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CEO, Athlete or Both?

A Study from an Institutional Theory Perspective on CEOs Engaging in Endurance Training

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Abstract

Drawing on institutional theory, this thesis investigates what drives corporate leaders with demanding jobs to invest in time consuming endurance training. Resting on a theoretical framework based on regulative, normative and cognitive institutional pressures combined with theory on role-identity contradiction, the thesis furthermore explains how institutional pressures influence CEOs who engage in endurance training. Also, the thesis describes how these institutional pressures manifest themselves.

We have conducted in-depth interviews with nine Swedish CEOs representing different industries and varied sizes of companies. These CEOs all engage in endurance training and racing, for instance in long distance triathlon, running, cross-country skiing etc. In addition, three persons working as coaches for people like the interviewed CEOs, within the corresponding sports were interviewed. Clear links between managers behavior with respect to both their own training and institutional pressures are identified. Regulative pressures hardly affect the CEOs, instead the lack thereof enable them to live out their athlete identities. However, the employees in some of the CEOs' organizations are subjected to a regulative pressure manifesting in e.g. mandatory health activities. There is a clear pressure on the CEOs from the normative side of institutional theory, authorities, networks and trends decide what is legitimate. When these normative influences align with the CEOs personal interest and, at the same time, can be beneficial for the organization, action will follow accordingly. Cognitive ideas on who to be as a CEO and an endurance athlete is at the base for these persons' sense-making. It drives theme to exercise more frequently, and at times and in places most people wouldn't even consider. Not only is the cognitive sense-making of the interviewed CEOs somewhat unorthodox, the role "CEO" and the athlete identity, are at odds too. For example, the CEOs state that they don't talk about their athletic endeavors at work, even though there are several highly coveted personal attributes related to endurance athleticism. In relation to previous research on the topic, the findings can be grouped into two categories*; job performance* and *leader attributes*. *Job performance* relate to how managers connect endurance training to their own as well as their employees job performance. *Leader attributes* on the other hand relate to how certain attributes are attached to managers, companies' and their employees as a consequence of their engagements in endurance training and racing.

Adding theory on role-identity contradiction to the more established theory on regulative, normative and cognitive institutional pressures is found to be valuable when studying the phenomenon. This shows that when studying other similar phenomena, i.e. phenomena focusing on actions from individuals inside the organization, theory on role-identity contradictions is recommended.

Keywords: *Institutional theory, Role-identity contradiction, Endurance training, CEO, Workplace Health Promotion programs*

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1 Introduction

The health and wellness discussion has intensified during the past decades and include a broad range of topics such as nutrition, psychological health, esthetical appearance and physical fitness. Internet and social media has fueled this trend by providing tools for sharing workout data, pictures of healthy meals and perfect bodies. In their book "The Wellness Syndrome", Cederström and Spicer (2015) argue that there are health freaks who go to extremes to find the perfect diet, corporate athletes who start the day with a dance party, and self-trackers who monitor everything, including their own toilet habits.

Tabloids, gyms, sports apparel companies, dieticians, endurance race organizers and others try to make money from the fact that people are concerned about their health and being fit. By painting a positive picture about eating healthy, working out and doing other things that contribute towards wellbeing, they are aiming to create a demand for related goods and services.

However, actors outside the health and wellness industry point towards less positive aspects of the sometimes excessive strive towards wellness. As an example, Cederström and Spicer (2015) argue that the wellness command actually imposes guilt and stress on us, makes us narcissistic and takes our attention away from problems that may be more important to solve.

Clear signs point towards that people, regardless of the underlying reason, spend more effort, resources and focus on trying to be healthier and feeling well. One example is the increased interest in physical fitness training and racing. Out of 7000 members at Friskis&Svettis, one of Sweden's largest clubs for athletic training, 44% state that they exercise more today compared to three years ago (Schibbye, 2016). Endurance races like Vasaloppet and Ironman are proof of the same trend and they often sell out within minutes after opening up for new entries to upcoming events. 2013 Ironman Florida actually sold out in less than a minute, each spot at a price of more than $500 (Andersson 2015; Ironman 2012). To enter a race has become like standing in line at the ticket office for the chance of getting tickets to see a rock star or sleeping outside apple store to be first in line for the latest iDevice.

Two researchers at the University of Cologne recently showed that an increase in health and wellness activities is not just a general phenomenon, but also for high-level business leaders in

particular. Their studies show that the number of CEOs who enter marathon races has doubled between 2001 and 2011 (Limbach & Sonnenburg 2015). Statistics from Ironman supports this argument, and for instance at the Ironman event in Kalmar in Sweden 2017, 17% of the participants were managers (Carlsson, 2017).

The study done by Limbach and Sonnenburg (2015) also suggest that companies who have a CEO that race in marathons deliver higher average profit margins compared to other companies. Similar results were shown by Neck and Cooper (2000) who present evidence that executives who enjoy what they refer to as "optimal fitness" can handle demands of a business leader more effectively and thus perform better. Such demands include long working hours and stress from large responsibilities. However, what Neck and Cooper argue is that the amount of training and the fitness level required to reach optimal fitness is far less compared to what is required for running a marathon.

The observed general health trend in society, the high number of managers in endurance sports and the connection with business performance made us interested in this topic. Furthermore, a notion that business leaders who participate in endurance races are performing well both in their professional careers as well as their athletic careers made us interested in further researching this topic.

1.1 Background

There are numerous articles in business media describing the phenomenon of corporate leaders doing well in both business and athletic endeavors, such as marathons and long-distance triathlons. These often portray individuals with extraordinary abilities to successfully combine seemingly impossible amounts of work and training, e.g. (Wallace, 2016; Williams, 2017; Carlsson, 2013; Vene, 2013).

In 2001, Loehr and Schwartz published an article in Harvard Business Review in which the authors argue that physical fitness is important for managers to be able to sustain a high level of performance in their professional work. Using the logic presented by Loehr and Schwartz, physical exercise can be seen as a ritual that enables what they call "oscillation", i.e. alternation between

stress and recovery, which is claimed to be instrumental for sustained high performance among business leaders.

A number of business media articles use other rational to explain why endurance training is beneficial to business leaders. One example is an article from Eckfeldt (2015:01), where he states: *"Over the last decade, triathlon has become the executive sport de rigueur. Triathlon tests you in different ways than most other endurance sports. And interestingly, it is analogous of the unique challenges of executive leadership. Like triathlon, executive leadership involves three core key competencies: setting a vision, developing strategy, and managing accountability. Great leaders are well-versed in each of these disciplines and know how to move fluidly between them"*. According to Eckfeldt, managing a triathlon is closely linked to managing a business. I.e. if you learn to master a triathlon it will be helpful in your work life, or if you are successful as a business leader, triathlon will come easy to you. Other articles emphasize the importance of a balanced life to be successful as a business leader, e.g. Reitmann (2017) who in his interpretation of Limbach and Sonnenburg's (2015) research state: *"Prioritizing wellness, as part of a balanced life, is an important quality for business leaders to exhibit, even if it's purely for business. Companies in the S&P 1500 index with CEOs that have completed a marathon are worth 5% more than those who didn't"*.

Academic literature on the subject often points towards other aspects than business media's predominantly positive description of corporate elites who invest in health and fitness. Haggard and Williams (1992) argue that the phenomenon is a manifestation of top managers beliefs in what qualities makes a good leader. E.g. being a runner implies certain identity images, for instance that one is physically fit, motivated and self-disciplined. Maravelias (2015:280) writes the following: *"An elite class consisting of corporate executives who engage personal trainers and take part in competitive sports activities not primarily to become healthy, but to prove that they possess the 'true' competitive skills that are seen to define members of their elite executive class"*. Maravelias imply that the reason for maintaining a healthy lifestyle really isn't to maximize the potential to be effective at work as for instance Loehr and Schwarz (2001) claim. Instead, Maravelias (2015) argue that the main reason is to fit in with the top management peers. The sporty lifestyle of the top executives is meant to stand for competitiveness, self-control, a doer mentality etc. at work. Janet Johansson further examines this aspect in her dissertation "Sweat is weakness leaving the

body" (2017:01). She states: "*athletic endeavors serve as a new source of self-meaning with which the sporty top managers create and express wishful notions about themselves as occupants of the leadership role*". Not only does the sporty managers strive to portray themselves as role models with the right qualities and values, they even project this on the people around them and the organizations they run. "*They [top managers] formulate the expressions of their experiences in athletic endeavors in such a way that athleticism is a central theme both for people's personal success and for the prosperity of an organization*" (Johansson, 2017). This may take form in elaborate Workplace Health Promotion (WHP) programs, designed to promote personal health among the employees. Zoller (2003) see risks with these initiatives, she writes: "*By preoccupying employees with individual pursuits, such a discourse reduces employee voice about work-life balance and occupational health, making collective decision making and resistance to managerial imperatives more difficult*". Another negative aspect of athleticism in leaders is the norms created that define which types of bodies are recognized as viable and legitimate to operate in management, and which are not (Johansson et. al. 2017). There are strict and narrow norms among the corporate elite that make sharp distinctions between who can live up to the bodily ideal. This offers opportunities to marginalize and exclude those who don't live up to the ideal (Johansson et. al. 2017).

There are clearly two sides to the phenomenon described here:

1. It is beneficial for corporate leaders to participate actively in athletic endeavors like triathlons or marathons. It represents highly valued personal traits and increase profitability in companies.
2. The society has created expectations on managers, making them strive to live up to "super human" ideals and imposing these on the members of their organizations. In doing so creating elite groups and segregation.

Business media ride on the health trend and write articles contributing to the myth of the "superhuman" leader. Institutional theorists argue that concepts, products, services and policies are institutionalized by society and work as powerful myths (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Organizations then use these myths to gain legitimacy and resources. Associating business leaders with athletes, like Loehr and Schwartz (2001), appeal to the cognitive elements of institutions, i.e.

our conceptions of who we are and what ways of action make sense for us in a given situation (Scott 1995). The arguments implying that leaders pursue athletic fitness in order to gain legitimacy and acceptance among peers are consistent with the normative elements in institutional theory, i.e. that actors conform not only because they believe it serves their individual interests, but also because it is expected from them, meaning that they feel they have to do so (Scott, 1995).

Given the reasoning in this chapter with respect to the reviewed literature, the observed phenomenon and the theory, a conceptual framework based on institutional theory is suitable for the research described in this thesis. Such a framework constitutes a lens which enables the research questions to be studied in a structured way and supporting critical evaluation of the findings. Thereby, it also serves as an aid for explaining the described phenomenon.

1.2 Problem Definition

We believe that current research is polarized, focusing either on the positive or the negative aspects of combining managerial occupations with demanding fitness programs. A topic that has largely been neglected by previous research is to study what actually drives certain individuals to continuously engage in endurance training and racing, while also pursuing demanding professional high-level careers. We find it particularly interesting to study individuals who take part in the more extreme endurance events like marathon and Ironman, even though research indicates that optimal performance can be achieved with a lot less exercise than what is normally needed for these races (Neck & Cooper, 2000). Our aim is also to understand how the individuals' views fit with the two sides of the phenomenon, as described in the background above.

Research questions:

- What drives corporate leaders with demanding jobs to invest in time consuming endurance training?
- How are CEOs that do extensive endurance training impacted in their corporate roles?
- To what extent are endurance exercising CEOs influenced by institutional pressures, and how do institutional pressures manifest themselves?

Since previous research show that firms whose CEO do endurance racing deliver higher profit margins, we believe this area deserves further research. Through our research we aspire to contribute to the understanding of why certain business leaders decide to invest time in endurance training and racing. Furthermore, we will increase the understanding on how individuals in this situation perceive the interlinkages between endurance training, racing and performance at work. Such knowledge can help both corporate HR professionals as well as business leaders to maximize individual as well as firm performance. As an example, HR professionals can learn to design programs and processes that draws on the findings in this thesis when it comes to drivers for activating individuals in unhealthy inactive work environments. Similarly, managers aspiring increase their fitness level for various reasons, will be better equipped and able to understand how endurance training can serve as an instrument that can help them achieve this.

Furthermore, by studying the described phenomenon through the lenses of institutional theory, we provide new insights about what role institutional pressures plays on impacting business leaders decisions with respect to how they view endurance exercising and racing.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Empirical Studies on Athletic Leaders

Business leaders who engage in physical training and racing have been studied from different perspectives in the past. Some of the most influential studies in this field are reviewed and explained below.

One widely cited article is "The Making of a Corporate Athlete" by Loehr and Schwartz (2001), which present an integrated theory of performance management relating to business leaders. Their theory addresses the body, the emotions, the mind and the spirit of the leader and they argue that each of those aspects are profoundly influencing each other and that failure to address any one of them compromise the leaders' performance. They present the physical well-being as the foundation of their Performance Pyramid, which depict the hierarchical relationships between the different aspects mentioned above, see Figure 1 below.
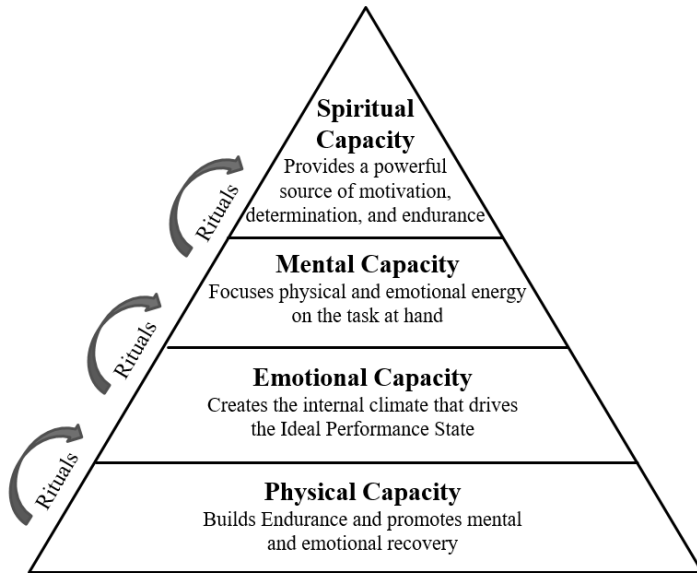
Spiritual Capacity
Provides a powerful source of motivation, determination, and endurance

Rituals

Mental Capacity
Focuses physical and emotional energy on the task at hand

Rituals

Emotional Capacity
Creates the internal climate that drives the Ideal Performance State

Rituals

Physical Capacity
Builds Endurance and promotes mental and emotional recovery

Figure 1: The Performance pyramid presented in the article "The Making of a Corporate Athlete" (Loehr & Schwartz, 2001)

Loehr and Schwartz argue that increasing capacity at all levels in the performance pyramid allow athletes and executives to reach what they refer to as the Ideal Performance State (IPS). Deviations from IPS on the other hand reduce chances of performing at full potential over time, and/or at the cost of themselves, their families and corporations they work for. Loehr and Schwartz argue that key for achieving IPS is to alternate between stress and recovery at all levels of the performance pyramid. To achieve this, they further argue that having rituals (habits) that promote such oscillation is positive for managing to consistently be in the IPS.

Another perspective is taken by Maravelias (2015) who discuss how Critical Management Studies (CMS) focus on the regulation of identities with respect to business leaders. He exemplifies this by discussing how management has become a phenomenon that concerns not just what employees do at work, but also how they live their lives and who they are in a sense that transcend the professional-private distinction. He defines "Athletic Corporate Elites" as an elite class of individuals that take part in sports activities to prove their "true" competitive nature. Maravelias continues to argue that the phenomenon of athletic corporate elites has emerged as an example of new techniques and authorities which have come to play important roles in making up individuals who self-manage not only their professional behaviour and skills, but also their selves and lifestyles in accordance with managerial ideas. Maravelias argue that athletic corporate elites in

fact is an expression of a neoliberal governmentality that cancel out the distinction between an economic world of work and a private social world by inciting individuals to use their lives in full as human capital. Furthermore, he presents how athletic corporate elites also have different motives for promoting their subordinates physical exercise and why they conduct their own. At the same time, he also highlights the symbolism in the athletic endeavours of athletic executives. He writes: *"While they [corporate elite] typically mention the win-win relation between organizational effectiveness and employee well-being as an argument for investing in employees' WHP (Workplace Health Promotion) activities, the argument for their own engagement in sports related activities are of a more symbolic and personal nature."* (Maravelias, 2015:282).

Maravelias is also saying that athletic corporate elites do not just strive to be healthy. *"They go further and pursue athletic, endurance oriented and above all competitive sports activities, which are sometimes dangerous and may in fact jeopardize their health"* (Maravelias, 2015:282). Another interesting finding from Maravelias study is that while regular employees carry our health activities primarily in their spare time, the athletic corporate elites engage in health activities also during working hours. In fact, the study indicates that the executive elite does not make clear-cut distinctions between work and leisure and between work and sports.

In a recent publication by Johansson (2017), she presents a study on the self-presentational practices of what she refers to as "sporty top managers" in Sweden. Johansson followed a group of sporty top managers and through interviews and observations she examined how this group interpret their athletic endeavours to express important values, beliefs and concerns to express whom they want to become, as occupants of the leadership role. What Johansson found was that the athletic endeavours undertaken by these individuals serve as a source of self-meaning for the sporty top managers. By participating in athletic activities, the top managers seek to present themselves with an idealized picture of an "athletic leader". Furthermore, Johansson found that the sporty top managers adopt a leadership style in which "athletic values" plays a big role. The implications of this can be that these managers tend to promote people who are also perceived as sporty, while excluding people that do not fulfil those criteria's. Hence, the sporty top managers' own athletic engagement is not only relevant to themselves, but is also important from an organizational point of view. It is also described by Johansson how the sporty top managers attempt

to gain legitimacy and an elite status through the idealized image of themselves as an "athletic leader".

The studies discussed in this section all connect to the topic of managers and business leaders who engage in endurance training. They all highlight the interlinkages between managers engagement in endurance training and their work roles. Also, they show that these couplings are strong and that the individuals engagements in endurance training can have significant implications in their roles and their performance as business leaders. To varying degrees, the studies also connect the identities individuals obtain due to their engagements in endurance training and how this is reflected in their professional roles. Although they share similarities, the studies also differ in the way through which they have studied the phenomenon. While for instance Johansson (2017) study specific aspects of the phenomenon, Loehr and Schwartz (2001) take a more holistic approach. Maravelias's (2015) approach provide interesting findings about differences between managers and other groups of people. To better understand why managers engage in endurance training, we need to study underlying drivers. To be able to encompass different and diverse types of drivers, it is suitable to use a broad and general theory as a base, which is why institutional theory is fitting. As institutional theory is used as a base for studying the phenomenon, the models and research explained so far in this chapter is not explicitly part of our theoretical framework. Instead, the literature reviewed in the subsequent sections of this chapter act as the main constituents of our theoretical framework.

2.2 Institutional Theory

"Once a field becomes well established there is an unstoppable push towards homogenization". This short statement by DiMaggio and Powell (1983:148) sums up the theory of institutions in a good way. More elaborate, the institutional theorists Meyer and Rowan (1977) argue that, in order for an organization to secure resources and survive, it is forced to gain legitimacy by adopting rationalized concepts institutionalized by society, i.e. to homogenize. They refer to these concepts as "myths" and "ceremonies". One example given by Meyer and Rowan (1977:344) is that of an increased pressure to incorporate R&D units *"..as programs of research and development are created and professionals with expertise in these fields are trained and defined".*

The general term for the homogenization achieved by adoption of institutionalized myths is "Isomorphism" (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 1995). These institutional theorists attach different labels to the drivers behind this phenomenon. While DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identify coercive, mimetic and normative isomorphism as the main mechanisms for homogenization among organizations, Scott (1995) argue that the forces behind isomorphism can be grouped in what he calls the three pillars of institutions: normative, regulative and cognitive. He expands the theory by interlinking the pillars orthogonally with what he refers to as three types of carriers; culture, social structures and routines as shown in table 1 below.

Table 1: *Institutional Pillars and Carriers (Scott, 1995).*

Pillar / Carrier	Regulative	Normative	Cognitive
Cultures	Rules, laws	Values, expectations	Categories, typifications
Social structures	Governance systems, power systems	Regimes, authority systems	Structural isomorphism, identities
Routines	Protocols, standard procedures	Conformity, performance of duty	Performance programs, scripts

The three pillars all contribute to an individuals or organizations legitimacy in different ways. The regulative emphasis is on conformity to rules, and legitimate organizations are those established by and operating in accordance with relevant legal requirements. The normative pillar introduces a prescriptive, evaluative, and obligatory dimension into social life, including both values and norms. In the case of gaining legitimacy from the cognitive pillar, a person or organization have to adopt a common frame of reference or definition of the situation. E.g. adopting an orthodox structure or identity in order to relate to a specific situation. Scotts' "carriers of institutions" represents different patterned activities that influence the three pillars. These activities can be habit based actions, routines, standard operating procedures among other things. Many early institutionalists view patterned activities as the more central features of institutions (Scott, 1995).

2.2.1 The Individual's Perspective

Institutional theory is often described from an organizational point of view, e.g. that organizations form structures to gain legitimacy in order to secure resources and survive. This is exemplified by DiMaggio and Powell (1983:150) who write: *"Organizations compete not just for resources and customers, but for political power and institutional legitimacy, for social as well as economic fitness"*. However, Powell and Colyvas (2008) argue that the individual has a major role in institutional theory, namely that it is the enactment of institutions by individuals in concrete social situations that sustain, alter, and extinguish institutions. In this thesis, we focus on the individual and are consequently interested in how institutional mechanisms or pressures affect the individual.

There are structural elements in organizations that are attached to groups of people or individuals, e.g. professions or labels of the organizational charts. Meyer and Rowan (1977) argue that these labels as well as the vocabulary used to describe organizational goals, procedures and policies are analogous to the vocabularies of motive used to account for activities of individuals. In other words, the label CEO explain organizational activities just as jealousy, anger or love explain the actions of individuals. When a person states his or her profession, people usually have a clear idea of what skills and knowledge to expect from that person. This is why we take for granted that an engineer is capable of solving problems or that secretaries have certain tasks. We instantly recognize, feel comfortable and are able to take meaningful actions in relation to such familiar social actors (Scott 1995). The same applies to personal achievements, for example that someone who completed an Ironman has high stamina. By putting the right labels to activities, they can be perceived as high value and attract internal and external commitment (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) connect this with normative isomorphism and professionalization. They attribute this to two aspects, the first being the importance of formal education and the legitimation produced by university specialists. The second is the professional networks that span organizations and fields across which new models spread rapidly, e.g. that formal education gives the legitimacy needed to obtain a certain profession. This means that unless university specialists change the contents of their programs, which is unlikely because that would jeopardize the legitimacy of the university, the profession will over time be more and more homogenized. The networks formed around professions held by formally educated people further fuel the

homogenization by recirculating methods, policies and interpretations of organizational vocabulary.

Furthermore, the normative approach to institutions emphasizes how values and normative frameworks structure choices (Scott 1995). In social context, actions are based on rationalized rules and guidelines for behavior, i.e. values and normative frameworks. Scott (1995) implies that the normative side of institutions force individuals to conform, not because it serves their personal interests, but because it is expected from them - they have to do so. Cognitive frameworks on the other hand stresses the importance of social identities, i.e. our conceptions of who we are and what ways of action make sense for us in a given situation. Rather than focusing on the constraining forces of norms, cognitive theorists point to the importance of guidelines for sensemaking and choosing meaningful actions (Scott, 1995). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identified mimicking as clearly capturing the cognitive dimension of isomorphic processes. I.e. individuals and organizations deal with uncertainty by imitating the ways of others who we use as models. We attempt to imitate others who we regard as superior or as more successful.

In a recent study, Lok et.al. (2017) point towards a new dimension related to institutions, the relevance of emotions. They argue that institutions condition not only how we think and what actions we consider appropriate in a certain situation, they also condition how we feel about various people, events, practices and rules in our lives. This may be part of the explanation to why organizations and individuals sometimes take actions that are not in their best interest, they may feel insecure or uncertain and rationalize an institutionalized action based on a mix of emotion and sense of legitimacy.

Based on the reasoning above, the individual has a part to play in institutional theory. For example, a CEO is a vessel for normative isomorphism bringing mandatory behavior and expectations. At the same time CEO stands for a social identity shaped by cognitive isomorphism bringing certain status and possible privileges.

Organizations which become isomorphic with environmental institutions can encounter crucial consequences. They may incorporate externally legitimized methods and processes instead of what is most efficient. They are likely to use external or ceremonial assessment criteria to value their structural elements. However, applying external fixed institutions reduces turbulence and

promotes stability. It is possible that the commitment of internal participants, e.g. employees, can be increased by incorporating externally legitimated formal structures (Meyer & Rowan 1977).

One may argue that all this can be put in the context of the individual. I.e. a person may act or do things in a certain way because of external influences. The actions may not necessarily be what is best for him or her, but they will be legitimate and approved of by society. The title a person has will put normative pressure on him or her to act in a certain way and at the same time it will give him or her certain attributes in the eye of the society. It can be a professional title, e.g. CEO or an academic title, e.g. Ph.D., or even a title gained by personal achievement e.g. IRONMAN.

2.3 Role-Identity Contradiction in Institutional Theory

Institutional literature, as described in chapter 2.2 could be interpreted as putting constraints on individuals' capacity to affect their role in the environment they are in. Taken-for-granted beliefs, rationalized myths, and professional norms decide who we are and how we should behave (Creed et.al., 2002). However, in this section we will show examples of studies that present a different view. These studies give examples of when individuals either find their personal identity, or the identity of others, contradicting with what they observe as the norm in their institutional environment. When this happens, they are inclined to take action to legitimate their identity. Theorists call this phenomenon "institutional contradiction" (Creed, Dejordy & Lok, 2010; Creed et.al., 2002). This addition to institutional theory is specifically interesting to us as it may give a new dimension to institutional theory, possibly explaining endogenous agency and institutional change. In other words, how individuals can act on the basis of choice and affect their environment. Arguably, people are not completely confined to institutional pressures and do have an influence on their environment. The reason for this can according to Creed, Dejordy and Lok, (2010) be traced to the contradictory relations among the cultural rules, scripts, models of causality, and patterns of behavior that make up social arrangements and institutional frameworks in society.

The concept of "role-identity incompatibility" is central to the theory of institutional contradiction, i.e. when a professional role is incompatible with a person's identity in an institutional environment. For example, Creed, Dejordy and Lok (2010), studied gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) ministers in catholic congregations. However, role-identity incompatibility

could be applied in many settings where institutional pressures are strong. The role of a CEO for example may be associated with a hard-working elderly male, he might be slightly overweight and generally unhealthy. A triathlete on the other hand may be associated with high fitness level, young or middle aged and excessive amounts of training time. The CEO-triathlete role-identity may be incompatible according to some institutional actors, e.g. the board of directors.

Creed, Dejordy and Lok (2010) argue that individuals who experience institutional assumptions, regarding their identity-role as institutional contradicting, may feel that the integrity of both their identities and their profession is threatened. However, these people can work with their own view of their identity in relation to the institution to form deeply personal legitimating accounts for claiming and using institutional roles in ways that are better aligned with their identities, thus challenging the institution. These people claim and authorize their roles by selectively amplifying and reinvigorating institutionally available narratives and meanings in identity constructions to legitimize their role-identity.

Another interesting phenomenon related to role-identity incompatibility is some individuals' capacity to adjust their identity to be compatible with multiple institutional settings, and in some cases decide for others what an institution stands for. Creed, Dejordy and Lok (2010) state that, these people use suitable logics and frames from society. An example is how managers' capacity to access and deploy cultural arrangements and resources across settings is strengthened by having multiple social identities and an understanding of the social identities of employees etc. I.e. social setting and social identity affect the choice between and use of available cultural logics to give meaning and legitimacy in certain situations (Creed et.al., 2002). In addition, certain roles (e.g., teacher, preacher, expert, and theorist) has the right to make connections and interpret cultural logics and meanings for others. Sometimes professionals claim and use institutional roles like these to infuse them with new meaning, sometimes to prove that they are disconfirmations of the institutionalized assumptions of identity-role incompatibility (Creed, Dejordy & Lok 2010).

If individuals are successful in either affecting their own role-identity relationship or the meaning of an institutionalized system in the view of others, they are institutional entrepreneurs with the power to frame the common meanings and identities that motivate collective institution building. This means that social actors use their knowledge of cultural logics and institutional settings to

provide the common meanings and identities that mobilize local participation in sustaining or changing institutional arrangements (Creed et.al., 2002). Creed, Dejordy and Lok (2010) agree with this and state that institutional theorists are increasingly recognizing the importance of identity as a mechanism through which institutions can evolve.

The foundation of the theoretical framework used for the research presented in this thesis, is based on Scott's (1995) definition of institutional theory, i.e. regulative, normative and cognitive institutional pressures known as "the three pillars". To account for the critique against Scott's theory, from researchers such as Creed et.al (2002), on how limited it is when it comes to explaining individuals' capacity to affect their role in society, we see the need to complete our framework with the theory of role-identity contradiction in institutions, as described above in this section. Hence, our theoretical framework includes Scott's three pillars and role-identity contradiction as a forth element.

3 Method

3.1 Research Approach

Conducting research on business leaders and their endurance training and racing is a relatively new phenomenon. The primary area of interest in this study, i.e. why business leaders engage in such activities, has not been researched previously. As described in Chapter 2, much of the previous research in adjacent fields focus on other aspects of business leaders who train and race in endurance sports. One examples of such aspects is how executives can use physical exercise as one brick in building a foundation for achieving high performance in work life (Loehr & Schwartz, 2001).

Maravelias (2015) touch the subject we have studied by briefly discussing the motives behind "athletic corporate elites" engagement in sports. However, while Maravelias draw on the shortcomings of Critical Management Studies and principles developed by Foucault, we have studied the phenomenon from an institutional theory perspective. Our choice of institutional theory as the main foundation for our research is based on its ability to explain mechanisms that are evident in the studied field. Furthermore, institutional theory provides new and useful means for interpreting and explaining these mechanisms in a way which has not been done before.

Given that our research topic is relatively new, lacks previous research and therefore is not well understood, we used an exploratory approach as this is a suitable approach in such cases (Saunders & Lewis, 2009). Furthermore, in the attempt to answer our research questions, a qualitative method is selected since it according to Merriam (2010) enables flexibility and collection of rich and detailed data. This is important since we are aiming to extract the informants personal view on the topic, which could differ drastically between different individuals.

3.2 Research Design

The primary source of data for our study has been in-depth interviews with business leaders who engage in endurance training and racing. The sample consist of nine CEOs working in small, medium and large companies, covering the entire span from a few up to more than 2000 employees. The CEOs represent different industries ranging from management consulting to engineering and architecture. As a complement, we also interviewed three persons working professionally as triathlon and cross-country skiing coaches for people like the ones studied in this thesis. These coaches work with several clients each, whereof several fit into the category we have studied. Based on their experiences from many years work with many different people in executive positions, the coaches were able to provide valuable additional information. They also provided another view on the type of individuals we have studied with respect to for instance how they approach their endurance training and racing, how they are affected by it in their professional work etc.

Selection of informants was done based on theory of purposive sampling. As presented by Bryman and Bell (2015:430), this is a sampling method for which the units of analysis (informants in our case) are selected in terms of criteria that allows the research questions to be answered. Interviewees are primarily Ironman triathlon participants that the authors had heard about already (but did not know). We knew about them after having studied result lists from Ironman races, reading blogs and/or social media posts as well as speaking to other people familiar with Ironman triathlon in Sweden. Also, a snowballing approach was used to some extent since some of the coaches were asked to provide suitable candidates to interview and that fit into the target group for the study. In addition, some of the informants are persons that has been written about in business

media because of being both successful business leaders as well as actively engaged in endurance training and racing.

Table 2 below provides additional information with respect to the selection of informants. Since the informants shall remain anonymous, additional detailed information is not disclosed.

The selection is relatively conformal in terms of age and gender. The youngest CEO is 39 years, the oldest 59 years and the average age among the CEOs is 47.8 years. This is a reasonably good match with the average age of all CEOs in Sweden which is 42.8 year (Lönestatistik, 2018). Of the 9 interviewed CEOs, only one was a female, which may seem as too few. However, given that the fraction of female CEOs in Sweden is 16% (Åslund, 2017), the single female among the 9 interviewees represent the available population of CEOs in a good way. Also, in e.g. Ironman Triathlon races, the average fraction of women in all races was 11.8% during 2016 (Hansson, 2016), so also from that aspect, it is a representative sample.

Table 2: *Informants sample.*

Informant	Gender	Age	Position	Interviewer	Interview date
C1	Male	33	Coach	Lejon & Lindholm	December 21st 2017
C2	Male	44	Coach	Lejon & Lindholm	January 3rd 2018
C3	Male	35	Coach	Lindholm	March 9th 2018
E1	Male	59	CEO	Lejon	February 16th 2018
E2	Male	55	CEO	Lejon & Lindholm	February 21st 2018
E3	Male	42	CEO	Lejon & Lindholm	February 23rd 2018
E4	Male	43	CEO	Lindholm	February 26th 2018
E5	Male	49	CEO	Lejon	March 14th 2018
E6	Male	51	CEO	Lindholm	March 19th 2018
E7	Female	39	CEO	Lindholm	March 19th 2018
E8	Male	45	CEO	Lejon	March 21st 2018
E9	Male	47	CEO	Lejon	March 28th 2018

3.3 Data Collection

Collection of data for this study was done through personal in-depth interviews with the informants. These interviews were done the dates presented in Table 2, which also specifies who conducted the interviews. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in a semi-structured approach where predominantly open-ended questions were asked. According to Bryman and Bell (2015), this is a good method for extracting the informant's personal views and beliefs. It also

opened discussions on other topics, which is desired when conducting an exploratory study (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

An interview guide was used to support and help us remember to cover the relevant aspects. This interview guide is presented in Appendix A. Furthermore, as all informants were native Swedish, all interviews were held in Swedish. All interviews were recorded and we both listened to them several times in order to obtain the information and allow us to mentally process the information. Thereafter, all interviews were listened to by both of us one more time and the most relevant sections were transcribed. The quotes were then mapped to the thematic groups, which are described in section 3.3 below. Quotes presented in this thesis has been translated into English by us and the coding presented in the leftmost column of Table 2 has been used to identify which informant different quotes was made by.

3.4 Data Analysis and Data Presentation

As described above, the interesting quotes and discussions from the interviews were transcribed and mapped onto thematic groups. These correspond to the institutional pillars defined by Scott (1995) and the role-identity aspect as discussed by Creed, Dejordy and Lok (2010) and Creed et.al. (2002). Table 3 list these thematic groups and corresponding keywords proposed by Scott as descriptors of his three pillars as well as keywords identified by us as representative for the role-identity aspect. These thematic groups served as the base for the first order categorization and keywords occurring during the interviews relating to these thematic groups are listed in the rightmost column of Table 3. As a next step, quotes that belonged to the same thematic group were sorted into subgroups. These subgroups thereby contained quotes that were related to similar aspects, which gave us an overview of whether the opinions and views expressed by the informants were coherent, or if there were diverging views between different informants. Also, it enabled us to distinguish the most relevant quotes from the less relevant (cf. Langley, 1999). Finally, the most relevant findings and examples of corresponding quotes are analyzed and presented in Chapter 4, which is structured based on the thematic groups.

Table 3: *Thematic groups and corresponding key words according to which the interesting quotes and discussions from the interviews were categorized in. These thematic groups coincide with the institutional pillars defined by Scott (1995).*

Thematic groups	Keywords (from theory)	Keywords (from interviews)
Regulative	rules, laws, governance systems, power systems, protocols, standard procedures	Mandatory training for employees, absence of regulations on CEO's
Normative	values, expectations, regimes, authority systems, conformity, performance of duty	**Authorities:** Consultants, professional athletes, researchers **Networks:** professional, private, coaching teams **Image/Status:** Extreme events, seems interesting
Cognitive	Categories, typifications, structural isomorphism, identities, performance programs, scripts	self-realization, improvement, goal fulfilment, commitment, dedication, anxiety
Role-Identity	Influence, incompatible, conflicting roles/institutions, contradiction, institutional entrepreneurs	association, connecting identity role, contradiction, adaptation, conception

In a second order categorization, the findings presented in Chapter 4 were grouped into two main categories; Job performance and Leader attributes, that are described in Chapter 5, which also contain a discussion on how our theoretical framework have helped to understand the phenomenon. Finally, Chapter 6 present conclusions with respect to the studied phenomenon, our contributions to academia and managerial implications in relation to this study.

3.5 Limitations and Quality of the Research

One limitations with the research we present in this thesis include that only people who are actively themselves conducting endurance training and racing have been interviewed. However, as it is their perspective on the topic we have intended to study, it is a justifiable choice for our research. Nevertheless, it does mean that we might have missed other possible interesting views on the phenomenon.

Similarly, both of us are ourselves engaging in endurance training and racing. Also, given our professional careers and managerial positions in our companies, we are to some extent similar to the persons we study in this thesis although that neither of us work as CEO. While this provides us with enhanced possibilities for thorough understanding of the individuals we have interviewed, it also increases the risk that our interpretations are biased. To mitigate this risk, we have taken

measures and ensured to critically review our interpretations and findings and when found necessary, discuss them with our supervisor to get a second opinion.

As the selection of informants are limited to Swedish CEOs' and the interviews have been conducted during a short time period, the possibility to generalize to other countries or cultures is limited. However, given that several industries and sizes of companies are represented in the selection, the findings are likely to be generalizable to other CEOs' in similar positions in Sweden.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest that the two primary criteria for assessing the quality of a qualitative study is trustworthiness and authenticity. The trustworthiness of this study is argued for below by discussing the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of this research. The credibility of this study in ensured by among other precautions leveraging triangulation as defined by Denzin (1970), i.e. by using multiple observers, theoretical perspectives, sources of data and methodologies. Examples of this include that both of us extensively reviewed and discussed all gathered information and that our supervisor and opponents were leveraged to help critically review our research. Furthermore, we also considered both institutional theory as well as other explanation models offered by both popular media as well as academic research within the field of athletic executives. Also, the fact that we besides the nine CEOs also interviewed three triathlon and cross-country skiing coaches gave additional perspectives on the studied phenomenon. This included complementing, and sometimes conflicting, views on different aspects that were brought up by the CEO's during the interviews.

Another precaution we took in to ensure credibility was that most of the first interviews were conducted jointly by both of us (as can be seen in Table 2). The reason for this was for both of us to get a jump start into understanding the topic and what specific aspects that were important to cover. It was also a way for us to synchronize ourselves and to ensure that we remained somewhat consistent in the type of questions asked and the topics discussed in subsequent interviews, which were conducted by only one of us. All interviews were also recorded and we have used verbatim interview quotes, thus using the own words of the interviewees. Consequently, we have carried out the research according to the canons of good practice.

With respect to the transferability of the study, this was discussed above and to summarize, the study can be analytically generalized in certain ways whereas it cannot in others (see above). As

far as dependability goes, the entire research process as has been reviewed thoroughly by our opponents, our supervisor and examiner at multiple instances during our work. Hence, the dependability of our research has been ensured. Finally, the confirmability of this research has, just as proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1994), also been ensured through auditing by opponents, the supervisor and the examiner for this thesis. In addition, both of us have been very aware of our similarities with the persons studied in this thesis and have therefore tried to keep a critical distance and maintain a reflexive approach to our findings.

4 Findings and Analysis

This chapter is organized based on findings related to the different building blocks in our theoretical framework, i.e. the thematic groups of Table 3.

4.1 Regulative Institutional Pressures

Some of the interviewed CEOs have created Workplace Health Promotion (WHP) programs, i.e. programs that intend to increase health among employees in their companies. In relation to these WHP programs, there are a couple of examples where a regulative element is included. Informant E2 for instance force all members of the management team to perform one hour of training before they meet for dinner after a day of conference, *"If we (the management team) are on a conference there is always scheduled training before the dinner. That is just the way it is and everyone should exercise. We do not even discuss that anymore. Everybody can decide themselves what they want to exercise, but they shall exercise. No excuses are accepted" (E2).* While E2 only impose mandatory training on the management team, informant E8 has gone one step further and introduced mandatory training for all employees, which he believes to be a key ingredient in the company's success, *"Our core values and mandatory training are what is creating our company culture, a winning culture. We have better endurance, are fresh minded, more creative and our delivery is better (E8)."* In relation to the WHP programs, some of the CEOs also mention that there are rules and laws regarding how you as an employer shall work to reduce sick leave and be preventive in your work to promote health among your employees. Their way of doing this is in many cases to structure WHP programs and promote training for the employees. Informant E1

describe the reason for why he did that as a projection of his own interest, *"In the beginning it was a reflection of my own interest. I had a personal interest in nutrition and training that I wanted to transfer to my employees to benefit their health"* (E1).

Despite some of the CEOs imposing regulative pressures on their employees through the WHP programs described above, no major regulative pressures that cause them to engage in endurance training were found when analyzing the interviews. However, the absence of regulative pressure has a noteworthy impact on the CEOs possibility to invest large amounts of time in endurance training. This is explained by informant E7 who said: *"On one hand one might ask how you can make time for your training as a CEO. On the other hand, it is harder if you work as a middle manager. I (CEO) can delegate and more freely plan my time"* (E7). Similar remarks were made also by other informants and the fewer regulatory pressures impacting what to do and when to do it seems to be a key enabler for many of the informants when it comes to making time for their endurance training despite large responsibilities and high workload.

4.2 Normative Institutional Pressures

From the discussions with the informants, three main sources for normative pressure was identified; authorities, networks and image/status. For each of these sources, the types of normative pressure appearing is explained below and different concrete examples of such pressures that was mentioned during the interviews are presented.

The first type of normative pressure is how authorities, such as researchers, consultants and professional athletes impose normative pressures. One example is how consultants and researchers argue for that physical exercise has a positive impact on the individuals work performance. Informant E2 explained how a consultant he met planted a seed in his head, *"2010 I met a man who is a management consultant and a marathon runner. He strongly believes in the coupling between sports and performance at work. He has also written a book on this topic"* (E2). E2 then goes on and explain how he because of this went on and searched for more knowledge within the topic, which eventually made him structure a WHP (Workplace Health Promotion) program with the purpose of increasing employees' fitness. The motive for doing this was to increase their work performance and ultimately the company's financial result, as explained by E2: *"Among other things, I read more about how endurance training affect the synapses in the brain. I want my*

company to compete on creativity rather than price. If we can have the most creative employees we will be successful. Hence, I believe that all health initiatives we run in the company will pay back in creativity" (E2).

The WHP programs initiated as an effect of this are usually in turn imposing normative pressures on the employees in the companies the CEOs are running. Informant E3 for instance, who have also initiated WHP based on his conviction that higher fitness among the staff will lead to improved work performance, explained that: *"Everybody has one paid work hour per week when they can do fitness training" (E3)*. E3 also promote employees who engage in sports in other ways. For instance, rewarding employees that decide to participate in certain endurance events by providing free training clothes, pay their start fee etc. This is a clear signal from the CEO that it is appreciated if the staff engage in this type of activities and that taking part give legitimacy.

An example of how authorities subject the CEOs to normative pressures and affect their behavior is that some of the interviewed CEOs follow professional athletes on social media and try to mimic their approach to sports. They do this in various aspects such as how to train, what to train, what equipment to use etc. This was something that were discussed by all three coaches and C3 elaborated on the phenomenon by saying: *"A lot of the people I coach follow elite cross-country skiers on social media and get inspired by them. Many are adopting the same skiing technique as the professionals, even though they don't have the fitness to benefit from it. Also, they look at what type of training sessions the professionals do and they try to replicate those" (C3).*

The second type of institutional pressure that became evident from the interviews is how different kind of networks that the CEOs belongs to act as sources of inspiration with respect to training. Examples include traditional CEO networks, whereof some also have a clear health profile. For instance, E3 described that he is part of a network for CEOs running companies that all have physical exercise for their staff as part of their strategy. E3 described this network by saying: *"Within the network we exchange knowledge and experience regarding using health initiatives as an integrated part of our companies strategies. It is only information exchange with respect to the companies' health promotion work, not with respect to our own endurance training and racing" (E3)*. Other types of networks also contribute to normative pressures. One clear example is when individuals in the CEOs network post training related content on social media. This shows how

not just professional athletes, but also friends who are part of the CEOs networks impact the actions taken by the CEOs with respect to training. Informant E4 said that, *"I like doing swimming with a group of people in a Facebook group for open water swimming. If for instance I post that I will do a swim the next morning, it creates commitment that in turn ensure that I also do swim the next morning. (E4) "*. E4 then goes on and talk about how other people's post on social media inspire him in his training, *"I get inspired by other people's posts on social media. It used to be by reading their blogs, but now it is more through Instagram, Facebook etc. I also post a lot in relation to my own training and especially my Instagram feed is full of training related posts" (E4)*. As the statements above implies, social media offers a platform for both contributing to imposing normative pressure on others and at the same time being subjected to normative pressures imposed by others, thereby leading to isomorphism within the network. Networks can exist in other forms than on social media, but the effect is similar and informant E3 explained how he get inspired by others' training, *"I search for inspiration from others for my own training. I do this through people I know and people I meet. I do not read blogs or post things on social media, but I speak to lots of people" (E3)*.

An interesting finding is that when in the context of training, the CEOs very rarely speak about business or work, even though the people they train with might also be executive business leaders, or even colleagues. As E6 explain: *"Every year we are 17 people from work, including several executives, that travel together to Italy to participate in a long distance cross-country ski race. During this trip we never talk about business, the discussions are all about training and the race" (E6)*. Also, the coaches had noticed this behavior and C3 spoke about it in the following way: *"Something that I would like to highlight is that the executives that participate at my training camps never talk about their work. Neither are they talking in the phone or writing emails on their cell phone. I've also noticed that the more senior a manager is, the less stressed they seem to be" (C3)*.

The third category of normative pressures that were often mentioned during the interviews are aspects related to the image of extreme endurance racing and the status it is considered to incur. As C2 explained: *"Health has become a status marker today. 20 years ago, the watercooler subjects used to be what car you drive or what type of watch you wear. Today, it is about being able to show your finisher medal from the latest Ironman race you did" (C2)*. Furthermore, C2

was also discussing that certain endurance sports, like triathlon, have gotten an image of being extreme,*"Triathlon is considered much more extreme than for instance events in the Swedish classic circuit (en svensk klassiker) and it does not matter which triathlon distance you are referring to. If someone say Stockholm Triathlon [olympic distance triathlon, i.e. 400m swim, 40 km bike and 10 km run] it sounds tougher and more extreme than if someone say vätternrundan [a 300km cycling race] as everyone knows that men on standard bikes have been doing this since the 1950's" (C2).* C2 then goes on and talk about how the status of sports like triathlon have increased considerably over the past few years, *"Triathlon wasn't even a factor to consider in Sweden before 2012 when Lisa Nordén won the olympic gold medal and Kamlar Järnmannen gained official Ironman status. Before that, very few mentioned completing an Ironman race as a goal" (C2).* C2 also elaborate on his belief that despite Triathlon and Ironman races being a relatively new phenomenon, the type of people doing it have always existed, *"I think that these people have done other things before, done races in the Swedish classic circuit, climbing high mountain peaks etc." (C3).* The status and extreme image of certain events like Ironman was mentioned also by the other coaches, but often not in an explicit way by the CEOs. The high status that Triathlon have gained was however indirectly mentioned as a reason for why some of the CEO's started doing triathlon. For instance, informant E1 explained: *"My interest in triathlon started when I was at the swimming arena where my kids were taking swim lessons. I then saw how the triathletes were training and I became interested in doing that myself" (E1).*

In addition to these three sources, it is also noteworthy to highlight how one of the coaches explained that the normative conception about engaging a personal coach has evolved over time, *I started my personal coaching business in 2010 and since then the willingness to pay for such a service have increased dramatically. When I started, I charged 6000 SEK/year for a particular service and now I charge 30 000 SEK/year for the same service. When I started I was the only coach offering such services in the town I live and very few were willing to pay 6 000 SEK/year then. Now, there are several coaches offering similar services in the town I live and a lot of people don't hesitate to pay 30 000 SEK/year for the service" (C3).* This statement clearly shows that the norm in relation to this has changed and that engaging seriously in endurance racing has gained higher legitimacy.

4.3 Cognitive Institutional Pressures

Cognitive frameworks stress the importance of social identities, i.e. our conceptions of who we are and what ways of action make sense for us in a given situation.

The interviewed CEOs and Coaches all state that the main drive for enduring hours of tough endurance training is to improve and to become "the best version of themselves". When reflecting on similarities between professional athletes and business leaders, one of the coaches said: *"The common denominator among elite cross-country skiers and business leaders who do endurance training at a high level, is the drive and will to become better"* (C3).

To know if they are improving, the interviewed CEOs stated that they set up clear goals and that they use these goals to measure progress against. They do this in both their professional careers as well as in their private endurance training and racing careers. The goals they set are based on their cognitive sensemaking of the context and the environment they are in, and these goals serve as guidelines for meaningful actions. To a large extent, the CEOs don't let anything come in between them and their goals and they are working hard and with dedication to reach them. Many of the informants also emphasize the need for goals with clear purpose and having complete control and responsibility to reach them. This is equally important to them in their work life as in their private life. Informant E4 described this by saying: *"A big portion of my drive comes from having my own income statement and to clearly know, you have achieved this. I have a much bigger drive when I have a clear profit and loss responsibility than for example only a big sales responsibility. I want complete responsibility. You can compare it with triathlon. I'm not interested in relay triathlon, I want to do the entire race by myself"* (E4). Although they all have goals and constant improvement as key motivational factors, their emotions with respect to measuring and monitoring progress differ. Some of the interviewed CEOs see it as natural to monitor and measure down to the smallest detail while other feel it is taking away the joy and that it can even be a source of anxiety. One example of this is informant E4, who despite working out over an hour per day in average, stated: *"I rarely think it's fun to exercise. My wife does not understand why I feel anxious before I go running. The only exceptions are when I do "odd" training, e.g. when I do trail running, because then you cannot measure the pace in the same way. If, on the other hand, I know how fast I should run, I constantly feel the pressure. It takes away much of the joy for me"* (E4).

These people strongly identify themselves as runners, triathletes, endurance athletes etc. This impact their cognitive sensemaking strongly, e.g. they are very motivated to follow through their exercise plan as it makes sense to them to do so. As informant E9 described it: *"I always try to follow through my training, almost with any available means, for example rescheduling meetings etc. It would take a lot for me to skip a workout"* (E9). Evidence for the importance of following the plan can be found in the fact that most of the CEOs exercise alone even though they enjoy company while working out. The primary reasons they exercise alone are lack of time and dedication to increase their performance. Because of their cognitive pressure, it is not acceptable to them to deviate from the plan they have formulated. This is exemplified by a statement from E5 who said: *"It is more fun to exercise with other people but I do 90% by myself due to lack of time. Do I exercise to socialize, or do I exercise to perform? I exercise to perform. It is more fun to run with my friends, but if they can't keep up with the pace I have in my plan to optimize my training, I run by myself"* (E5).

Many of the interviewed CEOs highlighted that they fulfill their cognitive need with respect to training only when the planed weekly amounts of workouts are realized. Apart from identifying with being physically healthy, the interviewed CEOs also strongly believe that exercising will make them function better in various situations. If they for some reason are not able to exercise during a period, the result can be frustration and bad temper. As informant E8 puts it: *"I'm a much better parent when I exercise. I have more energy and I'm more relaxed, as opposed to being exhausted and finding the kids annoying"* (E8). Hence, they go to great lengths to get their planned exercise done. Some informants squeeze in training whenever there is an opening in their schedules, other informants plan their training around social events in ways that would not make sense to non-endurance training individuals. For instance, informant E4 described how he is able to get his training sessions done: *"Biking 10 before 10, that is 100 km before 10 am, which gets you back home before the kids wake up. And if we go to a dinner party somewhere, I bike one way, either to or from the place. Riding the bike takes roughly the same time as taking the car, at least not double the time"* (E4). The coaches also describe the CEOs in similar ways, e.g. as C1 put it: *"All the ones I coach do at least 7 hours of training per week, and they do that no matter what other engagements they have"* (C1).

According to the interviewed coaches, self-realization and appreciation is an important reason to why these people engage in endurance training and racing. However, most of the interviewed CEOs tone down their athletic achievements and despite often having done unbelievable performances, they are humble when sharing their results and goals. This behavior is further exemplified in the next chapter, covering role-identity contradictions. One informant however gives us reason to believe that the coaches are right when arguing that these individuals do enjoy being acknowledged for their achievements, he states: *"Maybe, I can confess that, it is a way to step into the spotlight too, and it might be part of the personality, one is doing extreme sports because it will put you in the spotlight. You want to be seen, and know that friends are impressed"* (E1).

4.4 Role-Identity Contradictions

Arguably, people are not completely confined to institutional pressures and do have an influence on their environment. The reason for this can be traced to role-identity contradictions in social arrangements and institutional frameworks.

There is a common understanding among the interviewed CEOs that they should not talk about their athletic achievements as it can be seen as negative by other people in their work environment. However, several of the informants find that there are positive personal attributes associated with endurance training that can be transferred to professional roles and general work environments. E.g. informant E4 notice a strong contradiction at work, between his leadership style and his personal identity, he explains: *"To be a top performer both at work and in private is not always a positive thing. I'm very hesitant to talk about my achievements in endurance racing at work. The problem is the combination of a strong leadership, to be perceived as the one that is always right, and at the same time be so damn successful in everything else [private accomplishments]"* (E4). While most of the CEOs try to separate their work role and their private identities, some of the informants have made an effort to legitimize their interest in health and fitness and make it part of their CEO role. They have achieved change by associating fitness with highly legitimate elements in the business institution. E.g. by connecting physical fitness among the employees with high output and earnings. One example is Informant E8 who wanted to introduce mandatory training for all his employees, as he believed that would make them more efficient. He then struggled with

the contradiction between what he cognitively believed was the best thing for his company and what the current business environment norm is, *"The logic was there but not without consequences. What will the customers say? What will the staff say? I processed that for many years. The management team was easy to convince, but the owners were a hard sell. My vision is that customers will want to pay us more, because we stay in shape, because we deliver better than those who don't"* (E8). E8 continued his argumentation with examples of organizations where the relation between physical fitness and performance is unchallenged, firefighters and the Police. These institutions among others include scheduled workouts to make sure a minimum fitness level is maintained in order to maximize performance. Why shouldn't we do the same, E8 argued.

As mentioned previously, the interviewed CEOs all make time for realizing their workout plan. However, for most of them, this is not realized without difficulty. They have to prioritize and be innovative when it comes to time management. One example is to handle the contradiction between their work roles and their athletic engagements. There is most likely a normative pressure to focus your time and energy on your work role, which may lead to a conception that there is little time left for other things, except daily chores and family life. Coach C2 gives us his answer to how the CEOs change their cognitive sensemaking in order to prioritize their training, *"This type of training release lots of energy and time. You may believe that you don't have time, but in this process, many learn that it's unreasonable to lead a life where there's not enough time to sleep, eat or exercise. You have to make time, work differently, commute differently, prioritize, buy services, use all the money you earn for something, buy time and health"* (C2). This implies that the fitness identity has gained strength after the work role was established. In other cases, the fitness or athlete identity was already there. For example, informant E7 experienced incompatibility between the athlete identity and the student role, which led to a change in cognitive sensemaking which is still present in her current role as CEO. E7 said: *"I realized that I didn't have the time to read as much as the other law students. To compete with them, I needed to be more efficient. So, in a way it was good for me not to have as much time, I was forced to focus"* (E7).

As described in section 4.3, the informants identify themselves as athletes to a high degree and take action and formalize goals in relation to this cognitive pressure. However, in several of the informants' statements, the athlete identity is in conflict with other roles, e.g. being a parent. The

solution is to relieve some of the pressure by relabeling from athlete to someone who "just" works out frequently. Informant E5 describes how he stopped doing triathlon races and consequently, in his mind, quit training, *"I think work and having small children gave me that [Positive] stress anyway, I didn't need exercising. But, my self-image might be a little bit off, come to think of it, when we were at conferences for example, I went running every morning. Exercising gave me energy, but I intentionally excluded racing, it would have been too much for me to handle"* (E5).

5 Discussion

From the findings in chapter 4 and the key statements from previous empirical studies in section 2.1, a second order categorization was conducted. This enabled us to categorize the findings in two groups; job performance and leader attributes. Job performance relate to how managers connect endurance training to their own as well as their employees job performance. Leader attributes on the other hand relate to how certain attributes are attached to managers, companies and their employees as a consequence of their engagements in endurance training and racing. By comparing our findings with previous literature relating to these topics, we are able to identify both similarities and differences with previous studies.

Our inclusion of theory on role-identity contradiction as a complement to Scott's (1995) institutional pillars enable us to identify aspects which has not been found in previous research, which demonstrates that our theoretical framework is suitable for studying similar phenomena. This is further elaborated on in section 5.3.

5.1 Job Performance

How athletic training can impact performance at work have been presented in several studies in the past. One example is the study by Limbach and Sonnenburg (2015), in which they present evidence that companies whose CEO have completed a Marathon are worth 5% more than companies whose CEO haven't. This is a quantitative measure on the benefit of having a CEO that engage in endurance training. However, it does not offer a more detailed explanation to why these companies are worth more. In our study, we have found that CEOs who do endurance training often create WHP Programs for their employees, in which they through normative and regulative institutional pressures encourage and force their employees to exercise. Hence, one explanation to

why companies whose CEOs have completed a marathon are worth more could be that they also more often implement such WHP programs. If these programs enable the employees of the companies to work more efficiently, that would explain the higher value of the companies. Another possible explanation could be found in the concept of legitimacy, as explained by institutional theory. According to Meyer and Rowan (1977), higher legitimacy adds probability of securing resources, such as attracting customers and negotiating good agreements with suppliers. This in turn obviously result in higher valuation of these companies compared to competitors. A reason for the higher legitimacy of CEOs who run marathons compared to those who don't could be that they are perceived as having certain attributes that are highly valued in their business environment, e.g. being motivated, self-disciplined having a doer-mentality etc. Whether endurance training and racing are associated with such attributes will be further discussed in section 5.2.

As both our findings as well as the study by Maravelias (2015) indicate, CEOs often have different motives for why they engage in endurance training themselves and why they want their employees to do it. In our findings, we see that the main motivation for wanting employees to be doing endurance training is to get them to perform better at work, which is in line with what Maravelias (2015) describe. Seen from an institutional theory perspective, it became obvious to us that there is a normative conception among the interviewed CEOs and coaches in this study, saying that people who do endurance training actually perform better. This conception is founded in normative pressures originating from authorities and networks, in which it is considered a given that people who exercise also perform better at work. Also, it is founded in a cognitive pressure caused by self-observations made by the CEOs in relation to perceived performance improvements due to their own endurance training.

A more facetted explanation to why endurance training can indeed create better work performance is offered by Loehr and Schwartz (2001). They argue that key for achieving what they refer to as the Ideal Performance State (IPS) is to alternate between stress and recovery in the body, the emotions, the mind, and the spirit (see section 2.1 and Figure 1). This alternation between stress and recovery is referred to as oscillation, and to reach IPS, rituals that promote oscillation must be established. In our findings we see that endurance training is described as such a ritual by many of the interviewed CEOs. They all have demanding and stressful jobs, so intuitively one could think that simply laying down on the couch after work would be a way of recover after a stressful day,

hence creating oscillation. However, their jobs are stressful for their mind and emotions, while not physically stressful. By laying down on the couch, the only guaranteed recovery is for the body, while it is likely that stressful thoughts and emotions lingers. From our findings, it appears that endurance training offers a better way to achieve oscillation at more levels. It is described by some of the CEOs as a means for recovering the mind and emotions, e.g. by enabling them to let go of thoughts related to an issue or problem that have kept them preoccupied for a long time. Another example is how they describe that they get new perspectives or find solutions to problems they haven't been able to solve while sitting behind their desks. Several of the informants also described how lack of training make them more prone to getting irritated, sad and generally in a worse mood compared to when they are able to get their endurance training done. For the studied CEOs, endurance training can serve as a ritual for achieving oscillation. An indication of this is that many of them describe that it takes a lot for them to not follow through a scheduled training session. Once a training session is planned, it gets done, almost no matter what other important tasks they have to do. Hence, it is clear that endurance training can be considered a ritual that promote oscillation and according to Loehr and Schwartz's (2001) reasoning will enable individuals who do endurance training to reach IPS easier and consequently perform better at work.

5.2 Leader Attributes

Previous research on the phenomenon studied in this thesis imply that physical exercising and fitness has explicit connections with personal attributes related to managerial roles, as well as more general organizational characteristics. In this section, we compare statements from other researchers in this area with our own findings.

In section 5.1, covering aspects related to job performance, we discussed how other studies argue that maintaining a healthy lifestyle is a way to maximize the potential to be effective at work. Maravelias (2015) goes against this and argue that the main reason is to fit in with the top management peers, i.e. to be perceived as someone with the right attributes for the managerial role and community. Haggard and Williams (1992) reason along the same lines, i.e. that the phenomenon is a manifestation of top managers beliefs in what qualities makes a good leader, e.g. being a runner implies certain identity images, for instance that one is physically fit, motivated and self-disciplined. The sporty lifestyle of the top executives is meant to stand for competitiveness,

self-control, a doer mentality etc. at work. according to Johansson (2017). Furthermore, she argues that the athletic endeavors undertaken by managers become analogies and symbols, not only for personal success, but also for the success of the company.

The interviewed coaches all agree that for business leaders, there are many fitting attributes that are part of an endurance athlete's personality. The coaches do their best to help spread this view, it is in their best interest because it gives them legitimacy and drives their business. This creates a normative pressure that according to institutional theory will create an isomorphic behavior among top managers, eventually making the statements by abovementioned researchers true. However, our findings show different aspects of this. The main reason for the CEOs to exercise according to themselves, is to become better at the sport they do. They do most of their training alone, out of sight from peer managers. Also, in contradiction with the observation by Maravelias, is the CEOs unanimous statement that they rarely talk about work or business when they exercise with others. Additionally, according to the interviewed coaches, groups and networks in the endurance athlete community are diverse, consisting of managers and people with high academic educations to a high degree but also many people not part of the managerial ranks. I.e. it is unlikely that the CEOs exercise to become better aligned with an existing group of managers in their work environment. It has been said by the informants that the reason is rather the opposite, namely to stand out of the crowd, to do something "extreme" to be noticed for. E.g. if all the managers play golf or tennis, our informant CEOs would probably opt for something different but just as legitimizing. Noteworthy is that most of the informants, CEOs and coaches, talk about how they see a trend in moving away from competitive racing and instead move towards events with less measurability and more adventurous elements. Our findings indicate that this stems from two parallel reasons. The first reason is that the perception of which activities that are extreme and legitimate change, e.g. for some time now triathlon has been considered extreme, but with more and more people participating, eventually it will become part of the norm and no different to tennis or golf. The second reason is the pressure the CEOs feel when there is a clear benchmark, e.g. it's easy to figure out the result one need to achieve in a 10km running race in order to rank among the top athletes. A more adventurous race lift some of this pressure and emphasis more on the achievement in completion. Connected to this is the picture conveyed by business media about what is considered extreme and thereby providing legitimacy. Today, they write about Ironman, Marathon etc., but there is a trend that they have started to write about new types of competitions. These races are

more adventurous and often include elements that make the results difficult to compare against established norms about what is good and what is not. Examples of such races are survival runs and swim runs.

Maravelias, look at managers from a wider perspective than we have done. In this thesis, we have only studied CEOs, i.e. members of the highest managerial level in organizations. This may affect our result when it comes to athleticism as a way to fit in with the management peers. Our study show that the CEOs don't need to try and fit in, because they often create management teams around them with members who exercise frequently. However, the CEOs do relate their athletic endeavors to work by saying that they have the same main drive in both sports and at work, i.e. to improve and fulfil goals. When it comes to labeling physically fit people with positive work-related attributes, the CEOs rarely use themselves as examples intentionally. In fact, they are reluctant to do so because it is not always well received by the business institution. However, when scratching the surface one can see that the CEOs often appear in situations related to health and fitness anyway, e.g. in interviews, articles, sponsorship etc. This puts them in the spotlight in a way that makes it hard to fully separate their athlete identities from the culture and performance of the company they represent. Activities like these are common, even though some of the CEOs have experienced strong negative reactions from their work environment when their athletic achievements have become too central. The argument by Johansson (2017) that athletic endeavors undertaken by managers become analogies and symbols, not only for personal success, but also for the success of the company may be true in some cases. However, according to our findings, it is more likely that managers avoid fronting their own achievements and instead highlight their employees' athletic accomplishments. By doing this, the CEOs transfer the desirable attributes related to athleticism to their employees, thus still attaching those to their company's success. This can then be used to motivate WHP initiatives, which supposedly result in higher efficiency, creativity and ultimately improved financial metrics. To convince others on their intent of not using themselves as role models, CEOs say that WHPs are not initiated to force employees to be healthy just because the manager say so or has a personal interest in health and performance. Employees should understand that it is for their own good and the drive must come from their own free will. It is hard to say what the reality is, but based on institutional theory, it is likely that any type of initiative from the management in an organization puts a normative and regulative pressure on the employees, constraining them to conform.

5.3 Theories Applied on Phenomena Related to Athletic Leaders

Institutional theory as described by the theorists in chapter 2.2 has been developed to study organizations from a macro perspective, e.g. how a company can gain legitimacy by aligning with institutional pressures. We study the phenomenon in a micro perspective, focusing on the actions from individuals inside organizations. This is in line with a recent development within the field of institutional theory. Microstructures, in which individuals make different interpretations of their surroundings may hold the key to answering why institutions change gradually. To look at CEOs who do large amounts of endurance training with the macro lens of traditional institutional theory may be unsuitable and hard to draw conclusions from, but by reversing the scope to a micro perspective, the same theory may lead to answers concerning the organizations in which the individual CEOs work.

Institutional theory is applicable to any phenomena, and one can argue that any action taken by an individual or an organization is the result of a combined pressure from regulative, normative and cognitive aspects. Essentially, relieving all accountability from actors in institutions. This is the key limitation when using institutional theory as a theoretical framework. It is important to be critical when analyzing findings and not jump to conclusions, since this is easy due to the generality in the theory. By addressing each institutional pillar, normative, cognitive and regulative separately, a more nuanced picture of empiric findings can be attained. Still there is a high degree of constraint included in all aspects of institutional theory that must be considered while analyzing the findings.

Previous research within the studied field of interest, i.e. athletic managers, have been conducted using various theoretical frameworks. Common to most of them are however, that they are closely linked to the individual in a similar way to ours. One example is self-presentation theory, which explains how people present themselves in socially desirable ways, i.e. actors seek to adjust the image of self to "fit" the social expectations that derive from the norms and expectations of others in social interactions (cf. Johansson, 2017). The similarities with the cognitive pillar in Scott's (1995) institutional theory is obvious. Cognitive frameworks stress the importance of social identities, i.e. our conceptions of who we are and what ways of action make sense for us in a given situation. The main difference lies in the constraining nature of institutional theory. Critics argue that institutional theory leave no room for choice, e.g. a person's cognitive impression of his

identity renders him/her unable to act outside of what is considered legitimate in the social context. Self-presentation theory on the other hand imply that a person may present different identities in various social situations in order to fit in all of them. We noticed this potential shortcoming in institutional theory and added the concept of role-identity contradiction to our framework in order to address this. Theorists argue that contradictions between different social interactions and cognitive identities constitute the base for change in institutions. The way individuals deal with these conflicts is to present appropriate elements of their existing identity in order to fit in as good as possible in the social situation they are in, i.e. present themselves in socially desirable ways. By combining the theories of cognitive institutional pressure and role-identity contradiction, we cover relevant aspects of individual identity and sense-making. In addition, by choosing institutional theory, we are able to study the phenomenon from a wider perspective. Also taking into account the regulative and normative pillars in Scott's institutional theory enable us to capture the pressures from the society as a whole.

6 Conclusions

In this chapter, we summarize the key findings in relation to our research questions. Also, we present managerial implications derived from the analysis of the findings in this study. Importantly, we also highlight the theoretical contributions from this study and discuss limitations as well as suggest topics for further research.

6.1 Key Findings

The studied CEOs are used to setting goals and work towards achieving these in their professional careers. They set goals and work towards fulfilling these in their roles as athletes in the same way. One of their main drivers is to constantly improve and become better at everything they do, including the sport they engage in. Their jobs are intellectually and emotionally challenging and often stressful, while at the same time not physically challenging. Endurance training offers one way of counter-balancing this by providing tough physical challenges at the same time as it enables them to redirect their thoughts and relieve emotional stress. The CEOs describe that this make them think in different ways and consequently enable them to resolve problems they are not able to solve by only sitting behind their desks. Furthermore, they describe that the endurance training

gives them more energy, a fresh mind and other positive effects that make them more efficient and perform better at work. Similarly, they also report that absence of training has equivalent negative implications.

We conclude that several institutional pressures affect the CEOs in relation to endurance training and how they relate this to their work and the organizations they represent. Authorities, networks and societal perceptions about what provide status in relation to be an athlete all impose normative pressures. These normative pressures, combined with cognitive pressures originating in self-observed positive relation between job performance and endurance training, cause them to establish WHP programs for their employees. The reason for doing this is however not primarily to increase employee health. Instead, it is meant to increase their companies' performance, which they through normative and cognitive pressures are convinced will be an effect from increased employee health. Although most often voluntary for the employees, these WHP programs are promoted through normative pressures, often established by the CEO themselves. In certain cases, these WHP programs are even enforced through regulative pressures, e.g. making physical exercise mandatory for employees. These WHP programs also contribute towards addressing the role-identity dilemma that the CEOs find themselves in as they try to merge their identities as CEOs and athletes in the business environment. By establishing WHP programs, the CEOs attempt to connect better health with higher job performance. Thereby, they gradually change the institutional norms, such that it becomes legitimate to label themselves as top performers at work due to their athletic achievements.

In relation to the CEOs own endurance training, the primary institutional pressures that contribute to this are cognitive. They have a strong need for self-realization, and they identify with the athlete role, which means that it makes sense for them to exercise in the way they do. Given that they identify with this role, they feel that they have to maintain a certain physical status and therefore need to exercise accordingly. However, it is likely that these cognitive pressures originate in normative pressures that these individuals have been subjected to. Why they specifically do Ironman, ultra-distance running etc. can be explained by that these are the type of activities that are legitimized through for instance normative articles in business media, advertising or through societal norms exiting within their social environment, as discussed in Section 1.1.

6.2 Societal Implications

Historically, most jobs in society have been physically challenging, but offered little mental stress. Since then, the trend has been that jobs become less physically challenging, while at the same time offer more intellectual challenges. We argue that this generate a demand for conducting physically challenging activities, in order to compensate for the stationary work many people have today. This can be the endurance races that the CEOs in our study participate in. However, it can just as well be other physical activities such as construction work, gardening, clearing snow etc. These activities all generate a tangible result, something you can actually see and touch. This is something which many jobs today don't offer. If this evolve in the same direction, we may notice a shift in prioritizing between office hours and leisure time among people with stationary jobs. CEOs already enjoy the benefit of choosing how to plan their time, the general population do not. However, if the mental stress at work continues to increase, society may have to regulate work hours in order to accommodate physical activities also for more people. Old norms such as having 8h work days might need to be challenged.

Through establishing WHP programs in which the employees are forced to participate, companies are associating exercise with an obligation. Although this will most likely increase the fitness level among the staff, it also risk reducing the positive mental and emotional recovery effects from the training, which have been described previously. In addition, an apparent risk is that it will lead to segregation, where the people who due to different reasons are not able to participate in these programs, are excluded. Companies need to take this into account and ensure that different alternatives exist so that everyone can participate according to their own capacity. If doing this in a sensible and inclusive way, it has potential to not only increase performance, but also increase employees' wellbeing by addressing the need for physical challenges as well as mental and emotional recovery.

The number of CEOs engaging in endurance training seem to increase. Likewise, more studies indicating that athletic attributes contribute to better job performance etc. are published. This contribute to the increased status and legitimacy generated by completing certain endurance races. Therefore, being able to say that one has completed for instance an Ironman, may become increasingly important when applying for a job within certain business environments. There may

be risks associated to this. If for instance a company start to value such athletic achievements equally high as the right academic education, it may lead to a decline in diversity among the work force and deterioration of other competences within the organization.

6.3 Managerial Implications

Based on the findings in this study, we would advise CEOs that engage in endurance training to apply caution when talking about and showcasing this in relation to their work. Associating achievements in endurance racing with the role as CEO can create negativity towards him or her from actors within and outside the organization. However, if done appropriately, attaching the attributes associated with athleticism to the company and its employees rather than the CEO in particular, can have positive effects and give the company higher legitimacy and therefore contributing to better performance.

Establishing rituals that promote alternation between stress and recovery for the body, the mind and the emotions has been described to have positive effects on job performance and wellbeing. Therefore, managers are encouraged to seek means for achieving this. The CEOs in our study use endurance training as a tool to achieve this. However, alternative means could also be just as effective.

6.4 Theoretical contribution

As was described in 5.3, institutional theory can be criticized in several ways and as all theories have certain strengths and weaknesses. However, studying the phenomenon described in this thesis from an institutional theory perspective has proved to provide many interesting findings and conclusions. We have expanded the theory of Scott's (1995) three pillars of institutional pressures to also encompass the individual's perspective as well as including theory on role-identity contradictions as previously presented by Creed, Dejordy and Lok (2010) and Creed et.al. (2002). By doing this we have contributed to the growing stream of literature that apply institutional theory to phenomena that relate to individuals rather than traditional organizations and other institutions. Also, we have contributed by applying the theories on role-identity contradiction developed by Creed and others on a phenomenon in a new societal context where the role-identity contradictions are less obvious compared to previously studied contexts. Most importantly, we have proved that

by including theory on role-identity contradictions into the theoretical framework, we have been able to identify aspects that would otherwise have been missed. One clear example of this is the contradictions between the expectations on the informants in their roles as CEOs and their roles as athletes. Finally, we have also applied institutional theory on a topic that previously have not been studied from that perspective, thereby adding to the existing body of research within institutional theory.

6.5 Limitations and Future Research

The CEOs selected as informants in this study all engage extensively in endurance training. Furthermore, the coaches were interviewed with the intention to obtain information with respect to such CEOs. Consequently, the findings primarily apply to this category of business leaders. This is limiting the study by to some extent leaving the statements by the CEOs unchallenged by other views. Interviewing subordinates, family members, friends and other (apart from the coaches) who observe these individuals on a frequent basis would provide a more nuanced picture of the phenomenon.

The findings from this study show that the behavior of the CEOs due to their interest in endurance sports impact other members in their organizations. Therefore, to broaden the understanding of the implications from the CEOs actions, we suggest that employees affected by these actions are interviewed as well. In this study, the CEOs describe the implications from their actions in one way but there might be others in their organization with other views.

Many of the CEOs highlighted that they believe that combining large amounts of endurance training and a full-time job is much more difficult as a middle manager. The reason to this is described as CEOs having more freedom to plan their time and less frequent interactions with their superiors. The CEOs describe how the middle managers have daily interactions both upward in the organization as well as with their subordinates, thereby allowing less flexibility. In addition, lower rank managers are more often in the age of having small children and other responsibilities outside of work. Despite this, we know that there are middle managers who combine large amounts of endurance training with full-time jobs. Studying them in relation to the same research question as in this study would be contributing further to the understanding of the phenomenon.

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APPENDIX A: Interview Guide

The Interview guide used when conducting the interviews is shown below. It contains themes with sub-themes which were discussed in the interviews without any particular order.

Who are you?
- Name
- Age
- Sex
- Family
- Title

Training
- When did you start with endurance training?
- Type of training/what sports
  - Why these?
- Volume
- Intensity
- Duration of training sessions
- Alone or in group
- Member of a club?
- When are you training?
  - Day of week
  - Time of day
  - Time of year
- Continuity/Periodically
- Feeling/emotions:
  - Why do you exercise?
  - Before/during/after training
  - If a training session is cancelled/missed

Racing
- Type of races
- How often
- Why do you race?
- Ambition
- Feeling/emotions:
  - Before/during/after training

Social context around training
- Who is aware about your training/racing?
  - Do they care?
- To what extent are people impacted by your training/racing?
- Do you care about other people's training/racing?

- o If so, who?
  - ▪ Friends, professionals etc.
- Blogs/Social Media
  - o How do you spread info about your training/racing?
    - ▪ Blog?
    - ▪ Strava/Garmin Connect/Funbeat etc.?
    - ▪ Facebook/Instagram etc.
    - ▪ How many followers?
  - o Do you read other people's blogs etc.?
    - ▪ How does it impact you

Work
- Position
- Responsibilities
- Working hours
- Colleagues view on training
- Career goals?

Leadership
- When did you become a manager?
- What is a good leader for you?
  - o Important attributes
- How are you as a leader?
- Describe yourself
  - o Personality
  - o Strengths
  - o Weaknesses

Family
- Spouse/Kids/Parents
- Spouse, spare time activities? Training?
- Did your parents train/race?
- Do your kids train/race

Friends
- Who do you spend time with outside work/family?
- What do you do together?
- What is their background?
  - o child hood
  - o Work
  - o Family situation
- Personalities?
  - o similarities/differences compared to you