dimensional LEPO-framework, the learning processes within the online learning environment were chosen as the focus points for this research. The learning outcomes were not separately assessed but attention was paid to

the way *how* the participants related with the content and various types of learning tasks, and how they described their learning experience. Guided by the research question "*How is the new online leadership training course received and experienced in its pilot phase?",* a multimethod approach was chosen.

However, as the LEPO-framework itself does not provide deeper insight into *how* the learners interact (Phillips et al. 2012, 41), the CoI framework was chosen to function as that lens deepening the insight into the learners' learning processes and interaction, thus forming a comprehensive picture of their experience. In both, the Five Stage Model and the CoI model, the course facilitation (scaffolding) also plays an important part in supporting the learning process. Therefore, special attention was paid to the course facilitation by observing the interaction between the learners and facilitator/s, paying close attention to the learners' process and experiences and by interviewing both, the course participants and facilitator.

BLT pilot course

As suggested in the literature, different evaluation plans were set for the two different cases. The first case, the BLT pilot course, had its emphasis on the experience and the learning process of the participants. The observation took place in the online environment, which offered a natural way of making judgements about how the participants engage, interact and learn within the online medium and how the medium supported their learning.

The three-dimensional CoI framework provided a lens for deeper insight into the social, cognitive and teaching presences reflected by the participants and the facilitators on the course. Even though the suggested addition of the emotional presence by Cleveland-Innes and Campbell (figure 9) was not officially considered as part of the framework in this thesis, the learners' emotions were taken into consideration in the social presence aspect of the CoI model. Course facilitation was also given special attention and in addition to the observation, the course facilitator was interviewed.

As the goal of the BLT course is to equip people with basic leadership skills, which they can then apply to their own environment and daily work, special attention was being paid to the four different aspects of Cognitive presence (Triggering

event, Exploration, Integration and Resolution) as the participants navigated through different course modules (Self-leadership, Team-leadership and Ministry-leadership). As Phillips et al. (2012, 6) state, unless the learners can utilize and apply the knowledge they have received into real life situations, the learning experience remains on an information acquisition -level, which is not sufficient enough. Phillips et al. continue that pursuing and using the knowledge they have gained, also makes the learners happier, as they are not merely bystanders in a learning process, but active agents in using their knowledge (Phillips et al. 2012, 6).

BLT pre-launch course

The second case, the BLT- pre-launch course had a different evaluation plan due to the different target group and purpose. The purpose of the pre-launch course was to introduce the course to the people in response of training/leadership development in the organization, and to get a “buy-in” from them, hoping that they would recommend the course to the people in their own areas (Zacharias 2018b). The BLT pre-launch course participants were already experienced in leadership, and thus were not part of the official target group of the course content. Therefore, studying their learning outcomes was not relevant. It was decided to gather information of their experiences through semi-structured interviews with questions that were based on the research-questions but also allowing them to raise up new topics. As the BLT pre-launch course participants were also potential future course facilitators, their view on the course and the e-learning process formed an important part in the evaluation of the BLT course in its pilot phase.

The discussion in this thesis has been divided into five parts: 1) Background research. Organizational leadership development goals and the place of the BLT course in that picture. 2) The BLT pilot course. Analysing the online method, the participant/facilitator interaction and the participants’ cognitive learning process through the lens of the CoI framework. 3) The BLT pre-launch course. Categorizing and analysing the results from the interviews conducted with the pre-launch course participants with the help of a framework created based on the studied theoretical framework. 4) Discussing the synthesis and validity of the results and possible future development ideas. 5) Making conclusions.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Methodological approach

The methodological approach (epistemology) in this research is founded on social constructivism. Constructivism philosophy is based on cognitive psychology and it accepts reality as a construct of human mind, therefore reality is perceived to be subjective (Dudovskiy n.d.). The research practises typical for constructivism can involve the following:

- Positions researcher within the context
- Collects participant-generate meanings
- Focuses on a single concept or phenomenon
- Brings personal values into the study
- Studies the context or setting of participants
- Validates the accuracy of findings
- Interprets the data
- Creates an agenda for change or reform
- Involves researcher in collaborating with participants

(Dudovskiy n.d.)

This thesis focuses on the pilot phase of the Basic Leadership Training course. As presented in figure 2, the pilot phase is divided into two different parts: the pilot course and the pre-launch course, therefore forming two separate smaller cases within the pilot case, both with a slightly different purpose, but aiming for constructing a picture of how the new leadership training course is experienced in its pilot phase. According to Klenke, Wallace and Martin (2015, 61), the case study methods offer a holistic picture to researching real-life events such as leadership processes. They also conclude that as a research method, case study is challenging, perhaps even more challenging than other qualitative methods, because the researcher not only needs excellent interpersonal and communication skills, but also to understand his/her own position that he or she is not neutral bystander but plays on active part in the process (Klenke et al. 2015, 61).

Another challenge of case study pointed out by Klenke et al. (2015) is that the researcher needs to be capable for processing the relationships and emotions involved in dealing with a broad range of research participants and gate keepers. Good listening skills and an ability to ask good questions, along with a capability

to remain objective to the case are qualities of a good case researcher. (Klenke et al. 2015, 61.) The fact that the researcher of this BLT case study was employed by the organization to which the study was conducted for, emphasized the need for paying close attention to objectivity. However, the researcher was not conducting the study to her local country office or direct department, but instead to the international organization, which diminished the risk of losing objectivity, but it was still an issue to keep in mind both while doing the research activities and analysing the results.

To get a comprehensive understanding of the case, a qualitative, multi-method approach with observation techniques, semi-structured interviews and course embedded reflection tasks/questionnaires was used. According to Maxwell (2013, 2), qualitative research process is adaptive, since any research components may need to be reconsidered or modified along the process, as changes occur, or new information is gained. This was true also in this research, as schedules and conditions kept on changing throughout the project forcing the researcher to consider new perspectives and approaches, and to adapt the process accordingly.

The original research plan was for the researcher to study the BLT course in two different phases: A pilot course and the first fully launched version. However, after the pilot course it was decided by the course design team that the full launch would be delayed and instead the pilot phase would continue with a pre-launch course aimed for area training officers and leadership development coordinators. The goal of the pre-launch course was to introduce the course contents to the people responsible for training, and hopefully get a buy-in, so that they would recommend the course to the people in their area (Zacharias 2018b).

New information gained in different parts of the process also affected the chosen methodology. The original plan had been that the researcher would participate on the pilot course to gain understanding of the course content and make herself familiar with the chosen environment. The actual participant-observation was planned to happen on the first fully launched course. However, having met the international pilot course cohort 1 group online, the researcher noticed that they were not on the pilot course only for testing the online format, but they were there

to learn leadership. This changed the researchers' view on the pilot course observation, and she fully engaged as a participant-observer, paying careful attention to the participant's learning process as they interacted with the course content, facilitators and each other. After the pilot course new questions were raised and the researcher decided to approach the pilot course participants through a follow-up email.

3.2 Data acquisition methods

As seen in figure 10, the main methods for data acquisition were *observation* (participant-observatory method and a complete observer -method) and *semi-structured interviews*. Pre-existing data was gathered in the beginning of the research process to familiarize with the organization's leadership development goals and training programs.

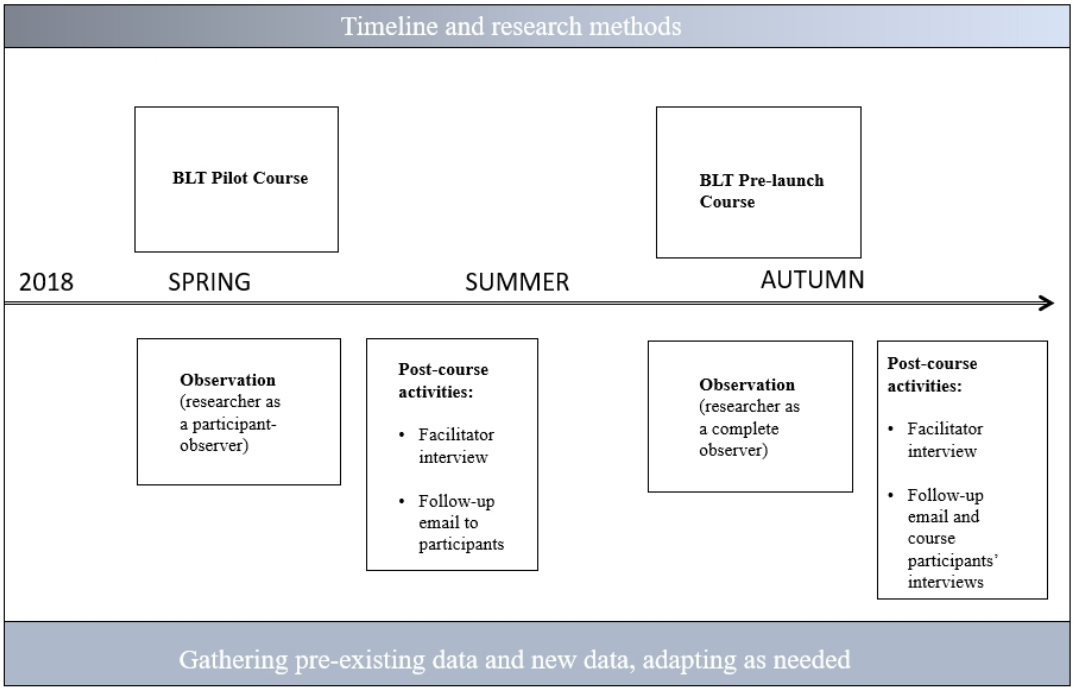

FIGURE 10. Timeline and research methods

Musante and DeWalt (2011, 99) believe that: "the goal for design of research using participant observation as a method is to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study that is as objective and accurate as possible given the limitations of the method". They also suggest that the validity of the results is

stronger if used with additional strategies such as interviewing, questionnaires or surveys (Musante & DeWalt 2011, 100). In this research, the observation method was completed with follow-up emails to obtain further information on the questions raised during the observation. The semi-structured interviews on the BLT pre-launch course provided deep insight in addition to the researcher's observations.

3.2.1 Observation

According to Jones & Rothwell (2012, 169), the benefit of the observation data collection method is that meanwhile collecting data, the researcher also has an opportunity to witness organizational performance in its natural setting. The observations vary from participant observations to more detached observations. When the observer becomes a member of the group, it is called participant observation. (Jones & Rothwell 2017, 169.) In what comes to observing e-learning initiatives, Phillips et al. (2012, 141) state that observation offers detailed information about the ways how the learners engage in the online environment, how they approach the learning tasks, interact and respond to different challenges they face.

Nørskov and Rask (2011), who studied online observation in a virtual community, point out that online observation is a method employed to study interactions in virtual communities in their natural setting. As shown in figure 11, the less involved the researcher's observer role is, the more s/he should consider introducing offline data collection techniques to support his/her research. (Nørskov & Rask 2011.)

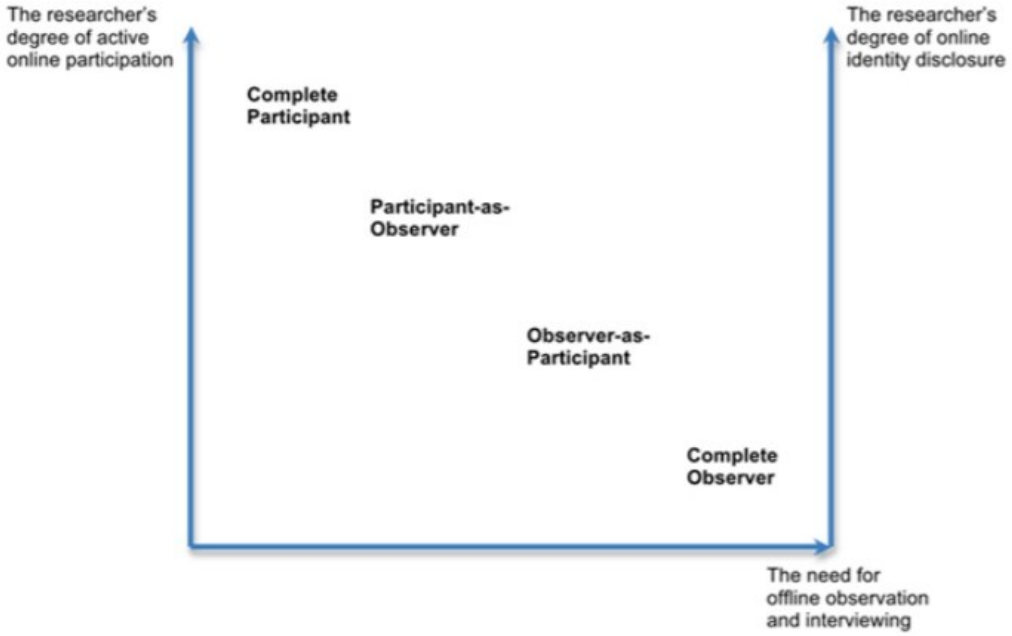

FIGURE 11. How to combine the researcher's online observer role with offline research techniques in order to diminish threats to credibility and transferability (Nørskov & Rask 2011).

On the BLT pilot course, the participant-observer method was used, meaning that the researcher took part in the course as a group member and participated on discussion along with the others. The participants were informed of the researcher's role on several occasions. The observation was completed with other methods, such as interviewing the facilitator and sending a follow-up email to participants.

On the BLT pre-launch course, the role of a complete observer was adopted, meaning that the researcher had access to the course and could see how the participants interacted with each other, but did not interact with the participants in any way. The participants were aware that they were being observed and, in addition, being informed of the ways their data would be gathered and used. Because of the more distant observer role, offline methods, such as semi-structured interviews, were added for further insight as suggested by Nørskov & Rask (see figure 11). Both, the facilitator and the participants, were interviewed after the course.

3.2.2 Interviews

The interviewing method used was semi-structured interview, the method which according to Jones and Rothwell (2018, 169) “is the most common type of interview for evaluating change initiatives in organizations”. They continue that semi-structured interviews use open-ended questions, but the questions are “specific in intent, enabling individual responses” and thus providing an opportunity to the interviewer to follow-up and clarify (Jones & Rothwell 2018, 169).

Phillips et al. (2012, 140) share similar ideas as “semi-structured interviews are the most common and allow more flexibility for both the interviewer and the interviewee.” They also state that it is common for the interviewer to prepare with thought-through themes but to have the flexibility to allow the interviewee to go to unplanned topics (Phillips et al. 2012, 140).

The BLT pilot course participants were not interviewed. The participant-observer method provided deep insight to the research questions and the follow-up email sent to them after the course provided further information to the questions raised during the observation process. The course facilitator, Zacharias, International Leadership Development Associate and Digital Training Manager of OM, was interviewed using a semi-structured interviewing style to get the facilitator’s aspect on the course. There was a plan in place to interview also the other pilot course facilitator, but due to time constrains the interview did not take place.

On the BLT pre-launch course, where the researcher acted as a “complete observer”, there was a need for using offline methods to get deeper insight to their experience. The participants were interviewed after the course using a semi-structured interviewing style. They were first approached by email to ask their willingness to take part in the interview. All four participants agreed to be interviewed. The course facilitator was also interviewed. Since the interviewees were located around the world, all the interviews were conducted on Skype for Business. They were recorded, transcribed and stored on a secure server. Video was not used due to its negative effect on the sound quality.

3.2.3 Ethics

As in any research, it is important to conduct the research in an ethical manner by letting the community know that they are being observed and their activities will be documented. It is also important to pay attention to the anonymity of the participants to prevent their identification. (Kawulich 2005, 8.) Furthermore, McLain and Kim (2018, 113), state that ethical questions must be considered in qualitative research, as "a multitude of ethical questions can arise during data collection, fieldwork, data analysis, and reporting." They also point out that qualitative data is most often provided by individuals who willingly want to provide their insight to the research, therefore they should be treated with respect and their well-being should be maintained (McLain & Kim 2018, 113).

The BLT pilot course participants were aware that they were participating on a pilot course and that the data obtained during the pilot course would be used to further developing the course. They were also informed beforehand that the course would be observed for research purposes and the researcher would also participate on the course. They were also promised that their identity would be kept confidential. At the beginning of the course, in the participant introductions, they were again reminded of the researcher's participant-observer role and the confidentiality in handling their data.

Due to the iterative nature of the research process the plans sometimes took a different route than what was originally planned, and the participants needed to be reminded of these changes. Even though the pilot course participants knew that they would be observed, they did not know in detail how their data would be gathered and used later in my thesis. This was because in the beginning of the course it was not yet clear what kind of data would be interesting for research purposes and useful for the thesis, and how the data would be analysed and used. At the end of the pilot course there was a better understanding, and the participants were approached with a personal email explaining the data collection and observation process in detail, the qualitative data analysis methods used (such as coding process) and given clear examples of how their data would be used. The participants were also informed that they still had a right to withdraw their data from the research and were given a period of a time during which they

could do that. It was again mentioned, that their identity would be kept confidential.

In terms of the position of the researcher, careful consideration of ethical aspects was needed, due to the researcher's position in the organization. Realistic evaluation biases and any effects the employee-status might have to the research, were conducted prior to beginning of the observation. The researcher was not involved in the participant-selection process and did not know their names prior to the beginning of the course. There was no personal connection between the researcher and the participants. They were placed in different countries, represented different areas in the organization and had never met in person. The researcher had briefly met the other facilitator earlier and had a Skype-call with another facilitator.

Another aspect to consider is the researcher's degree of the influence. In qualitative research the data collection phase needs more specific consideration, as most of the interaction between the researcher and the participants happens then, and it is very likely that the participants will be influenced to a certain degree (McLain & Kim 2018, 113). It is evident that the researcher's participant-observer role on the BLT pilot course influenced the participants to a certain degree and it needs to be considered when evaluating the objectivity and validity of this research. However, the results received through the coding process suggest that the researcher's role was not dominating and did not disturb the group dynamics. The participants accepted the researcher as one of the group members and interacted with her like with anyone else in the group. The results also confirm that the participants were able to engage in open and risk-free communication despite of knowing that they were being observed by one of the group members.

The pre-launch course participants were also informed about the researcher's role on the course (complete observer, not participating in discussions) and given clear examples of how their data may be used. They were reminded of the observer's role again in the beginning of the course and promised that despite of being observed, their identity would be kept confidential. They were also told that they would be contacted after the course and asked to be interviewed about their experience. When approached after the course, they were given an opportunity

to be interviewed, but were told that this would be voluntary. All four participants agreed to be interviewed.

3.3 Analysis methods

The discussion forums were the focus point for observation during the pilot course, as that is where the interaction and sharing took place. The discussion forum posts were collected on a datasheet, cleared of names and any identifying factors and divided into units. The units were arranged so that each unit represented a complete thought. Usually the units followed the natural paragraph structure used by the participants. The units were then analysed through the lens of the CoI framework by adding suitable codes for each unit using the categories of social, cognitive and teaching presence. A complete list of codes and indicators used can be seen in Appendix 1. Each unit could have several different codes and.

Data received through the semi-structured interviews were transcribed, collected on a datasheet, cleared of names and any identifying factors and analysed through thematic analysis methods. With the help of specific themes deriving from the research questions and the theoretical framework, the data were arranged to different categories (content, social interaction and facilitation).

4 PRE-COURSE ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

4.1 Background

As in any evaluation process, it is important to understand the background before planning any further. Phillips et al. (2012, 18) state that: “Before an investigation of the success of an e-learning innovation can begin, both the criteria for success and the questions of interest associated with these criteria need to be clarified.” In addition to the questions of interest presented in the theoretical framework, an additional question of interest for the researcher was to understand the background of the BLT course and the leading factors behind this initiative. For this purpose, background data was gathered by establishing contact to key stakeholders in response or the BLT course and interviewing them.

According to Thomas (2018), OM’s International Director of Leadership Development, the need for training leaders more systematically became evident as the organization grew bigger and a pool of competent leaders was needed. In the past, OM’s leadership development courses were built on the need-basis, and even though the courses had strategic elements, the leadership development process was not strategic in a bigger picture. (Thomas, 2018.)

Wingard (2015, 4) states that the new learning initiatives “can work most effectively when integrated into the overall corporate strategic decision-making process”. According to Thomas (2018), OM has been going through a significant organizational change during the past years and this change process has also been an appropriate time to relook at what is happening in the organization’s leadership development and critically evaluate if some of the things being taught, are even relevant anymore. During this thought-process it was realized that there is a need to build a stronger leadership development pipeline, which would also support the organization’s strategy and succession planning (Thomas, 2018). Figure 12 describes the leading factors and the organizational evaluation process behind the BLT course.

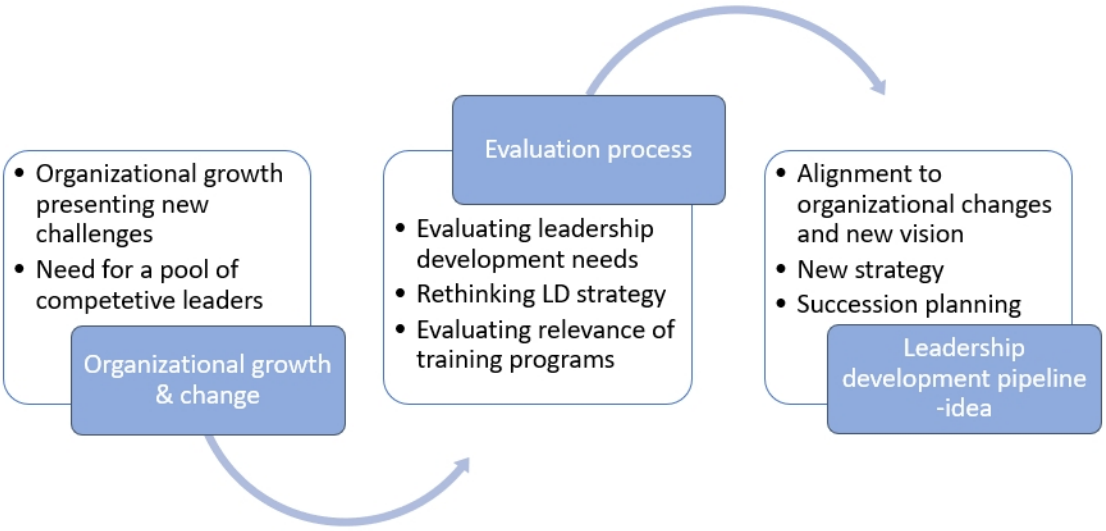

FIGURE 12. The organizational evaluation process at OM

This process could also be described as the very first step of the iterative e-learning evaluation. As described earlier (see figure 1), the iterative e-learning process contains evaluation in many different stages. The evaluation process described above, could also be considered as an analysis-phase, which Phillips et al. have placed before the actual design and piloting phases (Phillips et al. 2012, 117). Figure 13 connects the theoretical framework and the idea of the iterative e-learning process and presents the phases of evaluation on the BLT course.

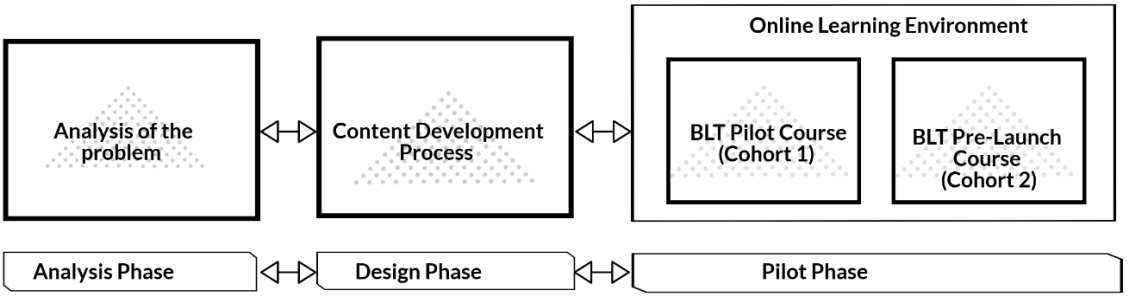

FIGURE 13. Iterative e-learning process from analysis to pilot phase (Based on FIGURE 1 andFIGURE 2)

In the analysis phase, the organization discovered that there was a need for rethinking the corporate leadership training, both the relevance of the contents, the methods and the medium, since the organization had grown, and its employees were placed around the world. The process continued with a design and development of a new training course, the Basic Leadership Training course (BLT),

which became the first step on the organizations' newly developing leadership development pipeline.

In the design phase the BLT was rewritten from the organization's previous, on-site leadership training course called FLighT added with new areas and aspects of leadership that would be relevant for the 21st century leader (Thomas 2018). The previous leadership development training courses offered by the organization had been offered onsite, but there had been a desire to enter the world of digital training, due to **higher accessibility** and **sustainability**. The decision was made that the BLT course would be offered online and piloted with a pilot cohort before fully launching it to the entire organization. (Thomas, 2018.)

4.2 Content and structure

Part of the background data gathering process was to better understand what kind of characteristics the organization values in its leaders, and how these qualities have affected the content design of the BLT course. According to Thomas (2018), the most important characteristics for a leader at OM are *cultural intelligence, emotional intelligence, agility and deep spiritual life*:

- *Cultural intelligence.* When OM was established, the organization culture was mainly western, but today, half of the people, or even more than that, are from non-western cultures. Teams are multicultural and a deep understanding of cultures and how to operate in multicultural teams, is essential.
- *Emotional intelligence.* In addition to understanding different cultural aspects, it is vital to know how to work with different people and how to lead a team consisting of different personalities.
- *Agility.* Adapting to changes, difficulties and challenges, and navigating through them. The challenges the leaders face today, are very different from before. Security risks are high in many areas and the leaders must also be prepared for crisis situations.
- *Deep spiritual life.* As a Christian organization, this is something the organization highly values and finds crucial. (Thomas 2018.)

The BLT course was divided into three modules (self-leadership, team leadership and ministry leadership) and the above-mentioned qualities were presented in different ways on these modules. In addition to these topics, there was an assignment, which continued all the way from start to finish, a leadership philosophy (figure 14). The participants were to begin with defining leadership and continue by building their own leadership philosophy. At the end of the course they were asked to reflect, and to think if they would like to make any changes to their earlier definition of leadership.

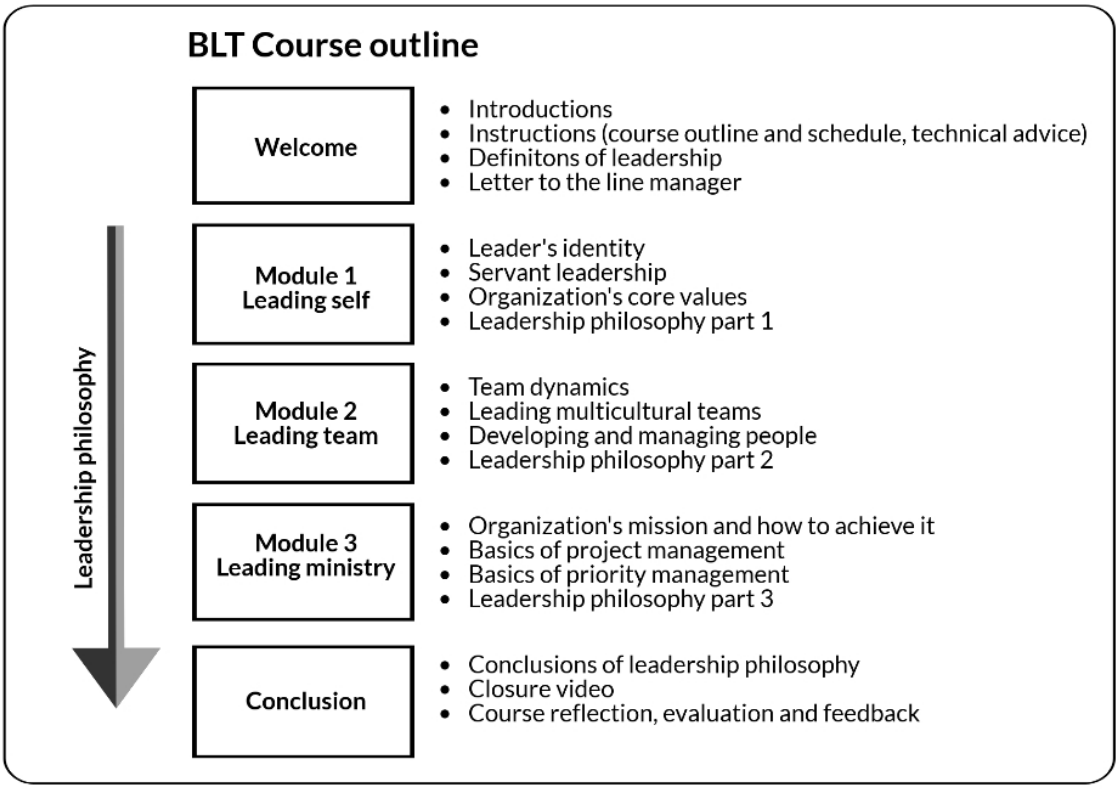

FIGURE 14. BLT course outline (adapted from course materials)

As discussed in the theoretical framework, the first stage in Gilly Salmon's Five stage model (see figure 4) was ***access & motivation*** that includes creating a welcoming and encouraging environment along with offering technological support by setting up a system and accessing the course. Similarly, the BLT course began with a welcoming email from the course facilitators prior to the beginning of the course. The participants were given directions how to log in to the Moodle (Jabin online) and access the course materials. Along with the welcoming email, the participants received the course outline and learning outcomes -document,

which also explained the expected time commitment and schedule, different modules and the idea of building up their own leadership philosophy during the modules. In addition, the level of activity needed for meeting the course expectations and receiving the certificate of completion, along with facilitator availability and general netiquette were communicated to the participants.

To ensure a strong start in the course, the participants were asked to introduce themselves on the introduction forum. If considered in the light of the Five Stage Model, the online introductions helped building towards ***online socialisation*** and assuring that everyone had successfully accessed the course and had a good start. This built a good basis for continuing the process to studying the content in more detail or taking the next steps on the Five Stage Model to ***information exchange*** and ***knowledge construction*** (figure 4).

4.3 The online learning environment

The specifics of the online learning environment set requirements to the learner. According to Burkle and Cleveland-Innes (2013, 74) online learning requires the learner to take "greater responsibility for and control over their learning", however, these requirements and responsibilities are not always apparent especially to the new online learners. They also list some of the competencies online learners need:

- e-Readiness is defined as knowledge about, skill with, and acceptance of, Internet technology
- Increased time on task and study management due to required learner self-direction
- new modes and channels of communication with instructors, peers, and course administrators
- synchronous and asynchronous approaches to learning
(Burkle & Cleveland-Innes 2013, 74)

Many BLT pilot course participants were relatively new online learners whereas the BLT pre-launch course participants were far more experienced. However, even though Burkle and Cleveland-Innes (2013) refer to new online learners with the above competencies, it was found during this research that the need for good time and task management skills was evident also among the more experienced

learners. In both groups there were also those who were able to overcome the challenges they faced by means of good time- and study management. They were able to take advantage of the flexibility of online learning and use it to plan the rhythm of their studies.

The BLT course was based on asynchronous discussions. Garrison (2016, 37) points out that one benefit of asynchronous communication is its reflective nature. The learners will reflect before responding to each other and this encourages thoughtful exchange of ideas that can be read and revised as more evidence and feedback is being received. This differentiates the written communication from verbal one, which is linear and ephemeral in nature. (Garrison 2016, 37-38.) On the other hand, lack of visual cues is naturally a challenge in written communication (Garrison 2017, 36), but several researchers (Boston et al. 2009, Garrison 2017) have found that students overcome that by using different linguistic means such as affective expression, para-language, self-disclosure, emoticons and humour. This was also found in this research and will be discussed in more detail in the chapters to come.

The online environment allows introducing different types of learning tasks. The tasks on the BLT course ranged from reading and watching videos, to self-reflective quizzes and online tests. There were also case-studies to solve (individually), and authentic, work-related tasks that related to the learners' own context. The discussion forums offered a place to sharing reflections, experiences and discoveries with other learners and course facilitators. According to Vaughan and Garrison (2009, 62), the focus of online learning has changed from merely accessing and sharing information, which was typical for distance education, to forming communities of inquiry where all participants have an opportunity to be heard, engage with each other, gain deep learning experiences and test and reject unproductive contributions.

5 BLT PILOT COURSE RESULTS

5.1 Background information and participant profiles

The BLT pilot course had 9 participants (including the researcher as a participant-observer). The pilot course participants had been chosen by the course design team partly based on their ability to give beneficial and critical feedback, not merely of what they were learning, but also the process of it (Zacharias 2018a). The participant selection process could be considered as one evaluation phase, the goal being finding answers to the questions introduced by Phillips et al. (2012, 16) such as 1) *who should be asked* and 2) *which strategies should be used when evaluating e-learning initiatives*. Here the strategy was to get a good range of participants to participate on the pilot course, a diverse group of people who would represent the organizational diversity as well as possible, and thus help the organization to make better judgements based on the results received from the observations.

According to Zacharias (2018a) cultural diversity was also one determining factor while searching for suitable participants. The design team did not only want Europeans and Americans to participate, but a wider sample of nationalities. The participants represented different nationalities and worked in different countries in Asia, Africa and Europe. Some participants were chosen based on their line manager's recommendation. The design team approached the line managers with a course description and asked for suitable people to join the course. (Zacharias 2018a.)

Most participants had been working for OM less than 2,5 years, but three people had worked for the organization longer. Two people had been with the organization only about two months. The participants worked in different professional fields, such as teaching and training, finance, social work, community development and HR. Some were not yet in a leadership role, some were leading a small team either locally or remotely and some were leaders of a wider ministry area. The diverse pilot course group represented well what the normal cohort in the organization's trainings could look like.

The BLT pilot course had two facilitators. Both facilitators had taught online courses before and they had also facilitated two courses together, which enhanced their co-operation during the BLT pilot course (Zacharias 2018a).

5.2 Challenges faced

The pilot course participants were actively participating in discussion, the level of their activity being on an average level compared to online courses in general (Zacharias, 2018a). However, out of the nine BLT pilot course participants, four people did not complete the course for various reasons. To clarify the reasons behind not finishing the course, a follow-up email was sent to them and they were asked to identify the main contributing factor from the following options:

a) General workload and time issues
b) Personal issue (such as illness, family issues etc.)
c) Not enough flexibility on the course for completing the tasks
d) The online format did not suit me, I prefer face-to-face
e) Course content not found relevant to my situation
f) Lack of support/interest from my manager
g) Language challenges
h) Technical challenges
i) Something else, please specify

Out of four people who did not complete the pilot course, three people answered the email and identified that general workload and time issues was the main reason for not completing. Their feedback was that the pace of the course was too high (alongside work) and therefore it was easy to miss the pace and start lagging, which then increased the workload and made it more difficult to complete. Added with unexpected challenges, such as sickness, the combination became even more challenging. One person said that due to the lack of time they did not have an opportunity to contribute more on the discussion forums.

In the follow-up emails one person pointed out the highly reflective nature of the course which was one reason why the amount of time and concentration needed

had been greater than on an average course. Also, despite of their line manager's support, there had not been an opportunity to drop anything from their busy schedule which eventually led to workload becoming too big and caused the person not to complete the course.

However, similar challenges were also identified with the participants who did complete the course: they also struggled with time and pace as they were all working alongside the BLT course. The following comments from participants who completed the course highlights this well:

> *Due to my own tight schedule and having to finish early, I'm overwhelmed by all this. Yet I learnt so much from you who gave feedback in the discussion… (P1)*

> *I really struggled to keep up with the work… (P2)*

The person behind the first example faced a challenge of the course falling on a busy time with scheduled travelling. However, the participant was able to overcome the challenge by taking advantage of the flexibility of online learning, contacting the facilitator and agreeing an alternative schedule to complete the course. Also, the importance of the social interaction and discussion with others is highlighted in this example.

The second example is from a person who had struggled with combined workload, which had caused a delay in some of their everyday responsibilities. However, at the end of the course the participant concluded that participation on the course had been beneficial despite of these challenges and was confident that the leadership skills learnt will be very useful in their everyday job.

Cho and Tobias (2016, 125) state that online learners do spend significant amounts of time in online discussions reading, posting and replying to other participants posts. In addition to the visible time the learners spend on the forums, they also spend considerable amount of time reading assignments and completing different projects (Cho and Tobias 2016, 125). The learners on the BLT pilot course noticed the time requirements of online learning and each participant responded to this challenge differently.

Apart from a few confusions with navigation, technical challenges were not reported by the BLT pilot course participants. Many participants were doing the course on a second language, but only one person identified that as a challenge and approached others for support:

> *My English is not perfect, you will see that, so please be free to correct my grammar and sentence or word. I will really appreciate it. (P7)*

According to Salmon (2013a, 12) “participants who are working in a language other than their own have a particularly sharp learning curve”. In the above example the participant reached out to others for help and support with their language. During the observation process it was however noticed that the person who expressed having language challenges, was participating actively on discussion boards, even more actively than many of the native language speakers, indicating that the challenges identified did not affect the person’s activity on discussion boards.

Social presence was found to remain on a high level throughout the BLT pilot course. Participants and facilitators were interacting with each other creating and maintaining a welcoming atmosphere where people could openly share. When measuring participant activity on discussion forums by counting the amount of their discussion posts, it was noticed that the participants who did not complete the course (Participants P3, P5, P6 and P8), were less active on discussion forums than the participants who completed the course (figure 15). Apart from one person (P8), they engaged less already from beginning of the Welcome module and participant introductions. The sample is very small and further research would be needed before forming causalities based on this result. However, the finding raises up a question about the role of social presence and interaction in maintaining commitment.

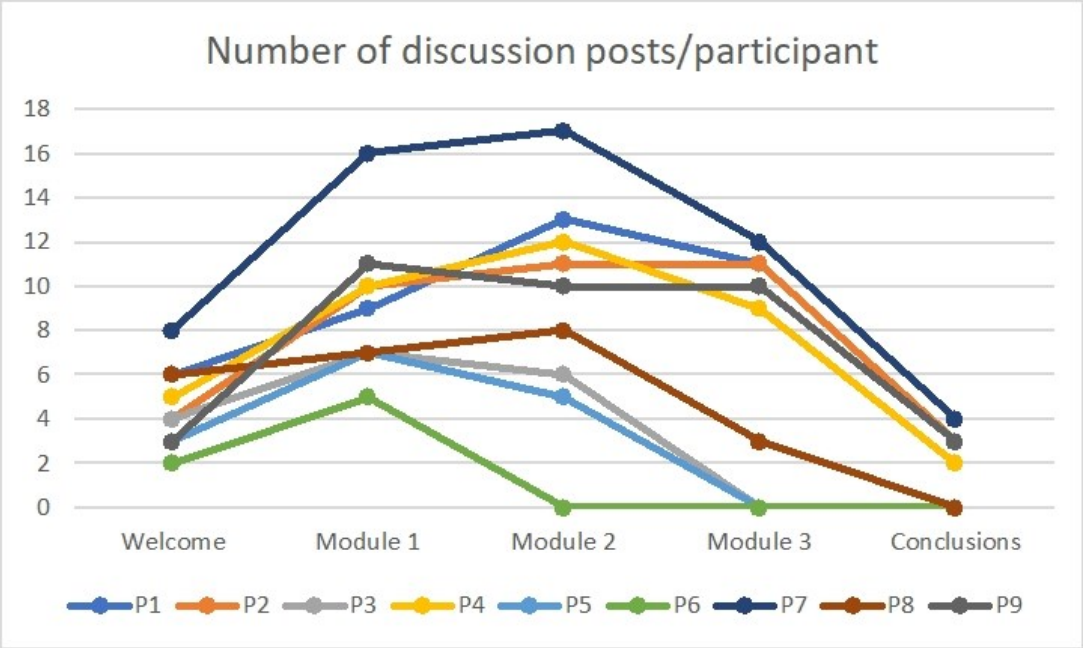

FIGURE 15: Number of discussion posts/participant during different modules

The existing theory suggests that there is a link between student engagement/interaction and student performance/retention rates. In their recent study among one hundred and fifty-five students Martin and Bolliger (2018, 205) found that "student engagement increases student satisfaction, enhances student motivation to learn, reduces the sense of isolation, and improves student performance in online courses".

Another study, a larger scale study among online university students conducted by Boston et al. (2009) found a significant connection between the social interaction and student retention rates (Boston et al. 2009, 77). The findings from a study conducted by Croxton (2014, 314) alike suggest that interactivity plays an important role in online students' persistence in studies but adds that many things, including different external, internal and contextual factors may influence the online learner's persistence. In addition, Garrison (2017) also emphasizes the need to explore the connection of social interaction and student motivation in more detail: "there is a need to explore the connection of social presence and motivation as this has been shown to be crucial in sustaining engagement in a learning community" (Garrison 2017, 44).

Evaluating the impact of the challenges faced during the pilot phase in the light of the above-mentioned theories, there is a possibility that struggling with work-load (external) and personal time-management (internal), and therefore not being able to engage socially as much as desired, could have affected the participants' feeling of being part of a learning community and hence affecting their motivation to continue. This could explain the different reactions between participants who faced similar challenges but reacted differently. But the sample is small and further research would be needed before making any causalities based on this result, as student motivation is a complex matter.

Garrison (2017, 44) links motivation with "initiating interest, directing effort and maintaining focus" and considers it to be an important part of the social-emotional aspect of social presence. In a community of inquiry where learners engage in meaningful collaboration with each other, the positive learning experience creates positive emotions which in turn results in motivational advantage (Garrison 2017, 44). Considering Garrison's thoughts, there is a possibility that learners who interacted less with each other, also experienced lower amount of collaboration and hence lost the motivational advantage.

Also, contrary point of views has been presented. Cho and Tobias (2016) compared students' learning experiences in three different conditions: (a) no discussion, (b) discussion with no instructor participation, and (c) discussion with active instructor participation. Their study suggests that there were no significant differences on student achievement or satisfaction whether they were interacting with others at all or not (Cho & Tobias 2016, 135). However, they did find that those who participated on course b or c, showed significantly greater amounts of social presence, and in the option c, where the instructor was engaging as well, all three dimensions of social presence (affective communication, open communication and group cohesion) were significantly higher (Cho & Tobias 2016, 131).

5.3 Statistics of different presence types

The participants' process was evaluated through the lens of the CoI framework (figure 6). From the research perspective, it was interesting to explore if the online

medium encouraged forming communities of inquiry in which to reflect findings with others and gain new perspective. According to Garrison (2009, 352) these kinds of communities are not formed by itself, instead they require commitment to the community and participation from the learners before a collaborative and constructive environment can be formed and the learners will feel comfortable to share openly.

During the qualitative coding process (see Appendix 1 for the indicators used), it was found that all three different presence types were present on the BLT pilot course (figure 16). Social presence was indicated more often than cognitive presence or teaching presence.

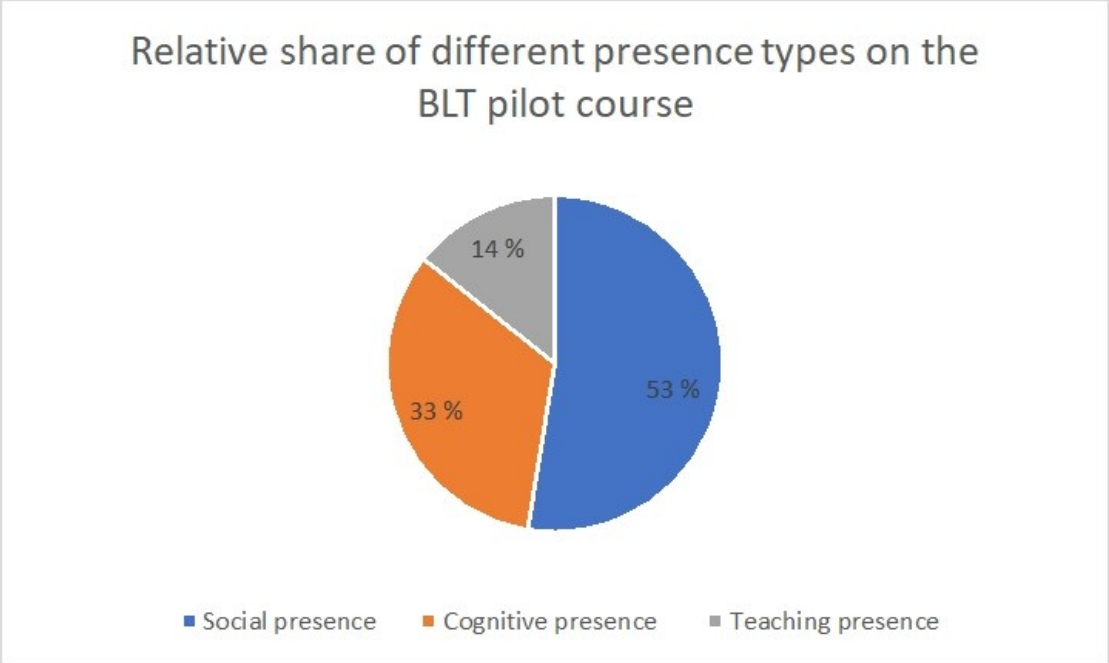

FIGURE 16. Relative share of social, cognitive and teaching presence (no of times coded / total no of codes)

When examining the different presences in more detail and per participant (figure 17), it was noticed that all participants along with the facilitators, expressed all three types of presence during the course. The teaching presence was not only indicated in the facilitators' posts, but also the participants reflected teaching presence to some extent. Alike the social presence was not reflected by the participants alone, but also by the facilitators. This finding is in line with what Garrison (2017, 29) states about each individual participating in collaboration by contributing to the social environment, engaging in constructing meaning in cognitive

area, and expressing teaching presence for example by confirming understanding.

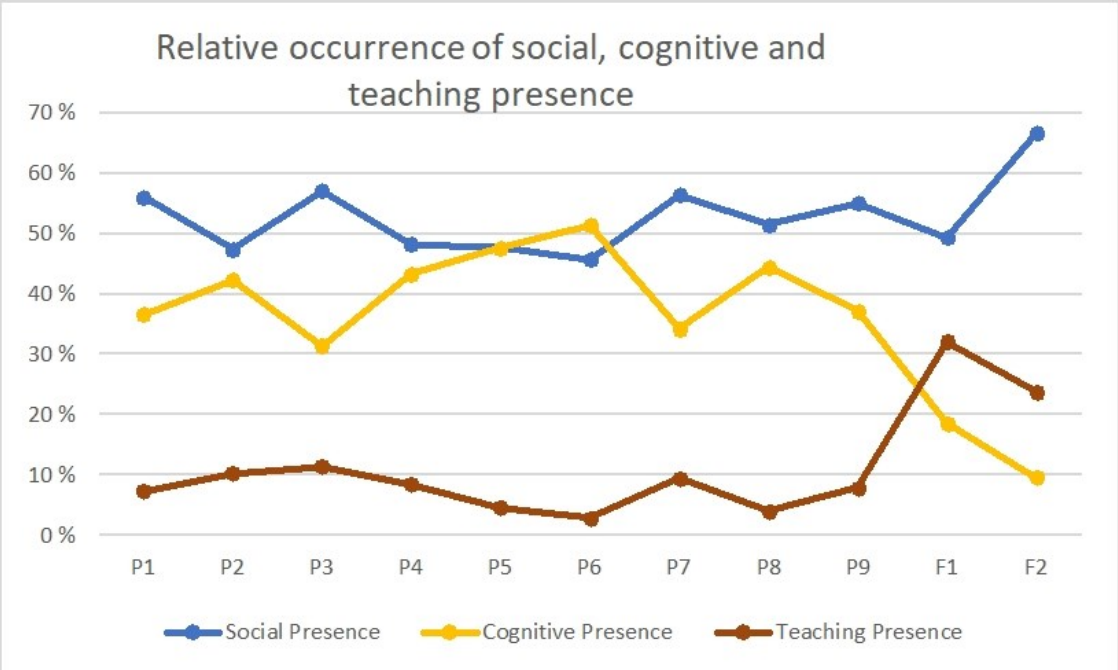

FIGURE 17. Relative occurrence of presence types indicated by each participant/facilitator (no of times coded / total no of codes per participant). (See also Appendix 3)

In addition to variance between participants, there were also differences in between different modules. Social presence was coded with highest numbers in the Welcome-module when the participants and facilitators met and introduced each other on the discussion forum (figure 18). Social presence was also relatively high in the Conclusions-module, when the participants recognized each other's contributions. In Modules 1, 2 and 3 as the participants engaged with the course content, reflection, practical tasks and active sharing with each other, they started expressing higher levels of cognitive presence. The low frequencies of teaching presence can be explained with the coding process. Only the discussion forum posts were coded and most of the design and organization happened outside of the discussions, via email, in the task description or in the announcement/questions board.

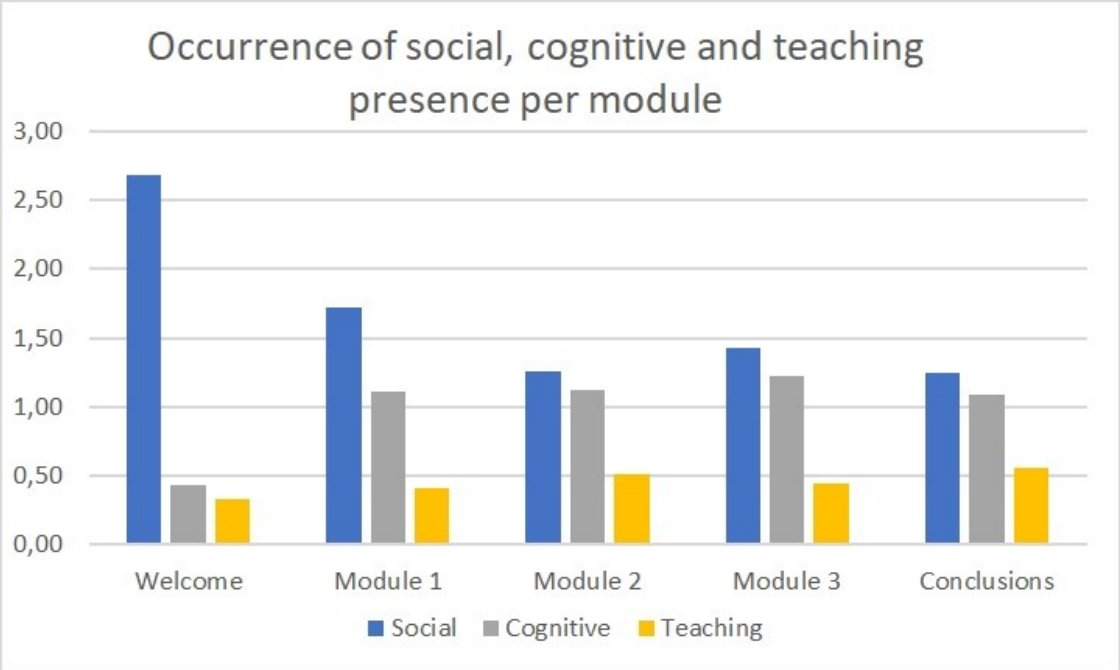

FIGURE 18. Occurrence of social, cognitive and teaching presence (frequency of coded units / module). See Appendix 2 for detailed calculations.

5.4 Social presence

The categories of social presence are affective expression, open communication and group cohesion (Garrison 2009, 353). On the BLT pilot course, all the different dimensions of social presence were indicated in the discussions and coded as follows in table 3:

TABLE 3. Occurrence of the three different dimensions of social presence on the BLT pilot course (frequency/coded units/module)

Social presence	*Welcome-module*		*Module 1*		*Module 2*		*Module 3*		*Conclusions*	
	Count	Per unit	Count	Per unit	Count	Per unit	Count	Per unit	Count	Per unit
Affective Expression	127	1,69	130	0,90	89	0,57	75	0,78	17	0,53
Open Communication	55	0,73	101	0,70	92	0,59	54	0,56	16	0,50
Group Cohesion	19	0,25	19	0,13	15	0,10	8	0,08	7	0,22
No of Units Coded	75		145		156		96		32	

Each of these categories has a different role in the community of inquiry. Garrison (2017, 45) argues that affective expression alone is not enough for establishing a purposeful community of inquiry, and the learners do not join the educational environment for merely social reasons. Instead, the role of affective expression

is to build towards the emotional climate, which then enhances open communication and group cohesion. Open communication and group cohesion then enable the learners to engage in cognitive learning process together with other learners. (Garrison 2017, 45.)

Vaughan and Garrison (2009, 65) also hypothesize that “it would be more productive to focus first on open communication in the task of creating a risk-free climate as well as group cohesion to build on group identity and provide the foundation for collaboration.” They argue that this would then naturally lead to development of purposeful communities (Vaughan & Garrison 2009, 65). However, Jahng, Chan and Nielsen (2013, 54) point out that a high degree of social interaction does not necessarily correlate with a high level of collaboration.

On the BLT pilot course, the role of affective expression was emphasized in the beginning of the course (figure 19) and the highest amounts of open communication were also coded in the beginning of the course.

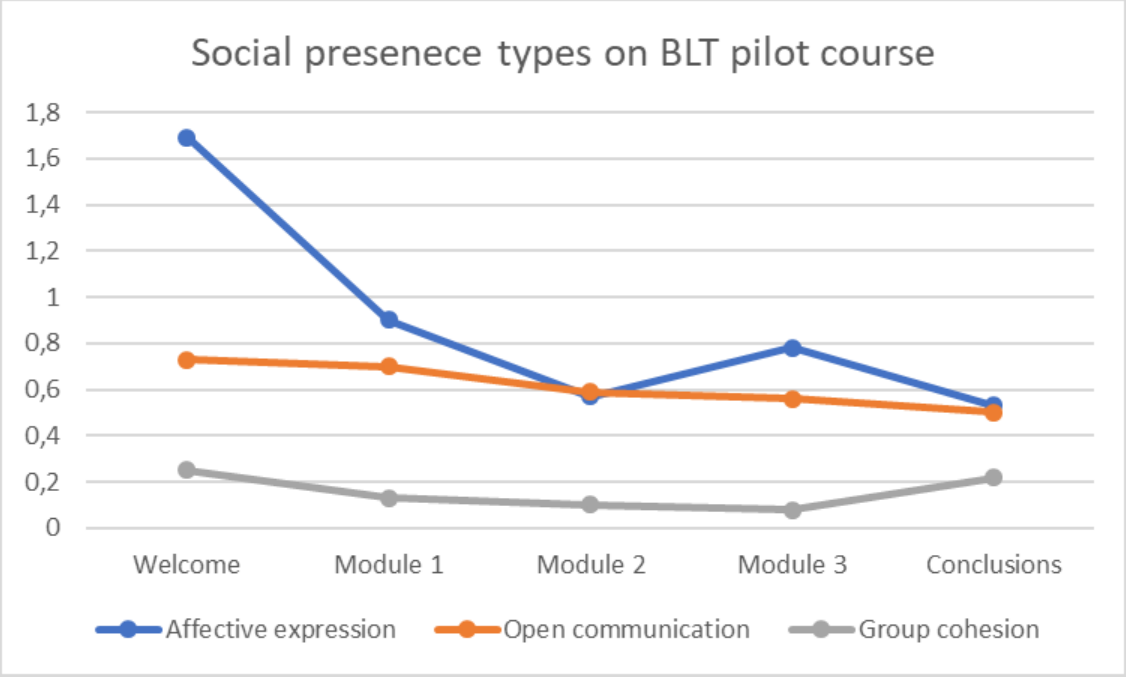

FIGURE 19. Development of social presence types on the BLT pilot course (frequency/module)

Both, the participants and the facilitators engaged in risk-free communication directly from the beginning of the course. Based on the theory studied, the conditions for a deep cognitive process were therefore at place. Despite of the asynchronous nature of the course, the participants were socially engaging with each

other within the online environment creating a *respectful* and *inclusive* environment that Garrison (2017, 37) mentions as signs of a high-quality e-learning environment. The other two signs mentioned by Garrison: *intellectually challenging* and *critical* which link more with the cognitive inquiry, will be looked at in more detail in chapters concentrating on cognitive inquiry.

5.4.1 Affective expression

As described in figure 19, the use of affective expressions was especially high in the beginning of the course. Boston et al. (2009, 68) define affective expression as: “an ability of online learners to project themselves through such text-based verbal behaviours as the use of para-language, self-disclosure, humour, and other expressions of emotion and values”. In text-based online environment, which lacks body language and vocal intonations, the learners need to find other ways to express their emotions and show affection. Garrison (2017, 45) lists three different ways: 1) emoticons and capitalization, 2) language and humour and 3) self-disclosure.

Therefore, the following indicators were chosen to assist in the coding process when searching for signs of affective expression on the BLT pilot course (See Appendix 1):

- Greeting each other, welcoming
- Self-disclosure, sharing about oneself
- Expressing emotions (by language, emoticons, humour)
- Showing respect/encouragement to others

During the observation of the BLT pilot course, it was noticed that the participants and facilitators used different aspects of affective expression, such as emoticons and humour more extensively in the beginning of the course when introducing each other and replying to each other’s introductions:

> *Have a good laugh or cry helps me to de-stress (sorry mates, this is embarrassing :P) (P1)*

> *Here's a little humour, because as you said, it's important 😊. (Adding a comic) (F1)*

Talking casually about their hobbies, one participant and facilitator discovered that they supported different sport teams. This led to a humorous discussion closing with statement:

> *Good thing we can appreciate each other's differences, eh? 😊 (F2)*

According to Garrison (2017, 45) using humour is a sign of goodwill and suggests that the relationship is at a good place with no serious challenges. In addition to humour, another aspect of how affective expression was present on the BLT pilot course discussions, was recognizing and complementing others as in the following examples:

> *X, thank you so much for such a comprehensive answer. I appreciate it. (P4)*
>
> *I like your comment about leaders giving people freedom at the same time as guiding them. I have really appreciated that from some of my leaders in the past. (P2)*
>
> *Thanks for writing a list of what you learned about leadership, it helped me to remember also. From all what you write, I will remember that leadership is a lifelong process which involves others, each experience enables you to learn, grow and build… (P7)*
>
> *Thank you for this brave post! – – Really encouraging, thank you! (P3)*

The climate of appreciation was evident also in discussion between participants and facilitators. In the following comments from facilitators to participants, the affective dimension of social presence overlaps with teaching presence providing the participant with feedback and simultaneously expressing appreciation and encouragement and thus creating a climate for learning. Not only do the facilitator-comments express appreciation, but they also indicate that the facilitators themselves have experienced "triggering events" which have inspired a thought process.

> *Your thoughts about leadership are well developed and gave me a lot to think about. I especially appreciated the "attainable yet challenging" phrase and the idea of helping people develop individually while pursuing a common goal. Good stuff. Thanks! (F2)*
>
> *Interesting reflections, X, thank you. I think you got right to the core – leadership flows out of who we are. (F1)*

The above examples show that the affective expressions were tied with cognitive process and not only concentrated on the social-emotional environment. This is important because there is also a downside in affective communication. Garrison (2017, 46-47) states that a delicate balance in social presence is needed as "too little social presence may not sustain open communication and commitment (group cohesion). On the other hand, too much social presence may inhibit meaningful discourse by avoiding critical questioning and constructive disagreement."

Jahng et al. (2010, 54-55) alike state that social communication alone does not necessarily mean that the level of collaboration is high. In their study of online collaboration in small groups, they found implications that an appropriate level of social communication supports collaborative activity, but more research is still needed to determine what that appropriate level is (Jahng et al. 2010, 55).

5.4.2 Open communication

As described in the earlier chapters, a trusting environment is needed for people to be able to engage in open communication. People need to feel accepted and protected before being able to openly share with others and being able to engage in reflective discourse. Providing recognition to others, complimenting them and responding to their questions helps building an environment where open communication can flourish. (Garrison 2017, 46). In this thesis *risk-free communication* and *responding to other people's comments* were used as indicators for open communication (Appendix 1).

It was found that on the BLT pilot course both, the participants and facilitators alike, engaged in open communication with each other throughout the course (Appendix 3), however in the beginning of the course open communication was

coded more often (as seen in figure 19). In addition to creating a reciprocal atmosphere by replying to other participants' comments and questions, the participants engaged in open and risk-free conversation, sharing about their own struggles in leadership as demonstrated in these examples:

> *I am quite new in leadership position and feel out of my depth a lot of the time. I have definitely been seeking approval from others that I'm doing an ok job. (P3)*
>
> *Most of the time I learn about my identity through pain or trials. (P6)*
>
> *After a difficult day at the center today, questioning once again what I'm doing... (P4)*

It was not clear to the researcher how many participants knew each other beforehand, but based on their introductions on the forum, most participants were new to each other and had not met each other face-to-face. Still they felt free to engage in open and risk-free conversation in the online environment and share about their own struggles. Partly this links with facilitation and the way how the facilitators themselves modelled open self-disclosure, thus encouraging risk-free communication. The following comments by the facilitators demonstrate this well:

> *I am still growing in the area of leadership, but I can say that integrity and leading by example are very important in my current understanding of the role. Looking forward to learning and growing with the rest of you here! (F2)*
>
> *I can relate to the perfectionism! That's been a struggle for me over the years, for sure. I remember a talk I listened to some years back about needing to insert some extra "gears" between perfect and disaster – such as "good enough" and "excellent". I still find that difficult, as I like to do everything well. (F1)*
>
> *If I'm completely honest, I've only started to value teams in the past 4 years or so. Most of my life I hated teamwork and preferred to work alone. When I started being part of teams where I saw other people had things to contribute that I didn't have, and that we were stronger together, my mind began to change. (F1)*

In addition, it was found that certain types of learning tasks encouraged open and risk-free conversation. One specific task was the leadership philosophy -task, where the participants were encouraged to start building their own leadership

philosophy. The participants showed self-awareness and openness while reflecting upon their own values in leadership and discussing their own personal challenges:

> *I'm tempted to find my identity in success, I can easily get defensive is someone criticises something – – I'm often sarcastic. I'd like to begin to change the way I speak. – – I like to see outcomes quickly and can sometimes be discouraged when I don't see growth or change. (P2)*

These findings confirm that the digital environment did not present challenges to open and risk-free communication. Akyol, Garrison and Ozden (2009, 76) compared a fully online course with a blended course and found higher degrees of self-disclosure in the online course. They came into a conclusion that the lack of the face-to-face component increased the need for spending time getting to know each other and setting the climate on an online course (Akyol et al. 2009, 76).

Considering the reciprocal atmosphere, it was noticed during the observation that even though the participants were active on discussion forums, not all the questions presented by participants and facilitators were noticed and answered. Some were left unnoticed despite of the automatic email notifications. Based on the interviews conducted on the BLT pre-launch course, some participants expressed frustration in following up on online discussions. This finding suggests that following up on asynchronous discussions can be challenging.

Croxton (2014, 317) has compared synchronous and asynchronous discussion on online courses and states that "there is no single "best way" to implement course interactivity". To respond to learners' different preferences, he suggests that the online instructors should consider offering different methods for interactivity, both asynchronous and synchronous (Croxton 2014, 317). Despite of the challenges in following asynchronous discussion-threads, the learners on the BLT course valued the flexibility of asynchronous communication over synchronous study-times, as it was easier to organize study times in their busy lives.

5.4.3 Group cohesion

In this research expressions of *building group identity* and using words such as *"we"* and *"our"*, were used as indicators for group cohesion (Appendix 1).

According to Rogers and Lea (2005, 153) physical presence is not necessary for the learners to identify themselves in a certain group. When the individuals define themselves in a shared social category (we), instead of individual category (me vs. other), they see themselves through the lens of the social group identity, which leads to focussing on shared similarities rather than differences. (Rogers & Lea 2005, 153.)

Rogers and Lea (2005) also suggest that

> If the intended result of social presence is to confer on the group greater capacity to communicate and collaborate, then the group will work more productively to the extent that group members identify with the group, thus making the group more cohesive (2005, 153).

Garrison (2017) states that group cohesion takes social presence to the next level, enables participants to see themselves as "we", rather than individuals, which in turn enables the online learning group to maintain focus and to sustain commitment. He concludes that "When students identify with the group and perceive themselves as part of a community of inquiry, the discourse, the sharing of meaning, and the quality of learning outcomes will be optimized". (Garrison 2017, 46.)

On the BLT pilot course, the relative occurrence of group cohesion was significantly lower than the occurrence of the other two dimensions of social presence (Appendix 2). Group cohesion was indicated more often in the beginning of the course and at the end (figure 19). This may be due to the social nature of both, the introduction and conclusions part, and more self-reflective and cognitive nature of the Modules 1, 2 and 3. The following examples demonstrate how group cohesion was indicated in the participant comments:

> *Looking forward to hearing your stories and learning from you [other participants] as we study together. (P6)*

> *Hope we can learn from one another during this course ☺ (P1)*

In addition to the participants, also the course facilitators reflected group cohesion as demonstrated in these comments:

> *I very much look forward to our interactions here and your feedback on the course experience. – Looking forward to learning and growing with the rest of you here. (F2)*
>
> *I hope this course is helpful as we learn together about leadership. (F1)*

The above examples indicate a sense of belonging to a specific group of learners. Since all participants represented the same organization, it can be presumed that they already shared the same organizational values at least to some extent, and therefore there may have been a natural sense of belonging to the same group even though most of them had not met each other face-to-face. However, as described earlier, the group cohesion goes further than sharing an organizational culture. It is about identifying with the group of learners and being part of the community of inquiry (Garrison 2017, 46). The above examples indicate that such group was forming, even though it was not expressed often.

Also, it was evident in the comments that the participants and facilitators did not expect the online learning experience to be merely an individual study, nor did they expect their learning to happen only around the designed course materials. Instead, they expected to learn from each other's experiences and diverse point of views.

An interesting finding is also that participants who did not finish the course expressed slightly less group cohesion than their peers who did complete the course. This was measured from discussions in Welcome-module and Module 1, when all participants were still engaging (see Appendix 3). In the light of the theory of social presence discussed earlier, it is possible that the time and workload challenges leading to lower participation in social interaction on discussion forums could have affected the forming of group cohesion, and hence affected their motivation to continue. But as stated before, more research would still be needed before making any causalities due to the complexity of the matter.

Garrison (2009, 352-353) explains that a strong group identity enabled by social presence is needed to help building cognitive presence. Even though the group cohesion was relatively low within the researched cohort, there is evidence that cognitive presence was developing well, and the participants were able to engage in meaningful discussion with each other. When discussing the findings around group cohesion also the length of the course needs to be considered. The BLT course was only three weeks long and to develop a stronger group cohesion, more time might have been needed. Akyol et al. (2009, 76) found that on an entirely online course group cohesion took more time to develop than on a blended course where the participant had a chance to meet each other face-to-face.

5.5 Cognitive presence

Garrison (2003, 5), states that "effective learning must take into consideration both the internal cognitive process as well as the external contextual elements that precipitate and shape thinking". If a deep and meaningful learning experience is the desired outcome, then both, the personal reflection process and collaborative discourse need to be considered, because these elements shape the cognitive presence of an online learning experience. (Garrison 2003, 5)

As described in figure 8, the dimensions of cognitive presence are triggering event, exploration, integration and resolution. On the BLT course all the four different forms of cognitive presence were found (table 4), and when looked at per participant (Appendix 3), it was noticed that all participants apart from one person who finished the course after module 1, were engaging in all four areas of cognitive presence, and were able to take the process into resolution at some point of the course indicating signs of commitment to take the learnt into practise.

TABLE 4. Occurrence of the four different dimensions of cognitive presence on the BLT pilot course (frequency/unit/module)

Cognitive presence	*Welcome-module*		*Module 1*		*Module 2*		*Module 3*		*Conclusions*	
	Count	Per unit	Count	Per unit	Count	Per unit	Count	Per unit	Count	Per unit
Triggering Event	17	0,23	45	0,31	21	0,13	23	0,24	2	0,06
Exploration	13	0,17	53	0,37	52	0,33	47	0,49	12	0,38
Integration	2	0,03	47	0,32	92	0,59	40	0,42	18	0,56
Resolution	0	0	16	0,11	9	0,06	7	0,07	3	0,09
No of Units Coded	75		145		156		96		32	

The findings indicate that the participants faced new interesting things during the course and expressed curiosity towards the content and towards each other's posts (triggering event), engaged in exploring new ideas with each other (exploration) and reached the integration level of cognitive presence meaning that they were able to integrate knowledge and experiences and gain new perspective (integration). The levels of resolution were low throughout the course which could be explained by task design. The learning tasks that encouraged the participants to put things into practice or to reflect and come up with a practical solution, were the ones that resulted in higher levels of commitment for implementation and thus lead into higher amounts of resolution coded. The figure 20 describes the development of different types of cognitive presence during the BLT Pilot course modules.

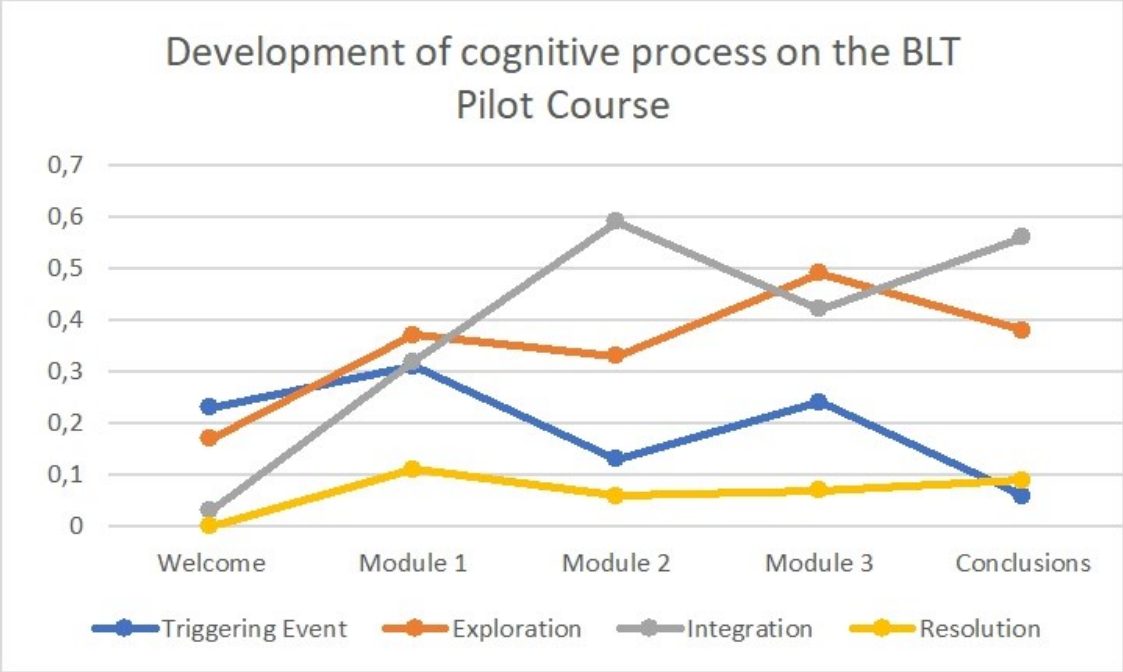

FIGURE 20. The development of triggering event, exploration, integration and resolution on the BLT Pilot course

5.5.1 Triggering event

The indicators used for triggering event in this thesis included these three categories: 1) recognizing a problem/issue 2) expressing a sense of puzzlement 3) expressing curiosity/presenting questions (Appendix 1). During the observation

process, it was noticed that the learners experienced triggering moments when engaging with learning tasks and course content.

The course content was divided into three modules each of which introduced several topics connected with the main topic. The first module was about self-leadership, and the learning tasks were highly self-reflective. The participants were asked first asked to reflect on their own and then share their findings with others on the discussion forums. The participants studied the same materials but came up with different interpretations and angles, which generated "triggering events" and curiosity in others. These examples highlight the triggering events they experienced when engaging with the content:

> *I found this exercise quite challenging. Even the opening questions stopped me in my tracks: "How will your leadership be affected if your identity is rooted in seeking approval from others?" I think this is something that I struggle with a lot, especially because I am quite new in a leadership position and feel out of my depth a lot of the time. (P3)*
>
> *It's a good question* [Why do I lead?]. *It's actually kind of hard to look back and answer that question now. (P8)*

In addition, triggering events also occurred while interacting with other participants as the following examples demonstrate:

> *Thank you for sharing – – I'm especially struck by the words "I feel challenged not to worry about establishing my authority in my challenging leadership role, but to seek ways that I can use the role as a platform to serve the people I'm working with." I need to ask myself if I'm making decisions in order to get ahead, or in order to serve. (P6)*

Also, the facilitators experienced triggering events:

> *Interesting take on leadership as a lifestyle. I want to think more about that. I look forward to exploring that idea further in this course. (F2)*
>
> *Hi X, I found it quite interesting that you had both activist and contemplative as your highest. I guess I don't always put those things together. How has that worked for you? (F1)*

> *I really like your point of how rich things can be in a multicultural team – – I'm wondering, how do you think the high-context folks would respond to the different style you suggest in task assignment? (F1)*

These examples highlight the curiosity triggered by something another person has communicated. In the above examples it is the facilitator who experiences a triggering event, which then leads to curiosity and forming another question to a participant. The questions presented by the facilitators were found insightful and highly appreciated by the participants.

5.5.2 Exploration

In this thesis the following indicators were used to indicate exploration: 1) exploring/brainstorming ideas and experiences 2) exchanging ideas and confirming understanding 3) supporting other peoples' points and ideas 4) presenting contradicting ideas/point of views (Appendix 1).

Prior to studying any course materials, the BLT pilot course participants were asked to define leadership. They gave a good variation of definitions to leadership and shared them to each other for further exploration. A few participants gave a broader definition to leadership, such as "power to influence" or "lifelong process" but others went into more detail describing the leadership process and exploring different aspects of it. Even though all participants approached leadership from different angles, all the following definitions include "others" acknowledging that leadership is not a lonely position:

> *I think I would define leadership as being in the position to bring others along on a journey to shape a project according to a vision. (P3)*

> *For me leadership is not a position…it's a lifestyle. It's first of all leading myself and then leading/coaching others until they are in a place where they can lead on their own. (P6)*

> *For me leadership is someone who can guide and lead other in the team and at the same time allow other the free hand to grow in the tasks they are given to. (P1)*

> *Leadership to me is an amalgamation of different skills to produce results with a team. This includes the development of team members, casting and carrying out a vision, and setting and achieving challenging goals... (P5)*

One person openly admitted that they do not know much about leadership yet and therefore cannot provide a definition but expressed hopefulness that at the end of the course this would change.

> *What leadership means to me is a good question and I will be honest, I really don't know about it a lot and definitely don't have a definition. So I think I am in a good place and hope till the end of seminar I will have an answer. (P8)*

During the observation process it was noticed that by asking questions and answering to the questions presented by other participants and the facilitators, the above-mentioned person went through a process of exploring what leadership could look like and was able to integrate the new knowledge to their own situation. At the end of the course the participant reflected on their learning process and confirmed that the process had been beneficial:

> *It turned out that I was in right place…I learned many new things, especially about leadership. The most feedback I have learned from was Module 2, where you make me think how will I solve problems with team or how will I lead them better. Thanks for everything. It's always good to see that people think same, but also even better when you can learn from different opinions. (P8)*

As discussed before, according to Garrison high-quality e-learning environment needs to be not only *respectful* and *inclusive*, but also *intellectually challenging* and *critical* (Garrison 2017, 37). As seen in Appendix 1, one category of exploration used as an indicator in this research was "presenting contradicting ideas and point of views" but it was coded only four times during the entire course (see Appendix 3). Mostly the discussions were affirming and encouraging. However, as seen in the comment above and the examples below, the participants expressed that they had enjoyed other people's different perspectives. This indicates that even though there was a lack of seemingly critical point of views, the discussion with different experiences and point of views enabled the participants to explore the topic of leadership with a wider perspective.

> *X, we really enjoyed having you here and hearing your perspective and insights. Diverse perspectives provide so much richness! (F1)*
>
> *Thank you, X for all your posts! It's always good to see that people think same, but even better when you can learn from different opinions. (P8)*
>
> *I had never thought about these ways – – but now that I read about your experiences, it feels very natural to me. Thank you for sharing. (P9)*
>
> *What leadership means to me personally? Through this course and the feedback of others, I would say… (P4)*

When evaluating the course through the lens of the CoI framework both the context and the content of the course need to be considered. The context of the BLT course was organizational training, rather than academic education, and the content of the course encouraged more personal reflection and sharing own experiences than discussing academic concepts. This could explain the relatively low amount of critical exploration. Instead, the participants were found to benefit from hearing each other's diverse perspectives and different experiences. This enabled then to explore their own experiences from a different angle thus expanding their view on leadership as can be seen in the following example:

> *My first definition was leadership is the power to influence. I would still say that is true if I were defining leadership in general – – What leadership means to me personally though? Through this course and the feedback of others, I would say that a leader is certain of their identity, strengths and weaknesses. Leadership is guiding and empowering others towards accomplishing a vision, with a servant attitude and great love.(P4)*

5.5.3 Integration

The following categories were used in this thesis to indicate cognitive integration: 1) constructing meaningful solution/explanation 2) integrating knowledge and ideas and 3) building on other people's ideas (Appendix 1). All pilot course participants reached integration at some point of the course. It was noticed that integration often, though not always, started from triggering events, whether inspired by the content or other participants as in the following examples:

> *After going through this module, I realize that.. (P4)*
>
> *I like your comment that leadership is a lifelong journey, that seems to fit really well with the introductory video where we were reminded that.. (P2)*

As seen in figure 20, the highest levels of integration were found in Module 2, which concentrated on team leadership. Practical work-related tasks and case studies encouraged integrating the studied theory to learners' own previous experiences thus forming an applicable solution to real-life.

Developing teams and people -module introduced a specific learning task where the participants could choose between three different practical tasks based on the relevance and usefulness to their own situation and context. After doing the practical task in their own work-context, the participants were asked to come back to the forum reflecting and sharing their experience with others. The options were 1) Delegation. A practical delegating task using the seven steps delegation process studied. 2) Developing a job description / appraisal using the tools studied. 3) Team strengths and weaknesses -task. The learners were asked to use the materials from the previous lesson and take it into practise within their own team.

One participant chose the third option and had a discussion with their own team integrating the studied theory into the situation. In their reflections afterwards, they discovered that this practical experience had helped them to better understand their team members and their reactions. The learning process did not stop in integration as the participant was also able to see how things could be improved in the future and what the leader's part in that could be, thus moving the inquiry to the next level, resolution. The participant's comment summarizes the experience:

> *It was very helpful to have this discussion because it helped me to understand my team mate better – – I think going forward it will be good if we speak about this as one of her gifts and seek opportunities for her to practically serve. (P2)*

5.5.4 Resolution

The indicators used for resolution were: 1) expressing commitment/determination to test and apply the solutions in practise 2) implementing and experimenting (Appendix 1). Apart from one person, all participants reached resolution at some point of the course, but the levels of resolution measured were relatively low during the entire course, compared to other types of cognitive presence (see figure 20).

This finding is in line with earlier research (Akyol, Garrison and Ozden 2009, Kanuka, Rourke and Laflamme 2007). Akyol et al. (2009,78) identified several explanations to the relatively low incidence of resolution compared to other dimensions of cognitive presence. By interviewing their research subjects, they discovered that time challenges were identified as one barrier to the development of resolution in online discussions. They came into a conclusion that the length of the online course needs to be enough for the students to have time to reach implementation and sharing their findings with other students. (Akyol et al. 2009, 78).

Length of the BLT course might explain the low levels of resolution. The course was only three weeks long and the participants were completing the course alongside their other responsibilities. This may have affected their ability to take their reflection process to the fourth level and practical implementation. It is also possible that these practical implementations happened after the course, but the post-course learning outcomes were not the focus in this research, and therefore there is no data available. It would be an interesting area of further study.

In addition, it was noticed that the learning task design affected the amount of resolution coded. This finding is also in line with the previous research (Akyol et al. 2009, Kanuka et al. 2007). On the BLT pilot course, the highest level for resolution was measured in Module 1, which concentrated on self-leadership (see figure 20). Resolution was also coded in Module 2, which was formed around team leadership. The learning tasks encouraged personal reflection and exploration of findings together with others, which led to personal “triggering events”,

discovering new perspectives, commitment to apply these to practise and conducting practical experiments. The following table 5 provides a good example of one participant's thought process and the way from triggering event to resolution:

TABLE 5. BLT pilot course participant's response to an authentic learning task

Participant's reflections	**Category**
After going through this module, I realize that…	A triggering event
I believe this is because of the combination of home culture and company culture..	Exploring possible explanations
I've realized, and have had it emphasized during this module, the importance of adjusting my communication style..	Integrating knowledge from the course to personal life
I think one way to utilize our (team members) strengths would be to involve both co-workers when discussing the projects.	Constructing meaningful solution (team)
I also need to communicate directly with my co-worker if I disagree with her/his perspective or have something to add.	Constructing meaningful solution (personal)
Because of our different communication styles, I have found it important to have time set aside specifically to address certain topics. I definitely think, based both on values and giftings, this is something we need to follow-through with.	Expressing determination to apply the solutions into practise

The above example demonstrates how the learning task triggered enthusiasm for further exploration, and how the participant was able to construct meaningful solution by integrating the learnt into their personal life and work situation. Through that reflection process, the participant was also able to reach resolution and express commitment to test the solutions in practise.

5.6 Teaching presence

As described in figure 8, the categories of teaching presence are 1) design & organization, 2) facilitating discourse and 3) direct instruction. The following table 6 describes how these different categories were present in the online discussions.

TABLE 6. Occurrence of the three different dimensions of teaching presence on the BLT pilot course (frequency/unit/module)

Teaching presence	*Welcome-module*		*Module 1*		*Module 2*		*Module 3*		*Conclusions*	
	Count	Per unit	Count	Per unit	Count	Per unit	Count	Per unit	Count	Per unit
Design and organization	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Facilitation	23	0,31	55	0,38	64	0,41	29	0,30	18	0,56
Direct Instruction	2	0,03	4	0,03	16	0,10	13	0,14	0	0
No of Units Coded	75		145		156		96		32	

According to Garrison (2017, 69)

> the role and responsibility of teaching presence is to monitor and manage the transactional balance and by engaging the learners, collaboratively guide the process of achieving worthwhile and intended learning outcomes in a timely manner.

Garrison (2017, 70) continues by pointing out that the online environment presents both, advantages and challenges to the roles and responsibilities of teaching presence. The advantage of the online medium is that it “supports sustained and reflective dialogue”, the challenges are the “distinctive communication characteristics that require new approaches”, particularly the demand of “collaborative approach that recognizes and encourages the assumption and development of teaching presence in all participants” (Garrison 2017, 70).

Hoey 2017, 263 states that instructor interaction on discussion forums can be used as a strategy which helps to establish teaching presence, but there is still need for further research in terms of determining the optimal frequency and content of the interaction. Her research evaluated 1625 instructor posts in 36 graduate-level courses and although no correlation between the frequency of instructor interaction on discussion with students and the students’ outcomes was found, there were other interesting findings which have to do with the type of the instructor posts (Hoey 2017, 263).

Hoey's research findings suggest that "posts that are instructional improve students' perceptions of their learning, and posts that are conversational improve students' perceptions of instructor and course quality, and their actual academic achievement" (Hoey 2017, 263). The connection between the facilitator post types and learner satisfaction were not studied during this research, but in the observation process it was noticed that when facilitator's post reflected both social and teaching presence, it often created positive emotions in learner. These emotions included happiness, thankfulness and motivation.

5.6.1 Design and organization

Designing an online learning experience is not an easy task as different aspects of social and cognitive presence need to be considered. It is not enough to create a welcoming climate, but the activities also need to be designed to encourage collaboration and reflection, and to maintain engagement. (Garrison 2009, 354.)

According to Garrison (2017, 72) the online course design and architecture need to be planned well before the beginning of the online course. As described in table 6, the category of *design and organization* was not found on discussion forum posts that were included in the coding process. This is explainable by the role of the discussion forums and by the fact that the course design had already taken place prior to the course by a specific course design team. Only small adjustments were done in the middle of the course for example to clarify a specific learning task etc.

There is also a different approach to online course design where designing and changing content takes place in an authentic way as the course proceeds. This approach has its' advantages and challenges, as mentioned in a conference paper written by Mayor et al. (2018). The paper forms around an educational leadership degree programme and more specifically, an online leadership training course. In the programme, the adaptive approach to course design was consciously adopted by teacher, and in practise it meant continuous evaluation, checking, changing and preparing (Mayor et al. 2018). In addition to being demanding for the teacher, some students of this online leadership training course

found the ongoing changes frustrating, although one student saw the potential in the ill-defined tasks as an opportunity to practise leadership skills. The flexible approach enabled the teacher to react to the learners' needs and for example to drop some of the content after realizing that the students' overall workload was getting too high. (Mayor et al. 2018.)

Due to a different context of the educational programme and the BLT course, the circumstances of the two courses are not completely comparable. Considering the diverse profile of learners on the BLT course and the completely asynchronous nature of the course, the clearly structured design, suggested by Garrison (2017) and continuous organization throughout the course modules was found to be a good choice. The participants commented that the course was "well-organized, easy to follow, clear and well structured". The following table 7 describes the different design and organization methods of the BLT course.

TABLE 7. Indicators and examples or design and organization (modified from Garrison 2017, 73)

Indicators	**Examples from the BLT pilot course**
Setting curriculum	**Materials received at the beginning of the course** Course outline, list of learning outcomes, schedule and checklist.
Designing methods	**Learning task design: Leadership philosophy -task** *"To start your leadership philosophy, reflect on and respond to the following questions... Post your response in the discussion forum and reply to at least one other person".*
Establishing time parameters	**Announcement board information / Email from the facilitator** *"I wanted to send a quick email to thank you for your progress so far on the BLT. There has been some great thinking and discussion, and I hope it's been of benefit to all of you. At this point, we have just one week left in the pilot. This means, per the suggested schedule, that you should be finished module 2 and into module 3, so you can finish module 3 and the conclusion by next week Wednesday. I know it is busy with all the other demands on your time, and I appreciate your perseverance."*
Utilizing medium effectively	**Course outline, instructions** *"In an online learning environment, people can't interpret your body language, facial expressions, or tone of voice. Consequently, a set of guidelines for civil communication has emerged that are collectively referred to as Netiquette."*
Establishing netiquette	**Course outline, netiquette expectations** • *Maintain a polite, respectful, business-like tone* • *Use standard English, not conversational slang* • *Stay on topic* • *Re-read your submissions carefully to check for language that may be misinterpreted* • *Do not use ALL CAPS as this is considered "shouting"* • *Treat others as you would like them to treat you*
Making macro-level comments about course content	**Learning task explanation** *"A leadership philosophy explains the why, what, and how of a person's leadership. Why is this important? Not knowing where you're going, how and why you're going there, decreases your effectiveness in ministry. With a clear understanding of these things, you can focus your energies on action, not reaction."*

In what comes to design and organization in a completely asynchronous nonverbal context, Swan et al. (2009) emphasize that clear communication of expectations is especially important. On the BLT course these were communicated in the beginning of the course in the form of learning outcome -expectations, facilitator-availability, course schedule and structure and the expected netiquette. As there were no collaborative group tasks on the BLT course, the collaboration happened asynchronously through reflective discourse with each other. This reflective pro-

cess was guided by the facilitators by task design, communicating clear expectations, setting boundaries, giving guidelines and participating in discussion themselves.

5.6.2 Facilitating discourse

Swan et al. (2009) emphasize the importance of the second category of teaching presence, *facilitating discourse*, stating that despite of how clearly the expectations have been communicated in the design and organization -phase, there is also a need for guiding the discussion and ensuring that the learners stay engaged and focused.

The indicators used to identify facilitating discourse in this thesis were 1) identifying areas of agreement/disagreement, 2) seeking to reach understanding/consensus, 3) encouraging, acknowledging or reinforcing participant contributions, 4) setting climate for learning, 5) drawing in participants, prompting discussion and 6) assessing the efficacy of the process (Appendix 1).

It was found that mostly the category of *facilitating discourse* was demonstrated by the facilitators by setting climate for learning, providing encouragement and acknowledgement to the participants and by drawing in participants and prompting discussion like in the following example:

> *Great observations and challenging questions. For everyone: What do you think it means to be a servant leader? Serving often generates images of washing feet, cleaning floors, washing dishes – practical, hands on tasks. Is this what it means to be a servant leader? Can it look differently? How? (F1)*

The facilitators' questions resulted in high levels of cognitive presence, especially exploration and integration. The following example describes one participants' thought-process prompted by the facilitator's question above:

> *That is a great question, I've been trying to work through that. I think for me, part of servant leadership is making sure that those you are leading have a voice. That they feel heard – that you take the time to*

> *listen – and then act on what they've said. So, two important things there – giving people your time and actively listening. (P4)*

It was clearly found on the course that the challenging questions presented by the facilitators encouraged participants to reflect and explore the topic of leadership. One participant commented to the facilitator at the end of the course:

> *Your questions lead me to think deeper and think like I'm already leader. (P7)*

This comment indicates how the facilitators not only tutored and supported the learning process, as described in the 5-stage model by Gilly Salmon (figure 4), but also facilitated the knowledge construction process. If considering Vygotsky's ZPD model (figure 5), this is a good example of a facilitator operating as an MKO and encouraging the student to reach higher level of knowledge (in this case self-knowledge) by asking relevant questions.

According to Garrison (2016) the role of a facilitator in a community of inquiry, is not only reserved to the teacher, but also the participants can participate in facilitation, which is "the workhorse in providing support and guidance for thinking and learning collaboratively" (Garrison 2016, 92). On the BLT course, the participants reflected the facilitation aspect of teaching presence by providing encouragement to each other and helping to create a good climate for learning, and by self-assessing the efficacy of their own learning during the course, as the following example demonstrates:

> *I'm learning how important this [servant leadership] is in a multi-cultural team where my ideas of what's helpful don't always fit with those around me. Part of serving sacrificially means learning what helps in another person's culture and understanding how to love them their way instead of forcing them into my way. (P2)*

The direction of the discussion posts was measured (figure 21), and it was noticed that in the beginning of the course, more than half of the communication occurred between participants and facilitators. The facilitators were engaging in discussion, sharing, commenting and asking questions. They answered each participant's introduction post welcoming them to the course. With a warm and welcoming approach and talking casually about their hobbies or other common

topics, they helped creating an atmosphere where the participants could start opening. The facilitators remained active for the entire course, but after the Welcome-module most communication happened between participants.

According to Zacharias (2018a), who was one of the facilitators on the BLT course, watching the participants starting to take more initiative with less facilitator-input, made the facilitating experience better as the participants were encouraging each other, asking questions and providing each other with feedback. The quality of their input and the effort they put into their studies positively surprised the facilitator (Zacharias 2018a).

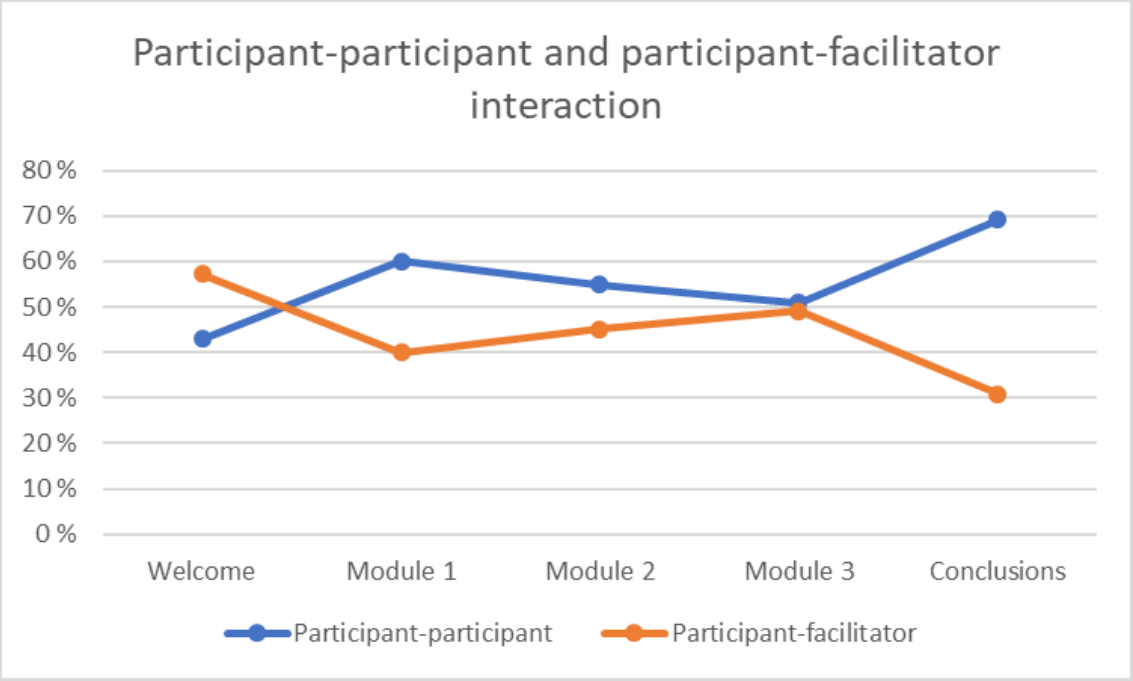

FIGURE 21. Interaction on the BLT course

Based on their research among first-time online learners, Burkle and Cleveland-Innes (2013, 84) concluded that active instructor involvement at the beginning of a basic level course has positive effects on learners as it enables them to work to meet their learning outcomes, participate in discussions more comfortably, and grow in confidence. However, they also conclude that: “Too much online intervention by the instructor can be intimidating and may decrease engagement” (Burkle & Cleveland-Innes 2013, 84). At one point on the BLT course, one participant and facilitator were having a deep conversation and the facilitator noticed it might be going too deep and said:

> *I'm sorry if I'm making this too deep or counselling-like. Feel free to disregard if I'm off-base! 😊 (F1)*

Based on the observation and the participants' comments and feedback, the level of the facilitator interaction seemed well balanced on the BLT pilot course and the positive development of the participant-participant interaction as described in figure 21, also supports this result. The facilitators modelled open and deep conversation, creating a climate for the participants to openly share and reflect.

5.6.3 Direct instruction

The indicators used to identify direct instruction in this thesis were 1) presenting content/questions and 2) injecting knowledge from diverse sources (Appendix 1). Presenting content mostly happened together with learning task introductions and was therefore found only a few times in discussion. Injecting knowledge was found more often, especially in modules 2 and 3 along with cognitive integration, when participants started reflecting and integrating the studied theory into their own previous experiences. Facilitators provided ideas of external sources to support the participants' cognitive process.

6 BLT PRE-LAUNCH COURSE RESULTS

6.1 Background information and participant profiles

The BLT Pre-Launch course was a good example of the iterative nature of the development process of the e-learning initiatives. The original plan had been to launch the BLT course to the entire organization after the pilot course had been reviewed and possible developments conducted. However, after the pilot course, the course design team saw a need to update the professional look of the course materials and the logo with the help of a graphic designer (Zacharias 2018b). To increase the buy-in within the organization and to train potential future facilitators, it was decided that before launching the course fully to the entire organization, there would be another course within the pilot phase, called BLT pre-launch (Zacharias, 2018b).

An invitation was sent to the people involved in leadership development and training and they were given a possibility to participate on the pre-launch course (Zacharias 2018b). According to Zacharias (2018b) the dual purpose of the course was for the participants to 1) become familiar with the content and thus better able to recommend the course to the people in their area 2) after becoming familiar with the course possibly being able to facilitate it themselves in the future. Five people agreed to take the course but one of them cancelled their registration because of their workload.

The four participants who took the course were all experienced leaders, trainers and/or professionals in education. The main motivating factor among these leaders for taking the BLT pre-launch course was curiosity. They wanted to experience the course themselves to better evaluate its suitability to their own context and team situation. Three people were experienced online learners and had either taken several online courses before or studied a degree completely online. One person had also taught online courses and had contributed to the contents of the module 3 on the BLT course. All three had positive experiences of online learning. There was one person who had taken only one online course before, and that had been a struggle leading to a negative experience.

6.2 Evaluation plan

As discussed in the theoretical framework, each stage in the e-learning evaluation cycle needs to have a different emphasis even though the basic steps (who should be asked, what strategies should be used, developing and evaluation plan, collecting and analysing data and deciding on the further action points) remain the same (Phillips et al. 2012, 16).

Both, the participant profile and the goals set for the BLT pre-launch course by the design team, were different from those of the BLT pilot course. The BLT course was designed for basic level leaders, not for experienced leaders like the pre-launch course participants, so direct comparison between the courses was not found meaningful. The group size on the pre-launch course was also significantly smaller. For these reasons, it was clear that the same strategy and methodology would not be suitable for both courses.

Therefore, a new evaluation plan was developed for the BLT pre-launch course. To be able to provide insight on the research question: *"How is the BLT course received and experienced in its' pilot phase"*, semi-structured interviews were chosen to function as a method for exploring the experts' experiences and a specific framework was developed for analysing the results. The interviewees worked in different parts of the world and the interviews were conducted on Skype for Business. Video was not used due to the negative effects on sound quality.

Inspired by the CoI and the LEPO frameworks, three main categories were chosen, and the interviews were structured, categorized and analysed in the light of these themes. These categories were: 1) content & materials, 2) facilitation and 3) social interaction. The goal was to get the experts' view on the same things that had been analysed for the pilot course participants, but from a different perspective thus hoping to provide a wider view on the intersections of the CoI framework (figure 6): selecting content, setting climate and supporting discourse. In addition to these categories, the experts' view on the online environment and its' suitability to their own context was important information for the research pur-

poses. Semi-structured interviewing style enabled asking each participant questions that concentrated on their experience but allowing the interviewees also to raise up themes that were not initially planned by the researcher (Appendix 4).

6.3 Interview 1

As the organization's leadership training took place completely in the online environment for the first time, the online medium was given emphasis also in the pre-launch course interviews. First, the interviewee 1 was asked to share about their experience around online learning in general. It appeared that the previous experiences were very good, and that the interviewee in fact preferred online learning over the traditional setting. The following comment summarizes the interviewees thoughts well:

> *I prefer that [online learning] because I can work with my own pace. I think it's probably my personality or temperament. I don't really like to sit in a class. I like to have some interaction, but I can limit it. I can do as much as I can and when I can – Online learning works really well for me because I can do it when I have time.*

From this example, **flexibility** of online learning rises as the main positive factor. The participant acknowledges that online learning enables social interaction with others, but the learner has control over the intensity of that interaction and is also able to limit it according to their own preference. In other words, the learner has a possibility to be as social as they want to be. Naturally this applies after the learner has completed the learning task requirements and posted to the forum the required amount of times.

When asked about challenges faced during the BLT pre-launch course, the interviewee raised the topics of **time management** and the **combined workload** as demonstrated in these comments:

> *We were warned that it was quite a lot of hours and I thought: "Oh well, they say that but I'm probably going to be able to do it much quicker". But you do have to set aside enough time.*

> *Sometimes face-to-face is easier because then you are removed [from your everyday work], you are somewhere else, and you have that time. But when you are in your normal situation – that is a challenge – the time you have to cut out from what you were already doing.*

There are two important aspects arising from these comments: the importance of good time-management skills and organizational support. As discussed in chapter 4.3, the requirements of online environment are not always clear to the learners. According to Burkle and Cleveland-Innes (2013, 74) these requirements challenge especially new online learners. However, despite of being an experienced online learner, the interviewee faced these challenges in setting correct expectations and allocating adequate amount of time for the online studies. Croxton (2014, 314) has researched several external factors affecting the online learning experience and mentions the organizational support (or the lack of it), as one. If the requirements of online learning are not clear to the management-level, this may lead to a situation where the learners combined workload becomes too challenging. Despite of these challenges the interviewee 1 described their online learning experience as “very positive”. Table 8 summarizes the positive and challenging factors experienced by the interviewee.

TABLE 8. Summary of the positive factors and challenges experienced by the interviewee

Interviewee 1	**Positive factors indicated**
Category: Facilitation	Creating clear expectations Facilitator's comments Facilitator support (in challenging situations) Course coodrination
Category: Content & Materials	Good balance Good coverage Variety of activities Introductory yet challenging Additional materials Communication of vision Practical tools
Category: Social Interaction	Getting to know new people Small group Easy to share Different perspectives
Challenges experienced	
Timing of the course, workload (normal workload in addition to course work) Underestimated the workload despite of clear communication of expectations Community is widespread, the afterward benefit	

Facilitation

The role of good facilitation and scaffolding were clearly expressed by the interviewee:

> *At one point I wasn't involved at all and she (the facilitator) wrote me a letter and said is there any way she can help to get me participate.*

By means of design and organization, the facilitator aimed for helping the participants building realistic expectations at the beginning of the course by giving directions of how many hours they should reserve for the training. There was also a clear schedule and a letter to the participants' team leader describing the course and the needed time. However, due to the interviewee's (overly) optimistic attitude, the reality occurred only through practise. The facilitator noticed the challenges and reached out to encourage the participant to continue. The participant was eventually able to complete the course.

The origins of the LEPO-framework (figure 3) are based on an idea that each learner brings their own individual characteristics to the learning context, such as

prior knowledge, motivational factors, expectations and needs. These characteristics affect their learning processes and experience. (Phillips et al. 2012, 38.) Even though it is impossible to account for all different learner characteristics, it is important to recognize the diversity of the learners and attempt to understand the impact of these characteristics on the individuals' learning experience when evaluating the online initiatives (Phillips et al. 2012, 38-39).

Content and materials

The interviewee 1 experienced that the course content covers a good range and balance of materials and a good variety of activities, such as quizzes, writing, doing in practise and reporting back. When asked about any surprises faced during the course, the interviewee expressed that the course had exceeded their expectations and surprised by offering food of thought:

> *I thought that it [the course] was going to be very basic. And I would probably be bored. I was surprised that the material even had me thinking and challenged even some paradigms that I had.*
>
> *I think the course is definitely suited for not only the guys we are training up to be leaders, but even guys who are leaders and have been for a while but never really took time to get input.*
>
> *If you know those things [topics of the course], then within the articles and in the discussions, it will take you deeper, you'll see other things because there is enough to see.*
>
> *I was really positively surprised how well they [design team] brought the new vision and alignment to the new vision into that course.*

These examples highlight the possibilities of online learning and the importance of the learning cohort. Even though the course content remained the same entry level leadership study, also people in the more experienced cohort found it meaningful, even challenging at times. Many assignments offered different alternatives the learners could choose from according to their own preference and relevance to their own context. Extra materials were offered to those who wanted more insight. And as discussed in the above chapters, also the learners, in this case experienced professionals, brought in their own characteristics and experience, making the discussions interesting to other experts.

Social interaction

It was considered as “a bonus” by the interviewee getting to know new people during the course. However, being able to limit social interaction was important to the interviewee, so the smaller group size suited them well as it meant less active participation and spending time reading posts on the forums. From the facilitator’s point of view the size of the pre-launch course study group was too small and she would have preferred a bigger group size (Zacharias 2018b).

When asked, whether online learning supports more individual or collaborative learning, the interviewee answered collaborative, but introduced a concern of the lack of afterward support and accountability in keeping on learning and putting things in practise:

> *I think it [online environment] is very good for community learning. I think it is important to balance thoughts because you get different perspectives from different people. Of course, it’s got individual benefits too. But I do think the community part is important.*
>
> *But it’s a pity that this [online cohort] is the only community you can have. And not so much with people who are close with you and who you see face to face. I just think when people are on the ground together their afterwards benefit is better because they can keep each other accountable, they learn the same things - I think for the learning during the training it doesn’t make any difference. But the impact afterwards. So, who’s going to help you actually do it?*

It is interesting that the interviewee uses the word “community” when describing online learning. Garrison (2017, 11) states that “community is defined by purpose, collaboration and trust”. This indicates that the interviewee has found the collaboration with the online cohort beneficial during the course. However, it is also interesting that the interviewee feels the loss of this support after the course finishes. The technology would allow the individuals to remain in contact also after the experience whether formally or informally (Garrison 2017, 11). According to Zacharias (2018a) there is still a lot to do within the organization in terms of learning transfer. The course design team has built components within the BLT course to encourage practising through real-life tasks within one’s own team and tasks which expect the participant to co-operate with their team leader. The purpose of these tasks is to transfer the knowledge into practise already when the course is

still running, but more thinking must still be done to get the best afterward benefit. (Zacharias 2018a).

As stated by Phillips et al. (2012, 140), one benefit of semi-structured interviews is that it allows the interviewee to introduce new topics in addition to the ones the interviewer has prepared for beforehand. The interviewee 1 raised a topic of the course's suitability to different learners. The interviewee had already recommended the course to another person and was able to think of many people to whom it might be suitable. However, there were also people groups to whom the interviewee would not recommend online learning: 1) for people to whom it is too complicated (indicating technical challenges) and 2) for people whose level of English is inadequate. According to the interviewee, these challenges may rise if national workers are expected to be trained online as their level of English is often poorer than that of the international community.

It occurred to the researcher that the above-mentioned challenges had already been considered by the course design team, and a decision had been made for the course to be translated into Spanish later. There was also a plan to develop a face-to-face version of the BLT course for those who do not have access to the needed technology or have limited access to the Internet. (Zacharias 2018b.)

6.4 Interview 2

The interviewee 2 had a long experience around online learning as a participant and as a trainer and had also contributed to the BLT course by designing parts of the content for module 3. In addition, the interviewee had a long background working with FLighT, the organization's previous leadership course, (the predecessor of the BLT course) and had developed a blended model of FLighT before. Therefore, the interviewee thought they might be somewhat biased for the interview and the results would need to be interpreted keeping that in consideration.

From the question of background in online learning, the discussion proceeded to comparing the online and face-to-face environments. The interviewee raised up the following advantages for online learning:

- flexibility
- cost-effectiveness
- no need for travelling arrangements or visas, which can sometimes cause difficulties depending on the area/nationality
- easier to facilitate than a face-to-face course
- easy to train many new facilitators

The interviewee expressed to be a practitioner who is keen to explore the most effective ways of giving information. Whenever possible, the face-to-face training method was the preferred method by the interviewee, mainly for its ability to enabling immediate interaction and practise. As discussed in chapter 4.3, the asynchronous communication in the online environment does present challenges to immediacy, but according to Garrison (2016, 37), text-based communication also offers advantages, such as a possibility to reflect upon one's own and each other's comments sometimes even more than in face-to-face environments.

The BLT experience

The interviewee found the course to be "well-organized, self-explanatory and clear" but the experience would have been even better if there had been more interaction on the course as indicated in the following comments:

> *I found this [the course] to be too much for my head and not enough for my other senses.*
>
> *The content I felt was spot on. It's more how you present it.*

The challenge of lacking interactive elements was not emphasized in other interviews or on the BLT pilot course observations. However, as discussed before in chapter 4.3, every learner brings their own characteristics and preferences to the online environment and that challenges the online learning designers to create content that meets these different preferences. Also, as stated before, some learners prefer asynchronous, and some synchronous methods. The BLT course was completely asynchronous, which may have left the interviewee 2 to feel like something is missing. On the other hand, if considering the discussion of learner persistence and importance of social interaction in chapter 5.2, a question can be

raised, whether adding one synchronous online meeting at the beginning of the course, would have enhanced the group cohesion and thus motivated more participants to pursue completing the course.

The following table 9 summarizes the positive factors and challenges faced by the interviewee.

TABLE 9. Summary of the positive factors and challenges (interviewee 2)

Interviewee 2	**Positive factors indicated**
Category: Facilitation	Preparation: outline/schedule Encouragement & support Organization of the course
Category: Content & Materials	A solid base, excellent starter for leadership Content "right on" Important topics that benefit the learner, raise awareness and provide insight Videos well done Instruction simple to follow
Category: Social Interaction	Discussions with a good, mature group of people Stimulating questions presented by others
Challenges experienced	
Timing of the course, had to finish early English-heavy, a lot of vocabulary and reading → challenging to non-natives? Lack of interactive elements (outside the discussion forums) → challenging to new generations?	

Facilitation

The role of good facilitation was emphasized by the interviewee in three different ways: 1) The facilitator prepared the participants for the course by helping create realistic expectations in terms of time expectations. 2) The facilitator was encouraging and supporting. 3) The facilitator provided good organization with clear and simple directions

If considered in the light of the CoI framework and the results from the BLT pilot course, a link can be seen to the different dimensions of teaching presence: de-

sign and organization, facilitation and instruction (figure 8) that link with the element of the social presence forming a supporting climate. The interviewee knew that the timing of the course would be challenging for them and especially the latter part of the course would be affected. After contacting the facilitator in terms of this challenge and receiving encouraging comments from the facilitator and the colleagues, the interviewee was encouraged to take the course anyway and had a plan how to do it.

In terms of clarity and organization, the interviewee stated that the BLT course was probably one of the most organized courses and continued thinking that it was because of the personality of the facilitator.

Content and materials

The interviewee's role as part of the course design team was not known for the researcher prior to the interview. Because this role, the interviewee needs to be considered biased in terms of evaluating the content, at least in what comes to the parts contributed by the interviewee. Therefore, the focus was more on how the interviewee would see the people in the actual target group of the course (people relatively new in leadership) benefit from the course content and what does the interviewee consider to be the main challenges for them. These examples highlight some point of views:

> *I think the course is an excellent starter for anyone going into leadership.*
>
> *If somebody takes this course it would not make them a leader, but it would definitely be a benefit. If nothing else, it would make them aware of many of the issues and strategies and challenges of leadership.*
>
> *I look at this for people from lots of different backgrounds. It's very English-heavy, a lot of vocabulary and lots of reading. If that's not your first language I could find it to be not that interesting because it's so much on the reading.*

Although the interviewee thought new leaders (and in some other comment "all leaders") should take the course, and they would surely benefit from it, there were also some concerns. Those had to do mainly with the possible language challenges and the amount of reading participants had to do for the course. There

were several non-native English speakers on the BLT pilot course and only one of them indicated having language challenges. During the observation it was noticed that these challenges did not affect their participation or performance on the course. However, as stated before, the language challenge is real when considering areas that have many national workers, which is why the course design team had already decided that the BLT course would be translated into Spanish later.

A concern was also raised about the new generation, whose attention span according to the interviewee often tends to be very short. The interviewee thought that the younger generation might need more interactive elements instead of reading. The same concern of the younger generation needing more "hands-on" training, was also raised by interviewee 3 and the interviewee 3 also offered a suggestion to meet this challenge (see chapter 6.5). However, studying generational differences and their impact on learning preferences in an online environment would be a completely new topic of research, which is why it cannot be discussed in detail in this thesis.

Social interaction

When asked about the interaction with other participants on the course, the interviewee described the experience followingly:

> *When I saw who was taking it [the course], I was like "Oh good, I'll be fine with them."*
>
> *Having been in a number of courses - this was as good as any discussion. They were all mature people who were involved in training and leading, so you had a good group of participants.*
>
> *I think what happened in discussions is people would ask questions as well. So yeah, that's interesting. "Where did you get this from?" or "Why did you do it this way?" Somebody challenged me on one thing, it was good, so I appreciate that - That came partly from the calibre of people who you had on this course.*

The interviewee was relieved to know some of the participants beforehand, perhaps taking off the extra pressure of studying with completely new people. This emphasizes the result received from the pilot course, the importance of social

interaction in the beginning of the course to create a climate where the participants feel secure to engage in open and risk-free discourse with each other.

The examples also indicate that the online learning experience can be greatly enhanced by the group of people who are learning together, asking questions and challenging each other. The same course content may generate different discussions and take the conversation to a different level depending on the calibre of people taking the course. Both, the interviewee 1 and the interviewee 2 experienced this and felt that the cohort influenced their experience and the quality of discussion.

6.5 Interview 3

The interviewee 3 was an experienced leader/trainer but had taken only one online course before the BLT course, and that experience had been a struggle because of the way the course was structured. Curiosity to see how the new online leadership training course, BLT, could be used in their rather challenging context, was the leading motivator to join the course.

On the BLT course the online environment itself caused some problems since the interviewee works in a place where the Internet accessibility can sometimes be a real challenge:

> *Sometimes even trying to get onto the Internet to actual course was a bit of a challenge because our biggest struggle is our Internet accessibility.*

Another challenge experienced by the interviewee in terms of the online environment, was to do with the lack of “human touch”:

> *Having an online course, you lose that sense of…uhmmm…I’m not sure what the right word is…but yeah, you lose the sense of actually having that human side of it, that understanding how someone understands what I’m facing, or someone understands what I’ve been going through in this role, you know.*

Even though the different presence types were not coded on the BLT pre-launch course, the thought above indicates that perhaps the dimensions of social presence, especially the group cohesion on the pre-launch course had not developed to the extent that the participant would have felt connectedness with each other. That may have been due to either external, internal or contextual matters (see Croxton 2014, 314), but since this topic was not researched any further on the pre-launch course, no causalities can be made based on this result. However, the same question that was raised in the interview 2, can be raised also here, of whether one synchronous meeting with other participants would have changed the situation. On the other hand, it may not have been possible in the interviewee's context, due to the unreliable Internet-access.

As the interview continued, the contextual matters received more attention. The interviewee's context consists of a diverse group of people with many young and inexperienced people, who, according to the interviewee, need more hands-on, practical training. The interviewee continued reflecting the question and came up with a solution:

> *Every group that we have has around 20-25 people, so they do the 5-day (face-to-face) training with us and settle in their role, and then they do the online course when they can really begin to process a lot of these things because five full intense days you don't always have the time to really reflect on these things.*
>
> *And they have a cohort, they have external people where they can learn and share from different viewpoints. That's my recommendation for this.*

The reflective nature of the BLT course was emphasized in this opinion as well. The interviewee discovered that the online course could serve as a supplement that could be used to add a reflective element in addition to the face-to-face training taking place in their context. According to the interviewee, deep reflection is not always possible during an intensive face-to-face training which is why the online course could be used for that purpose. The external online cohort would provide a possibility to reflect upon the theme of leadership and be exposed to diverse opinions.

The BLT experience

The interviewee's experience was largely a personal reflection to the interviewee's own leadership journey and style. When asked to freely describe their experience, the interviewee stated:

> *If I need to just say a word, I would say reflective. I saw it as a personal reflection, devotion time where I can really think about a lot of these things because I look back on my experience as a leader and leading in different situations.*

The following table 10 summarizes the positive factors and challenges experienced by the interviewee.

TABLE 10. Summary of the positive factors and challenges (Interviewee 3)

Interviewee 3	**Positive factors indicated**
Category: Facilitation	-
Category: Content & Materials	Impressed by the handouts and resources Encouraged a deep and reflective process PDF transcripts of the videos came out handy solving technological problems
Category: Social Interaction	Easy to share with others Different perspectives were helpful
Challenges experienced	
Internet connection, bandwith limits Could not watch the videos Following up posts on discussion forums was difficult at times	

Content and materials

As the biggest challenges faced by the interviewee 3 were technical challenges, it was interesting to hear how those challenges affected the interviewee's experience. It appeared that the course design team had taken the possibility of technological challenges into account very well already in the design phase (see figure 2). This was highly appreciated by the interviewee and emphasized many times during the interview:

> *We cannot see the videos. So, this is what I found really special and helpful that there was a PDF version of what is said in the video. I didn't feel like I've missed anything.*
>
> *What made me so happy about this course and so interesting, was like that, you know, if there was a video there was a transcript that says this is what took place. So for me that was really important.*
>
> *I was really impressed, and I really appreciated the handouts and the resources that the course offered. It's a lot but it's very good resources.*

The technological challenges could have had a very negative influence on the interviewee's experience, but the above examples show that the solutions made in the design phase of the course, during the content development process, appeared to be helpful and led to positive emotions such as feeling included, happy and thankful.

Social interaction

Like the previous interviewees, also the interviewee 3, when asked about the discussions and interaction with others, pointed out the meaning of different views and perspectives. However, for the interviewee 3, the real reflection process was an individual process:

> *What helped me was viewing different perspectives. That was really really helpful.*
>
> *It's good to be part of the cohort where you can get different ideas and thoughts, but the real learning is yourself. It's how you reflect on these things and how you process these things. And how does this, you know, change your behaviour.*
>
> *The real learning takes place in your own personal reflection, that's how I see it and that's what it really did to me.*

The interviewee also experienced challenges in social interaction especially in what comes to following the discussions on the forums and having to respond:

> *I'm not sure if this is a personality thing, but I just struggled in having to respond to, like, I'm not good at keeping up with for example social media and messaging and stuff like that, I'm not good at it generally.*

> *It was hard for me, like, if someone responds and then I need to respond and I'm like: "Oh, I need to log on and do these things." So, it was a bit of a challenge.*

6.6 Interview 4

The interviewee 4 was familiar with online courses and had taken several courses before, including university courses. On the BLT course the interviewee faced both challenges and advantages of online learning. The course fell on a vacation time when the interviewee was travelling and did not have good Internet access. The flexibility of online learning and the fact that studying was not tied into a certain time and place, however enabled to overcome that challenge and to work out a solution.

Content and materials

The interviewee 4 thought the course was very well put together. When asked about any surprises while interacting with the course content, the interviewee raised up a same topic than the interviewee 1:

> *I've been in leadership for a long time and in many different facets, so I was surprised when there were topics that came out that either reinforced my leadership or presented new topics to me.*
>
> *It [the course] does a very good job also incorporating our company values, which I think is very important and I don't think in other classes it's necessarily as well pointed out as it was in this leadership model now.*

In addition to incorporating company values, the interviewee thought that the online course offers many good tools for leadership and different facets to help the new potential leaders to engage in a self-reflective process.

> *I think there's different facets on the course that would help someone think through "Am I the right leader for this position?" And "even if I'm not the right leader, I am in leadership, so how am I going to approach that?"*

Social interaction

For the interviewee it was easy to share thoughts with others, but the asynchronous nature of the communication caused some challenges. The interviewee experienced following up on conversations as difficult, as people were working on different times and were not always online the same time:

> *Responding and sharing on conversation I found to be a little difficult just because of the times away. With everyone scheduled, sometimes very difficult to be all online the same time. – And then life happens and you kind of forget what you were talking about. Other times when someone responded, I had to go back to something I had engaged in with them prior, to remember what subject their comments were referring to. But other than that, there's not really a way to fix that other than everyone is working at the same time, which for me is more of a problem in our line of work than having to go back and look at the answer. So out of the two situations, I'd rather have the flexibility in timing.*

This example highlights the evaluation process the interviewee was going through while encountering challenges during the course. Garrison (2017, 26) describes that the lack of immediacy in communication presents big challenges to the development of social presence in online environment. However, even though the interviewee faced this challenge, they still valued the flexibility of the online medium to study at own pace higher than having everyone studying synchronously.

In what comes to the community, the interviewee thought that the interaction was respectful, and everyone shared their own opinions and commented appropriately, but the relationships remained surficial:

> *If you don't know someone already, and taking this course, you are not necessarily going to build a great relationship with them, it's going to be very surfaced while the course is going on. Real-time answering back and forth would have helped but this one [course] wasn't set up in that manner. And I also don't think it's necessary. You don't have to go into a relationship with everyone you take the course with*.

As stated by the interviewee, a personal relationship with everyone is not essential in online learning. What is important according to Garrison (2017, 12) is "connecting and collaborating with others in purposeful and meaningful ways."

7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study has researched the organization's new online leadership training initiative by gathering information about the participants' and the facilitator's experiences during the pilot phase of the course with an objective to get a full view of how the BLT course is experienced. Since the course is the organization's first leadership training course taking place completely online, a great emphasis was also given to observing how the pilot course participants engaged with each other and with the course content in the online environment. To form an overall picture of the course, multiple research methods were used, including studying organizational materials, observation, semi-structured interviews and follow-up emails. Figure 22 summarizes the positive and the challenging factors that were found to affect the participants' experience during the pilot phase of the BLT course.

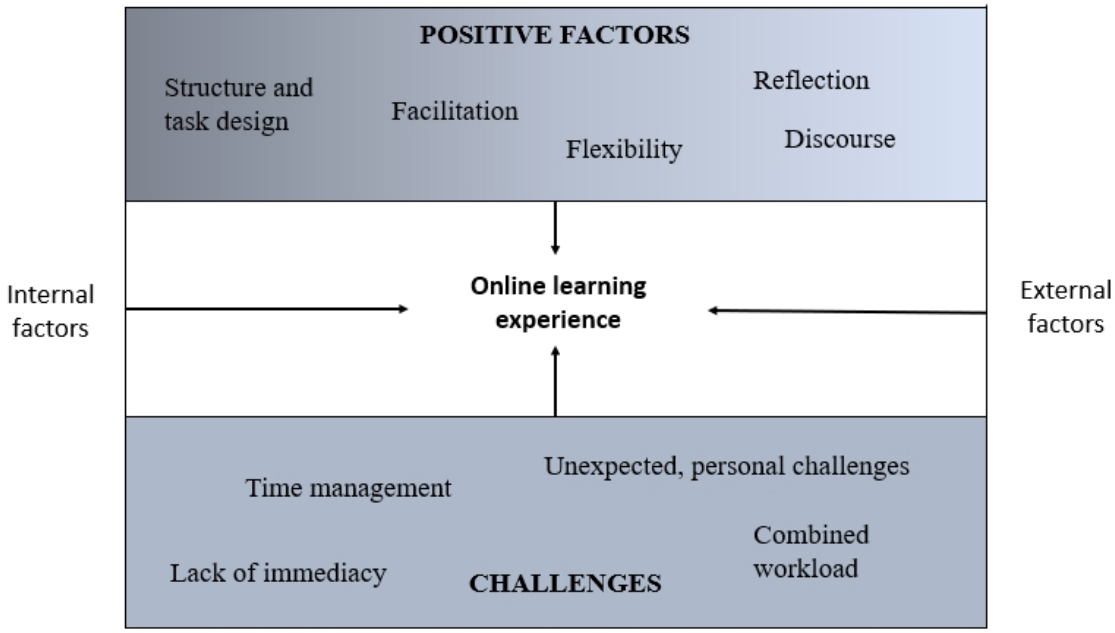

FIGURE 22. The challenging and supporting factors affecting the participants' experience

Inspired by the theory presented by Phillips et al. (2012, 16), the two different courses in the pilot phase had their own evaluation plan, data collection methods and analysis methods. The first course, BLT pilot course, was evaluated with the help of the CoI framework (figure 6), which provided additional insight to the participants' learning processes and experience. The evaluation of the BLT prelaunch course concentrated on gathering the experiences from the experts and their view of the course with three main aspects: content, social interaction and

facilitation. Both courses were received positively, despite of the challenges experienced.

Considering Garrisons (2017, 37) list of four signs of a high-quality online environment: *respectful, inclusive, intellectually challenging and critical*, the findings strongly indicate that the online environment on the BLT pilot course was *inclusive, respectful and intellectually challenging*. In what comes to *critical*, due to the BLT course's nature as a personal reflection, sharing personal leadership experiences instead of discussing academic concepts, critical thinking or point of views were not often found in the coding process. However, the participants were found to benefit from other learners' diverse point of views and experiences. The facilitators' insightful questions also helped the participants to gain new insight and expand their existing ideas or point of views. Therefore, a more appropriate term to describe the BLT course instead of *critical*, would be *insightful*.

7.1 Positive factors

Structure and task design

It was found that well-planned structure and task-design in the content development phase (see figure 13) led to positive experiences. The participants described the course as: "clear, well-structured and easy-to-follow". The design team had also prepared for possible challenges while developing content, one example being technical challenges. Once these challenges were faced by one participant, the possibly negative experience was turned to a positive emotion of feeling included. What could have been a negative experience, instead created a positive experience because of good decisions made in the design phase.

One goal of the design team had been to develop training that is customized, unique and relevant to organization's employees (Thomas 2018). The participants found the content "useful, interesting and relevant", and were positively surprised how well the organization's values had been incorporated into the course.

It was also found that the learning task types had an impact on the participants' cognitive process. The learning tasks which encouraged practical implementation, also resulted in more resolution coded. Tasks which encouraged reflection, often led to high amounts of exploration and integration. Reading other participants' reflections often led to triggering events which launched new exploration and integration processes.

Facilitation

The facilitators received many positive comments from the BLT course participants and it was found that facilitation affected their experience in several different ways in different phases of the course.

Before the course planning for a good structure and designing tasks (or setting curriculum and methods as discussed in Garrison 2017, 28) had an important part in how the course was experienced. This part was what Phillips et al. (2012, 27) call "designing learning environments". Before the course, the facilitators also helped building realistic expectations by offering a course schedule and guidelines, which was appreciated by the participants. Making sure the participants knew how to access the course and the materials and navigate in the online medium (Salmon 2013b), were also among the pre-course preparations.

In the beginning of the course the facilitators engaged in social interaction with the participants creating a welcoming atmosphere as in the online socialisation phase of the Five Stage Model (Salmon 2013b). The participants demonstrated different means of affective expression, like using para-language, self-disclosure and humour, as described by Boston et al. (2009, 68). The facilitators themselves modelled open and risk-free communication, which lead to participants also engaging in open discussion with each other. However, the beginning of the course was not merely social interaction, but the facilitators also started laying grounds for cognitive process by asking relevant questions about leadership. This was important, as according to Garrison (2017, 37) "creating a cohesive community of learners could not be created based only on establishing social relationships", but instead the participants also need to be reminded of the common purpose.

In the middle of the course the facilitators continued scaffolding the learning process. Scaffolding was manifested in many ways, such as maintaining focus (Bates 2016, 16), guiding the discussion and ensuring that the learners stay engaged (Swan et al. 2009), maintaining climate by recognizing, encouraging and complimenting the learners (Garrison 2017, 45-46). If considered in the light of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (figure 5), the facilitators also facilitated the cognitive process, and with insightful questions helped the participants to engage in thought-process that led from exploration to integration and discovering new perspectives they would not necessarily have found on their own.

In addition to scaffolding, the facilitators provided practical assistance with time-management challenges by agreeing about alternative schedules if needed. This flexibility was especially appreciated by participants who had travels overlapping the course or who faced unexpected challenges. Another finding was that in the middle of the course most of the interaction happened between participants, instead of facilitators and participants like in the beginning of the course.

At the end of the course the facilitators encouraged the participants to reflect to what they have learnt and think if there is anything they would like to change when moving ahead. This links with the fifth stage of the Five Stage Model, development (see figure 4), where the learner both looks back and to the future and has become a confident e-learner, able to integrate the learnt knowledge into their own context (Salmon 2018).

Reflection and discourse

The BLT course was a highly reflective course, which suits a completely asynchronous course well considering that reflective nature is one benefit of asynchronous communication (Garrison 2016, 37). In the light of Dewey's Practical Inquiry model (figure 7) reflection happened both, in the participants' private world (offline time) and in a shared world (online discussions). During the observation it became evident that the participants and facilitators did not expect the online learning experience to be merely an individual study, nor did they expect their learning to happen only around the designed course materials. In addition, they expected to learn from each other's experiences and diverse point of views.

Both, the individual reflection and collaborative discourse led to positive experiences among the participants. The individual reflection helped them to go through their own leadership experiences in the light of the studied theory and the discourse with others enabled re-considering their own experiences, getting new perspective, and thinking of alternative ways they could have handled a certain situation.

During the pilot course evaluation, it was found that despite of the asynchronous, completely online nature of the course, the amount of social presence remained high throughout the modules. Considering the definition of social presence by Vaughan & Garrison (2009, 64), the findings confirm that the BLT pilot course participants found different means of communication to project their personalities and to help creating a trusting environment where they could engage in purposeful discussion with each other. As discussed before, the facilitators modelled open communication, which enhanced the open climate and encouraged the participants also to engage in open discourse on the discussion forums.

7.2 Challenging factors

The main challenging factors affecting the participants' experience had to do with time-management and workload. Technical challenges were faced by one person but those did not affect the experience due to the good decisions made by the design-team in the design-phase of the course. One person also indicated language challenges, but it was not found to affect their activity in discussion or posting on forums. A few people indicated that they were bothered by the lack of immediacy in discussion, but flexibility of learning at their own pace was valued higher than responding to this challenge by having to work synchronously with others.

The participants found different means to overcome the challenges they faced. Flexibility of online learning combined with facilitator support, enabled the participants to plan and organize their studying times and overcome the (external) challenges presented by busy times at work or travelling. The well-structured course design and organization enabled the facilitator/s to concentrate on interaction

with the participants and offering them a scaffolded learning process instead of concentrating on constant adjustments on the course materials or learning tasks.

Lack of group cohesion and learner persistence

Even though some aspects of social presence (affective expression and open communication) developed well on the BLT course, group cohesion, which was mentioned by Garrison (2017, 38) as an important aspect in helping to create and support a climate that enables deep and meaningful learning, was only measured a few times leaving a question if it was ever properly formed. This result needs to be analysed in the context of the BLT course which was: 1) completely online with no face-to-face of Skype meetings, 2) asynchronous and text-based 3) the learning tasks were completed individually, there were no group assignments, and the only place for interacting with the group were the discussion forums. Considering these things, the lower development of the group cohesion is not a surprising finding.

Despite of the lower occurrence of group cohesion, the findings indicate that the participants were able to engage in the higher levels of inquiry, integration and resolution (see figure 20). The participants' own comments and feedback also confirm this finding. In addition, the results strongly indicate that the learning cohort and discourse with others was an important part of the inquiry. An interesting finding was also that the more experienced cohort, the pre-launch course participants, indicated being surprised how interesting the basic level leadership course was to them. In addition to the choice of study materials, the learners in the experienced cohort brought in their own experience and knowledge, which took the online discussions to a deeper level, and made the basic level course interesting and engaging also to the more experienced people.

Time management and combined workload

Even though the reflective nature of the course was appreciated by the participants, and they felt that they gained from both, their personal reflection and the reflection with others on discussion forums, the participants also noticed that the reflection took more time than what they had estimated to use for the course. In addition, the specific requirements of online learning as discussed in the theoretical framework (Burkle and Cleveland-Innes 2013, 74), became evident to the

participants. Both, the pilot course learners and the more experienced pre-launch course learners noticed that online learning demands high self-discipline and good time-management skills. In the interview Zacharias (2018) stated that it might be difficult for online learners to prioritize online learning because they do not need to travel anywhere for it. In the beginning of the course the participants were asked to block time from their calendars for online study like they would do for a face-to-face course, but it takes discipline and self-motivation, and it was not clear how many had done that. (Zacharias 2018.)

Most participants faced similar challenges with time management and general workload, as all of them were completing the course alongside their normal work responsibilities. Facing unexpected issues, such as sickness, lead to time-management challenges and affected some participants' online learning experience on the pilot course. Four people ended up not completing the course reporting these challenges as the main reason. Interestingly, the findings from the coding process indicate that those who completed the course were more active on discussion forums and in social interaction at the beginning of the course, than those who did not complete the course. Based on the existing theory and findings of the positive connection between social interaction and student persistence or motivation (Boston et al. 2009, Croxton 2014, Martin & Bolliger 2018) this leaves a question whether the reasons for not completing were linked with the lower participation in social interaction, and hence lower forming of deeper group cohesion.

It was also found that the participants who completed the course were facing similar challenges with workload and time pressure, but they managed to overcome those challenges and continue. Naturally, as Croxton (2014, 314) points out, the issue of persistence is complex, and the people's own situations and different internal, external and contextual issues may also affect their ability or willingness to continue in studies. Further research would be needed to determine what those internal, external and contextual issues were on the BLT course.

From the facilitator's point of view, it was sometimes difficult to tell when people were having challenges with time-management because some people preferred to do a lot at once and then drop out for several days (Zacharias 2018a). This left

the facilitator wondering if more initiative from facilitators' side would have been needed to assist with time-management issues (Zacharias 2018a).

7.3 Validity, further research and development

When considering the validity of the results received through this study, the context and the scale of the research need to be kept in mind. This study was a small-scale research conducted for a specific organization in a specific context and therefore any generalizations should be considered carefully.

The researcher's position as a participant-observer on the pilot course also needs to be considered as it may have affected the results to some extent. According to McLain and Kim (2018, 113) this is a challenge in qualitative research, and it is very likely that the participants will be influenced by the researcher to some degree. Based on the results from the CoI coding process, the researcher's presence did not affect the participants' ability or willingness to engage in open and risk-free conversation (figure 19), but the researcher's participation in discussion may have affected other dimensions of the inquiry, and therefore needs to be considered.

There was no possibility to have a second coder to validate the accuracy of the researcher's coding process, which also needs to be considered when reviewing the results of this research. However, to keep the coding process simple and as reliable as possible, the researcher decided to use the original three-dimensional CoI-framework (figure 6) instead of the one introduced by Cleveland-Innes, which added another presence, emotional presence, to the CoI (figure 9). Adding an emotional presence to the CoI would have made the coding process more complex. The multi-method approach was found useful because the reliability was not only dependant on the coding process. The other findings received through observation, follow-up emails and interviews were in line with the results received from the coding process and helped giving more insight.

As the area of online learning within the organization had not been researched before, this research provides important aspects for consideration and ideas for

further research. One area of further research could be the link between social presence and group cohesion, and the learners' persistence in studying. In terms of further development, it could be considered whether adding one synchronous online meeting to the beginning of the course, would enhance the formation of group cohesion and thus increase the learners' motivation to complete the course. It would also help to meet different learner needs, as Croxton (2014, 317) states that "while there is no single "best way" to implement course interactivity, online instructors should consider including interactive student–student opportunities which meet the different learning preferences of their students". However, as most BLT course participants preferred working asynchronously at their own pace, adding synchronous elements should be done with careful consideration.

Studying the impact of the line manager support to the participants' experience was not included in this research. However, in an organization with a long history of onsite training, the attitudes towards a new medium may take time to develop. Therefore, it would be important to study the impact of the line manager support, its influence on learners' motivation to finish the course and the combined workload. Considering the finding that the requirements of online learning were not always clear even to the more experienced online learners, raises up a question of how clear they are to the management-level. As one interviewee commented, the challenge with online learning is that the learners are not removed from their everyday job, whereas when taking an onsite course, they are moved from their everyday responsibilities and given that time to concentrate on learning.

As the purpose of this research was to gather information of the pilot phase participants' experiences and learning process, and not examine their long-term learning outcomes, further research would be needed to see whether the learners were able to put the learnt into practise also in their everyday job. There were some practical assignments during the course, which enabled the participants to practise in real-life, but to see the long-term effects, more research would be needed.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Community of Inquiry indicator template 1 (2)

CoI categories, codes and indicators used in this thesis to assist coding discussion forum conversations. Examples are from the BLT pilot course discussions. Modified from the coding template introduced by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000, 89) and Anderson et al. (2001).

Social Presence

Category	Code	Indicators	Example
Affective expression	SA1	Greeting each other, welcoming	*"Hi X, great to meet you through this course!"*
	SA2	Self-disclosure, sharing about oneself	*" I have a degree in... and have worked..."*
	SA3	Expressing emotions (by language, emoticons, humor)	*"I was encouraged by.." , "I worry about.." "..my plants are still alive 😊👌"*
	SA4	Showing respect/encouragement to others	*"I really appreciated your application of.."*
Open communication	SO1	Risk-free communication	*"I have a tendency to think.."*
	SO2	Responding to other people's comments	*"Interesting take on leadership as a lifestyle, I want to think more of that.."*
Group cohesion	SG1	"We", "our"	*"I am confident that we will all learn a lot..."*
	SG2	Building group identity	*"Looking forward to learning and growing with the rest of you here."*

Cognitive presence

Category	Code	Indicators	Example
Triggering event	CT1	Recognizing a problem/issue	*"It's actually kind of hard to answer that question.."*
	CT2	Sense of puzzlement	*"This is a tough question.."*
	CT3	Expressing curiosity/ presenting questions	*"What's the most interesting case you have worked on?"*
Exploration	CE1	Exploring and brainstorming ideas/ experiences	*"This theme has been on my mind a lot recently."*
	CE2	Exchanging ideas and confirming understanding	*"Is anyone else on this course part of a remote team? Any thoughts on team building remotely?"*
	CE3	Supporting other people's points/ideas	*"I totally agree with you that.."*
	CE4	Presenting contradicting ideas/ point of views	*"I wonder if it would be better to say..."*
Integration	CI1	Constructing meaningful solution/ explanation	*"For me personally this means.."*
	CI2	Integrating knowledge and ideas	*"Through this course and the feedback of others, I would say..."*
	CI3	Building on other peoples' ideas	*"Part of this, like X said in one earlier post, is knowing.."*
Resolution	CR1	Expressing committment/determination t test and apply the solutions in practice	*"The two statements I will apply to my leadership this week, are.."*
	CR2	Implementing, experimenting	*"This week I did... in an effort to share responsibility and model servant leadership."*

Community of Inquiry indicator template 2 (2)

Teaching Presence Category	Code	Indicators	Example
Design and organization	TD	N/A *	N/A
Facilitating discourse TF	TF1	Identifying areas of agreement/ disagreement	*"It's great to see how your two observations work together."*
	TF2	Seeking to reach understanding/ consensus	*"I hope I understand your question correctly.."*
	TF3	Encouraging, acknowledging or reinforcing participant contributions	*"Interesting reflections, X, thank you. I think* you got right to the core.."
	TF4	Setting climate for learning	*"Your perspective will be very helpful in our conversations here."*
	TF5	Drawing in participants, prompting discussion	*"I'm wondering how do you think the high-context folks would respond to the different style you suggest in task assignment?"*
	TF6	Assessing the efficacy of the process	*"I have realized, and have had it emphasized* during this module.."
Direct instruction TI	TI1	Presenting content/questions	*"How do you plan to practice your reflections?"*
	TI2	Injecting knowledge from diverse sources (books, articles, internet, personal experiences)	*"OM is developing a course that goes more in depth with these concepts. If you're curious, here's a link.."*

* was not applicaple on discussions

Appendix 2. Occurrence of social, cognitive and teaching presence

Occurrence of presence types during the BLT pilot course modules.

Social presence	*Welcome-module*		*Module 1*		*Module 2*		*Module 3*		*Conclusions*	
	Count	Per unit	Count	Per unit	Count	Per unit	Count	Per unit	Count	Per unit
Affective Expression	127	1,69	130	0,90	89	0,57	75	0,78	17	0,53
Open Communication	55	0,73	101	0,70	92	0,59	54	0,56	16	0,50
Group Cohesion	19	0,25	19	0,13	15	0,10	8	0,08	7	0,22
No of Units Coded	75		145		156		96		32	

Cognitive presence	*Welcome-module*		*Module 1*		*Module 2*		*Module 3*		*Conclusions*	
	Count	Per unit	Count	Per unit	Count	Per unit	Count	Per unit	Count	Per unit
Triggering Event	17	0,23	45	0,31	21	0,13	23	0,24	2	0,06
Exploration	13	0,17	53	0,37	52	0,33	47	0,49	12	0,38
Integration	2	0,03	47	0,32	92	0,59	40	0,42	18	0,56
Resolution	0	0	16	0,11	9	0,06	7	0,07	3	0,09
No of Units Coded	75		145		156		96		32	

Teaching presence	*Welcome-module*		*Module 1*		*Module 2*		*Module 3*		*Conclusions*	
	Count	Per unit	Count	Per unit	Count	Per unit	Count	Per unit	Count	Per unit
Design and organization	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Facilitation	23	0,31	55	0,38	64	0,41	29	0,30	18	0,56
Direct Instruction	2	0,03	4	0,03	16	0,10	13	0,14	0	0
No of Units Coded	75		145		156		96		32	

Appendix 3. Occurrence of presence types per participant / module

Welcome-module

	SA1	SA2	SA3	SA4	SO1	SO3	SG1	SG2	Sum	CT1	CT2	CT3	CE1	CE2	CE3	CE4	CI1	CI2	CI3	CR1	CR2	Sum	TD1	TF1	TF2	TF3	TF4	TF5	TF6	TI1	TI6	Sum
P1	4	2	4	1		4	2		17													0										0
P2	4	2	2	1		3		1	13				1		2			1				4				1						1
P3	3	1	1		1	3			9	1	1	1										3					1					1
P4	4	3	3	2		4			16		2		2		1							5										0
P5	2	2	1			1		1	7			1	1									2										0
P6	1	1	2			1	1		6				1									1										0
P7	6	1	6	1	1	5	1		21		1	2										3							2			2
P8	3	3	1			5			12			3	1									4										0
P9	4	2	2			3			11													0										0
F1	9	4	4	4		11	2	2	36			3	1		1			1				6				1	4	1		1	1	8
F2	12	6	8	5	1	12	5	4	53			2	1	1								4			1	3	7	1	1			13
	52	27	34	14	3	52	11	8	201	1	4	12	8	1	4	0	0	2	0	0	0		0	0	1	5	12	2	3	1	1	25
	127				55		19		201	17			13				2			0		32			23					2		25

Module1

	SA1	SA2	SA3	SA4	SO1	SO3	SG1	SG2	Sum	CT1	CT2	CT3	CE1	CE2	CE3	CE4	CI1	CI2	CI3	CR1	CR2	Sum	TD	TF1	TF2	TF3	TF4	TF5	TF6	TI1	TI6	Sum
P1	4	3	1		2	6	1		17													0										0
P2	7	5	3	3	2	6	1	2	29		2		8	1	1		3	1	2	2	1	21				4	2		3			9
P3	5	1	4	3	4	3	1		21	2	1		1		1							5				2			2			4
P4	4	3		2	4	6	1	1	21	3	1	2	1							1		8		1		3	1					5
P5		3	3	3	3	3	1		16	1		1	4				1	4	2	4		17				1	1					2
P6	1	2	1	1	2	2	1		10	1	2	1	5	1			3			1	3	17				1						1
P7	6	6	10	5	9	13	2	2	53	2	3	1	2	3	7		6	1	5			30		1		1	1		5			8
P8	1	8	2		5	3		1	20	4	2	1	2				6	2		3		20										0
P9	4	5	1	2	1	7	1	1	22	2	3	2	5	1	3		3	1	2	1		23									1	1
F1	9	4	2	3	4	16	1	2	41	1	1	6	1	1	5				5			20		3	1	12	5	4	1	1	2	29
F2	NO CONTRIBUTIONS																					0										0
	41	40	27	22	36	65	10	9	250	16	15	14	29	7	17	0	22	9	16	12	4		0	5	1	24	10	4	11	1	3	59
	130				101		19			45			53				47			16		161			55					4		59

Module2

	SA1	SA2	SA3	SA4	SO1	SO3	SG1	SG2	Sum	CT1	CT2	CT3	CE1	CE2	CE3	CE4	CI1	CI2	CI3	CR1	CR2	Sum	TD1	TF1	TF2	TF3	TF4	TF5	TF6	TI1	TI6	Sum
P1	3	3		1	1	9	1		18	2			3		5		6	4		1	1	22				1			2	1		4
P2	2	1	1	4		7			15	1			3	1	3		9	5	2	2	1	27							3			3
P3	3		1	2		3	1		10	2	1		1		4		3	2	1			14				2			1			3
P4	3	1	3	2	2	7	2		20	1	1	1	3		3		10	5	2	2		28				2			2			4
P5			2	3		3			8				3				4	4	1			12				1						1
P6	NO CONTRIBUTIONS																					0										0
P7	5	2	2	1	4	12		2	28				2		4	1	9	6		1		23									3	3
P8	4	2		1	2	4	2	1	16		1	1	1		4		6	4		1		18				2	1			1		4
P9	1	3	1	2	3	6	1	2	19				3	1	1		3	3				11				4	2					6
F1	9	3	4	6	3	21	2	1	49			7		3	3				2			15				15	7	10	1	5	4	42
F2	3			5		5			13			3							1			4				4	3	1		2		10
	33	15	14	27	15	77	9	6	196	6	3	12	19	5	27	1	50	33	9	7	2	174	0	0	0	31	13	11	9	9	7	80
	89				92		15		196	21			52				92			9		174			64					16		80

Module3

	SA1	SA2	SA3	SA4	SO1	SO3	SG1	SG2	Sum	CT1	CT2	CT3	CE1	CE2	CE3	CE4	CI1	CI2	CI3	CR1	CR2	Sum	TD1	TF1	TF2	TF3	TF4	TF5	TF6	TI1	TI6	Sum
P1	1	1	3	1		5	1		12	2			5		3		5	1	1	1		18			1	1					1	3
P2	2	6	3	2	6	7	2	1	29	3		3	6		1		3	2	3	2		23		1		1			1		2	5
P3	NO CONTRIBUTIONS																					0										0
P4	1	3	5	4	2	4		1	20		2		6	1	1		4	2	4	1	1	22				2			1			3
P5	NO CONTRIBUTIONS																					0										0
P6	NO CONTRIBUTIONS																					0										0
P7	3	4	3	2	3	5			20	3			6		3		3		1	1	1	18				1			3			4
P8	1		1			1			3				1		1							2										0
P9	1	5	4	1	1	6			18	1			2		3		4	3				13							1		1	2
F1	2	2	6	5		13		3	31	1	2	4		3	4	1	1		3			19			1	12	4	3		1	2	23
F2	1		1	1		1			4			2										2		1				1				2
	12	21	26	16	12	42	3	5	137	10	4	9	26	4	16	1	20	8	12	5	2	117	0	2	2	17	4	4	6	1	6	42
	75				54		8		137	23			47				40			7		117	0		35					7		42

Conclusions

	SA1	SA2	SA3	SA4	SO1	SO3	SG1	SG2	Sum	CT1	CT2	CT3	CE1	CE2	CE3	CE4	CI1	CI2	CI3	CR1	CR2	Sum	TD1	TF1	TF2	TF3	TF4	TF5	TF6	TI1	TI6	Sum
P1		1	1		1	2			5	1					2			1		1		5							2			2
P2	1		1	2		2	1		7	1			2			1	2		1	1		8				1			1			2
P3	NO CONTRIBUTIONS																					0										0
P4	1					1	1		3				3		1		1	3		1		9							2			2
P5	NO CONTRIBUTIONS																					0										0
P6	NO CONTRIBUTIONS																					0										0
P7	2	1	2			3	1	1	10				1				1	2	2			6				2			3			5
P8	NO CONTRIBUTIONS																					0										0
P9		2		1	2	2			7						1		3		1			5							2			2
F1	1			1		3	2	1	8							1			1			2				2	1		2			5
F2	NO CONTRIBUTIONS																					0										0
	5	4	4	4	3	13	5	2	40	2	0	0	6	0	4	2	7	6	5	3	0	35	0	0	0	5	1	0	12	0	0	18
	17				16		7		40	2			12				18			3		35			18					0		18

Appendix 4: BLT pre-launch course interviewing questions

Semi-structured interviewing guideline for the BLT pre-launch course, leaving room for the interviewee to introduce new topics.

1. Introductions and informal chatting

2. Background questions (experience in online learning, training, leadership)

3. The BLT course experience: positive and challenging aspects

6. Aspects on individual/collaborative learning

7. Additional questions guided by previous discussion

8: Anything else? (Free speech)

9. Closure