



Roald Amundsen's false start: Leadership and conflict during Amundsen's South Pole expedition

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Abstract

This study explores the leadership dynamics, conflict, and group cohesion during Roald Amundsen's South Pole expedition, with a particular focus on the critical confrontation between Amundsen and Hjalmar Johansen. Through a dual-method approach that integrates Narrative and Thematic Analysis, the research delves into the diaries and autobiographical writings of key expedition members. The findings reveal that while Amundsen's authoritative leadership was pivotal to the expedition's success, it also fostered significant internal conflict, particularly with Johansen. This tension highlights the delicate balance between decisive leadership and the need for inclusiveness in high-stakes environments. The study provides a nuanced understanding of how varying levels of loyalty among team members influenced group dynamics, offering insights that extend beyond the historical context of polar exploration to contemporary leadership challenges in extreme conditions.

Introduction

Roald Amundsen's South Pole expedition (1910–1912) remains a seminal event in the history of polar exploration. This expedition is celebrated for its monumental achievement of reaching the South Pole on December 14, 1911, a feat that secured Amundsen's place among the great explorers of the "Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration." However, beneath the triumph of this achievement lies a more complex narrative of leadership, conflict, and survival, particularly surrounding the so-called "false start" and the subsequent fallout between Amundsen and one of his key expedition members, Hjalmar Johansen.

Historians have approached Amundsen's leadership and the events of the expedition from a variety of perspectives, reflecting broader debates in the historiography of polar exploration. For example, Huntford (1999) portrays Amundsen as a determined and often ruthless leader, whose authoritarian approach to leadership created significant tensions within the team. While Huntford is critical of Amundsen's methods, he also acknowledges Amundsen's effectiveness and the necessity of his decisiveness in the harsh Antarctic environment. Huntford presents the false start as a critical moment that exposed the fragility of the team's cohesion and the underlying conflicts, particularly between Amundsen and Johansen.

The fallout between Amundsen and Johansen was particularly significant. After the return from the false start, Johansen publicly criticised Amundsen at the breakfast table, accusing him of abandoning weaker members of the team in his haste to return to base camp. Johansen, who had heroically waited for and assisted the struggling Kristian Prestrud, confronted Amundsen about his decision to press ahead with only Helmer Hanssen and Oscar Wisting, leaving the others to fend for themselves in the brutal conditions. He argued that Amundsen's leadership had been "shipwrecked" and that his reckless decision-making had put lives at unnecessary risk (Johansen, 2011). This confrontation was not only a direct challenge to Amundsen's authority but also a rare instance of open dissent within the rigid hierarchy of the expedition. Amundsen responded swiftly by demoting Johansen and excluding him from the final polar party. Johansen, a respected and experienced polar explorer, was instead reassigned to a secondary mission to explore King Edward VII Land.

Bomann-Larsen (2006) offers a somewhat more balanced interpretation of these events than Huntford (1999). He acknowledges Amundsen's misjudgements, particularly in handling the interpersonal dynamics of the expedition, but also emphasises the extreme conditions that influenced these decisions. Bomann-Larsen (2006) delves into the human aspects of the conflict, highlighting Johansen's heroic efforts during the return from the false start, where he saved the life of fellow expedition member Kristian Prestrud. Despite Johansen's bravery, Amundsen's subsequent actions to isolate and marginalise him underscore the harsh realities of leadership in such a high-stakes environment. Bomann-Larsen (2006) portrays Amundsen as a leader who, while successful, grappled with the immense pressures of ensuring the expedition's success at the expense of personal relationships and team cohesion.

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Adding to this debate, Bown (2012) examines the false start with a focus on the intense physical and psychological challenges faced by the men. Bown (2012) presents Amundsen as a leader who, while determined and strategic, was also deeply aware of the precariousness of his position. The fallout with Johansen is portrayed as a tipping point that not only revealed the growing rift between Amundsen and Johansen but also tested the loyalty and resilience of the entire team. Bown (2012) notes that Amundsen's actions, though sometimes ruthless, were driven by a genuine fear of failure and the high stakes of the polar race. This perspective adds complexity to Amundsen's character, depicting him as a leader who was willing to make difficult, and sometimes unpopular, decisions to achieve his goals.

Amundsen's leadership has often been characterised by his emphasis on preparation, adaptability, and the efficient use of resources, which were critical to his success in reaching the South Pole. As noted by Mann (2013), Amundsen's leadership style was marked by a meticulous focus on decision-making, particularly in extreme conditions where even minor errors could lead to catastrophic outcomes. His ability to foresee and mitigate risks, as well as his strategic use of dog sled teams, exemplifies a leadership approach grounded in pragmatism and a deep understanding of the environment. Chiaramonte and Yue (2006) further highlight Amundsen's innovative team dynamics, where leadership was distributed across all members, allowing for a cohesive and resilient team that could operate effectively under pressure. This approach not only maximised individual contributions but also ensured that the team remained adaptable and responsive to changing conditions. Finally, Butz, Hunter and Fisher (2023) emphasise Amundsen's capacity for strategic foresight, noting how his thorough planning and execution set a new standard for leadership in polar exploration. Together, these sources illustrate the unique and deliberate nature of Amundsen's leadership, which played a pivotal role in his historic achievement.

This study aims to delve deeper into the internal dynamics of Amundsen's South Pole expedition, focusing on the conflict between Amundsen and Johansen during the false start. Based on the somewhat contrasting interpretations offered in previous research, this paper seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of Amundsen's leadership based on primary sources. Specifically, the research will address the following questions:

1. How did Amundsen's leadership style contribute to the success of the expedition, and what were the associated costs in terms of group cohesion and individual well-being?
2. What were the key factors that led to the conflict between Amundsen and Johansen, and how did this conflict impact the overall dynamics within the team?
3. How did the varying levels of loyalty among team members influence their responses to the leadership conflict, and what can this tell us about leadership in extreme environments?

To address these questions, the study employs an integrated analytical approach, combining Narrative Analysis and Thematic Analysis, to examine primary sources such as the diaries and autobiographical writings of key expedition members. This dual-method approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of both the individual narratives and the broader themes that shaped the expedition.

By examining the interplay between leadership, conflict, survival, and loyalty, this study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the expedition's internal dynamics, offering

insights that extend beyond the historical context of polar exploration to inform contemporary leadership challenges in similarly extreme or high-stakes environments. The study hypothesises that while Amundsen's authoritative leadership was crucial for the expedition's success, it also generated significant internal tensions that had long-term implications for group cohesion and the psychological well-being of the team members.

The paper is structured as follows: Firstly, the Literature Review section provides overviews of the historical context as well as of the relevant leadership and conflict theory. The Methods section details the analytical approaches used in the study, followed by a presentation of the results from the Narrative and Thematic Analyses. The Discussion section then integrates these findings to explore the broader implications for our understanding of leadership, conflict, and group cohesion in extreme environments. Finally, the Conclusion reflects on the significance of the Amundsen-Johansen conflict and its relevance to both historical and modern contexts of leadership and exploration.

Literature review

Historical context

Polar exploration, particularly during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, marked a period known as the "Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration," characterised by a series of daring and often perilous expeditions to the Earth's polar regions. This era was driven by a combination of scientific curiosity, national pride, and the human spirit of adventure. Notable figures such as Sir Ernest Shackleton, Robert Falcon Scott, and Roald Amundsen emerged as leaders who faced immense challenges in exploring the Antarctic, a region notorious for its extreme cold, unpredictable weather, and vast, featureless ice expanses (Fiennes, 2003; Huntford, 1999).

These expeditions were not merely physical journeys but also profound tests of human endurance, leadership, and survival under some of the most inhospitable conditions on the planet. The Antarctic environment presented unique challenges that demanded exceptional leadership qualities. Leaders had to navigate the delicate balance between the goals of the expedition and the well-being of their team members, often making life-or-death decisions with limited information and resources. As Nansen (1897) and Preston (1998) highlight, the success or failure of these missions frequently depended on the leader's ability to maintain group cohesion and morale, even when faced with relentless environmental and psychological pressures.

The series of *Fram* expeditions, particularly the third expedition led by Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen from 1910 to 1912, stand out as significant milestones in the history of polar exploration. The first two *Fram* expeditions, led by Fridtjof Nansen and Otto Sverdrup, demonstrated the feasibility of long-term expeditions in polar regions and laid the groundwork for future exploration (Nansen, 1897; Sverdrup, 1904). However, it was Amundsen's third *Fram* expedition that achieved one of the most celebrated accomplishments in the annals of exploration history: the successful journey to the South Pole.

Initially, Amundsen's plan for the third *Fram* expedition was to reach the North Pole. However, upon learning that the North Pole had already been claimed by Frederick Cook and Robert Peary, Amundsen made the strategic decision to secretly redirect his efforts toward the South Pole—a move that was not disclosed to most of his team until the last minute (Huntford, 1999). This decision, while ultimately successful, introduced a layer of complexity and tension to

the expedition, setting the stage for a challenging journey both logistically and interpersonally. The expedition's triumph in reaching the South Pole on December 14, 1911, solidified Amundsen's place in history but also overshadowed the internal conflicts and leadership challenges that arose during the journey (Fiennes, 2003).

A critical event during the expedition was the "false start," which occurred early in the season in which their journey toward the South Pole took place. This event has often been overlooked in the triumphant narrative of Amundsen's success, yet it was a pivotal moment that highlighted the intense pressures faced by the team and brought underlying leadership conflicts to the forefront. The false start involved an aborted attempt to begin the final leg of the journey due to a miscalculation in timing and weather conditions. Amundsen, keen to gain a head start and capitalise on favourable conditions, pushed the team to depart only a few weeks after the sun had reappeared following the polar winter. However, they were soon forced to retreat after encountering severe cold, realising that the conditions were far more treacherous than anticipated that early in the season.

Amundsen's decision to attempt an early departure for the South Pole was likely influenced by his desire to secure an advantage over the British expedition led by Scott. Contrary to some secondary accounts, there is no evidence that he feared Scott's motor sledges as a serious threat. Instead, Amundsen's stated reasoning for the early start was his belief that temperatures might improve further inland on the barrier—a hypothesis that proved incorrect. Additionally, Amundsen's determination to reach the South Pole before Scott, given his secretive and ambitious change of plans to target the Antarctic instead of the Arctic, added significant pressure to his decision-making process (May, 2016, p. 272).

The retreat after the false start, although necessary for the safety of the team, exposed significant cracks in the leadership dynamic, particularly between Amundsen and Hjalmar Johansen, one of the most experienced members of the expedition. Johansen, who had previously served under Fridtjof Nansen and was highly respected for his polar expertise, openly criticised Amundsen's decision-making during this episode. He argued that the disorganised last leg of the return journey, where essentially every man was left to fend for himself, was a reckless gamble that put the entire team at unnecessary risk.

Interestingly, Amundsen himself did not document the last leg of the return journey in his diary—a notable omission that contrasts with his usually meticulous record-keeping. This silence could suggest a variety of underlying reasons, such as discomfort with the situation, a desire to avoid recording potential failures, or a focus on maintaining the broader narrative of the expedition's success. In his published expedition narrative, Amundsen acknowledges that Hanssen and Wisting drove first and faster than the rest but emphasises that this was their usual practice, further motivated by the weather: "*On the way home we kept the same order as on the previous days. Hanssen and Wisting, as a rule, were a long way ahead, unless they stopped and waited. We went at a tearing pace. We had thought of halting at the sixteen-mile flag, as we called it—the mark at thirty kilometers from Framheim—and waiting for the others to come up, but as the weather was of the best, calm and clear, and with our tracks on the way south perfectly plain, I decided to go on. The sooner we got the bad heels into the house, the better. The two first sledges arrived at 4 p.m.; the next at 6, and the two following ones at 6.30. The last did not come in till 12.30 a.m. Heaven knows what they had been doing on the way!*"

(Amundsen, 1912, p. 388). Furthermore, Amundsen made no mention at all of the false start in his later autobiography (Amundsen, 1927).

Johansen's frustrations were not merely about the chaotic conditions of the retreat but also about the broader leadership style of Amundsen, which he viewed as increasingly authoritarian and dismissive of input from other seasoned members of the team (Johansen, 2011). The confrontation between Johansen and Amundsen after the false start became a significant moment of dissent within the expedition. Johansen's criticism was not received well by Amundsen, who perceived it as a direct challenge to his authority. This tension escalated to the point where Amundsen made the controversial decision to exclude Johansen from the final push to the South Pole, relegating him to a secondary role in the expedition (Huntford, 2012). Johansen was ordered, along with Kristian Prestrud and Jørgen Stubberud, to explore a section of Antarctica east of the base camp called King Edward VII Land.

Although Johansen thereby was excluded from the South Pole dash, his inclusion in the King Edward VII Land expedition was also a logical decision given his polar expertise and the inexperience of Prestrud and Stubberud, who were also recovering from frostbite. Despite this, Johansen's position in the party could still be seen as a secondary "degradation," as leadership of the King Edward VII Land expedition was given to Prestrud, a first helmsman with limited polar experience.

Interestingly, in his expedition narrative, Amundsen makes no mention of the argument with Johansen at all. Instead, he provides a brief and somewhat ambiguous explanation for his decision to exclude Johansen, Prestrud, and Stubberud, stating only that "*Circumstances had arisen which made me consider it necessary to divide the party into two*" (Amundsen, 1912, p. 389). In his diary, on the other hand, he clearly states that "*To my astonishment, Johansen took the occasion to make unflattering statements regarding my position as leader for our actions here. It was not only our drive home yesterday that he considered to be highly irresponsible, strange, etc, etc. but many other things which I as leader had done over time. I received no reply to my request for further grounds for these statements. The gross and unforgivable thing in these statements is that they were made in the company of others. Here the bull must be taken by the horns and an example made immediately. At the dinner table, I informed him that after his statements, I found it only right to exclude him from taking part in the polar journey. Instead I have ordered him, in writing, to take part in a research expedition to King Edward VII's Land under Prestrud's leadership.*" (Amundsen, 2010, pp. 283–284).

This decision had profound implications for the dynamics of the expedition. While it allowed Amundsen to assert his authority and maintain a unified team for the final leg of the journey, it also highlighted the cost of such leadership decisions in extreme environments. Johansen's exclusion was seen by some as necessary to prevent further discord, but it also underscored the ethical dilemmas inherent in leadership during high-stakes missions where survival is at risk. The diaries of other team members, such as Sverre Hassel and Olav Bjaaland, reveal that while the team remained outwardly focused on the goal of reaching the South Pole, the incident left a lasting impact on group cohesion and morale (Bjaaland, 2011; Hassel, 2011). On the other hand, Johansen's exclusion from the South Pole push was generally perceived by the team as a necessary decision driven by concerns over his behaviour and the potential risks it posed to the expedition's unity and success. Johansen's public criticism of Amundsen's leadership was viewed as disruptive and undermining

the team's cohesion. The division of the team into two parties was seen as a pragmatic choice to minimise conflict and ensure that the most harmonious and focused group would undertake the South Pole push. While Johansen was highly experienced, his critical attitude and refusal to fully cooperate were perceived as risks that could jeopardise the expedition's objectives. Therefore, the team accepted the exclusion as a necessary measure to maintain morale, focus, and the overall success of the mission.

Historians have approached the false start of Roald Amundsen's South Pole expedition with varying perspectives, often interpreting it as a critical moment that reveals the complexities of Amundsen's leadership and the internal dynamics of his team. For example, Huntford (1999) presents the false start as a defining event that underscores Amundsen's authoritarian approach. Huntford (1999) relied on a selective use of primary sources, particularly Amundsen's diary and a few others, to argue that this episode exposed significant tensions within the team, especially between Amundsen and Johansen. Huntford (1999) suggests that Amundsen's decision to push forward, despite the adverse conditions, was driven by his determination to maintain control over the expedition and assert his leadership, even if it meant risking the unity and morale of his team.

In contrast to Huntford's (1999) critical portrayal, Bomann-Larsen (2006) offers a more nuanced interpretation of the false start in his biography, emphasising the harsh environmental conditions and the difficult choices faced by Amundsen. Bomann-Larsen (2006) acknowledges Amundsen's misjudgement in attempting to break camp early, but he also highlights the leader's pragmatism in choosing to turn back to avoid a complete collapse of the expedition. Rather than solely focusing on Amundsen's authoritarian tendencies, Bomann-Larsen (2006) explores the human dimensions of the conflict, particularly the heroic actions of Johansen in saving Prestrud, and the subsequent power struggle that ensued within the team. He presents Amundsen not just as a figure obsessed with control, but as a leader grappling with the immense pressures of ensuring the survival and success of his expedition, even at the cost of personal relationships and team cohesion.

Similar to Bomann-Larsen (2006), Bown (2012) offers a balanced view of the false start in his biography on Amundsen, acknowledging the severe conditions the team faced and Amundsen's pragmatic, if contentious, decision-making. Bown (2012) details the extreme cold and the suffering of both men and dogs, highlighting Amundsen's initial determination to press on but also his eventual realisation that they must turn back to avoid catastrophic failure. The false start exposed the growing rift between Amundsen and Johansen, culminating in Johansen's public outburst at Amundsen, which Bown (2012) interprets as a significant tipping point in their relationship. While Bown (2012) acknowledges Amundsen's harsh treatment of Johansen, including his decision to exclude him from the South Pole party, he suggests that Amundsen's actions, though sometimes ruthless, were driven by the immense pressure of the polar race and a genuine fear of failure. This perspective underscores the complex interplay between leadership, loyalty, and survival in extreme environments, portraying Amundsen as a leader deeply committed to his goal but not without flaws and human vulnerabilities.

However, it is important to note that previous historiographical interpretations, including the ones by Bomann-Larsen (2006), Bown (2012), and Huntford (1999), have not fully utilised the breadth of primary texts available from all participants of the expedition. This study distinguishes itself by relying on the diaries

and autobiographical writings of all key expedition members, providing a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the false start. This approach challenges earlier interpretations by showing how the broader array of voices within the expedition reflects a more intricate interplay of conflict, loyalty, and survival under Amundsen's leadership.

The false start and the subsequent fallout between Amundsen and Johansen serve as a compelling case study in the complexities of leadership in extreme environments. The event illustrates the fine line between decisive leadership and authoritarianism, as well as the challenges of managing dissent within a team where the stakes are life and death. It also provides insight into the psychological and relational strains that can emerge in such high-pressure situations, shedding light on the delicate balance leaders must maintain between asserting control and fostering team unity. The handling of this conflict and its resolution offers valuable lessons not only for understanding the dynamics of the expedition but also for leadership in other extreme contexts.

Leadership frameworks in extreme environments

Leadership in extreme environments, such as polar expeditions, is fundamentally shaped by the challenges of isolation, harsh conditions, and the need for rapid decision-making. Theoretical frameworks often distinguish between transformational leadership, which emphasises shared vision and team cohesion, and transactional leadership, which relies on clear structures and task-oriented management (Bass, 1990; Bass & Bass, 2008). While transformational leadership fosters unity and long-term commitment, transactional leadership is often more effective in immediate, high-stakes contexts.

Amundsen's leadership style was predominantly transactional, characterised by decisive, unilateral actions. His decision to abort the "false start," despite its impact on morale and team cohesion, exemplified his pragmatism in prioritising survival over inclusivity. This style enabled him to maintain control and focus under life-threatening conditions, yet it also exposed the limitations of authoritarian methods when managing a diverse team. For example, his swift demotion of Johansen after the latter's public criticism highlighted the fine line between asserting authority and fostering trust.

Scholars have emphasised that transactional leadership in extreme environments must be tempered by effective communication and a willingness to engage with dissent (Hogan, Curphy- & Hogan, 1994; Seeger, 2003). Amundsen's failure to adequately address Johansen's concerns contributed to a breakdown in trust and team morale, ultimately centralising decision-making to the exclusion of experienced voices. This contrasts with other polar leaders, such as Sir Ernest Shackleton, whose more inclusive and morale-focused leadership style succeeded in maintaining cohesion under similarly harsh conditions (Morrell & Capparell, 2001).

While Amundsen's transactional approach was essential to his South Pole success, it serves as a case study in the trade-offs inherent in leadership under extreme stress. Leaders in these contexts must balance the need for rapid, decisive action with the imperative to maintain team cohesion and psychological resilience (Leach, 1994; Palinkas, 2003).

Conflict and group dynamics

The conflict between Amundsen and Johansen during the South Pole expedition offers a compelling lens through which to explore the dynamics of leadership and group cohesion in extreme

environments. Johansen, an experienced polar explorer, openly criticised Amundsen's decisions during the false start, particularly the chaotic conditions of the retreat journey. This confrontation, unprecedented in the rigid hierarchy of the expedition, not only challenged Amundsen's authority but also exposed underlying fractures in team dynamics.

Amundsen's response—demoting Johansen and excluding him from the South Pole push—was a decisive assertion of authority. While strategically necessary to restore order, this decision also had profound implications for the psychological well-being and cohesion of the team. Johansen's relegation to the King Edward VII Land expedition, under the inexperienced Prestrud, underscored the punitive nature of Amundsen's leadership, despite its logistical justification. This exclusion also reflected a broader pattern in Amundsen's leadership, where dissent was met with marginalisation, as seen in his interactions with other team members in later expeditions (Huntford, 1999; May, 2016).

Survival psychology research sheds light on the cumulative impact of such leadership conflicts in extreme environments. Prolonged exposure to environmental stressors exacerbates interpersonal tensions, making effective communication and trust-building critical to maintaining cohesion (Bartone, Johnsen, Eid, Brun & Laberg, 2002; Palinkas, 2003). Amundsen's authoritarian approach, while operationally effective, left little room for constructive dissent, which could have mitigated the psychological strain on the team. In contrast, inclusive leadership styles that emphasise mutual support and shared responsibility have been shown to enhance resilience and morale in high-pressure settings (Morrell & Capparell, 2001).

The Johansen conflict also highlights the differing responses of team members to leadership under stress. Younger, less experienced members often refrained from criticising Amundsen, aligning with him out of loyalty or deference. In contrast, seasoned explorers like Johansen, who possessed greater autonomy and expertise, were more likely to voice dissent, even at personal cost. This dynamic illustrates the importance of understanding how individual differences in experience and loyalty shape responses to leadership in extreme environments (Johansen, 2011; Næss, 2004).

Survival psychology and group cohesion

Survival in extreme environments, such as polar expeditions, demands not only physical endurance but also a high degree of psychological resilience. The psychological challenges posed by these environments are profound, as individuals and teams must cope with isolation, extreme cold, physical exhaustion, and the constant threat of failure or death. The study of survival psychology provides valuable insights into how these stressors impact individual behaviour and group dynamics, particularly in relation to leadership and team cohesion (Leach, 1994; Palinkas, 2003).

One of the central themes in survival psychology is the concept of "expedition mentality," a psychological state that emphasises adaptability, resilience, and the ability to maintain focus on long-term goals despite immediate hardships (Leach, 1994). This mentality is crucial in ensuring that team members can sustain their efforts over extended periods in hostile environments. For instance, during Amundsen's South Pole expedition, the ability of the team to endure the harsh Antarctic conditions was not solely a function of physical fitness, but also of their collective psychological resilience. Roald Amundsen's leadership was pivotal in fostering this expedition mentality, as his clear vision and authoritative style helped to maintain the focus and discipline necessary for survival (Huntford, 1999).

However, survival psychology also highlights the potential for psychological stress to undermine group cohesion, particularly when the stress is exacerbated by leadership conflicts or a lack of effective communication. In extreme environments, stress can manifest in various ways, including irritability, anxiety, and a breakdown in social relationships (Palinkas, 2003). These symptoms can be particularly dangerous in a small, isolated group, where the success of the mission depends on the ability of team members to work together cohesively. During Amundsen's South Pole expedition, the conflict between Amundsen and Hjalmar Johansen following the "false start" incident serves as a case in point. The psychological strain of the harsh environment, combined with the interpersonal tension between the two men, created a fissure in the group's cohesion that had lasting effects on the dynamics of the expedition (Johansen, 2011).

Group cohesion, which refers to the bonds that hold a team together and enable them to work effectively as a unit, is a critical factor in the success of missions in extreme environments. High levels of group cohesion have been shown to enhance morale, improve communication, and increase the likelihood of mission success (Bartone et al., 2002). In the context of polar expeditions, maintaining group cohesion is particularly challenging due to the prolonged isolation and the necessity of close, constant interaction among team members. Leaders play a key role in fostering cohesion by promoting a sense of shared purpose and ensuring that all team members feel valued and included (Bartone et al., 2002).

Amundsen's leadership during his South Pole expedition exemplifies both the strengths and limitations of authoritative leadership in maintaining group cohesion. While his decisive style was effective in keeping the team focused on their goal of reaching the South Pole, it also led to the marginalisation of dissenting voices, such as Johansen's, which ultimately weakened the group's cohesion (Huntford, 2012). The exclusion of Johansen from the final push to the pole, while strategically advantageous in the short term, had the potential to undermine the overall morale of the team by creating an atmosphere of distrust and division. This highlights the delicate balance that leaders in extreme environments must strike between asserting authority and fostering an inclusive, cohesive team culture.

The literature on survival psychology also emphasises the importance of social support and mutual trust within the group as key components of psychological resilience and group cohesion (Palinkas, 2003). In extreme environments, where external support is minimal or nonexistent, the emotional and psychological support provided by fellow team members becomes critical to survival. The diaries of Amundsen's South Pole expedition members reveal that despite the challenges posed by the harsh environment and internal conflicts, a strong sense of camaraderie and mutual support persisted among most of the team members, which was crucial in sustaining their morale and collective resilience (Bjaaland, 2011; Hassel, 2011).

Anthi (1999) explores Amundsen's underlying psychological dynamics, linking his rivalry with Scott and his experiences in polar exploration to deeper conflicts involving autonomy, guilt, and masochistic tendencies. These conflicts may have influenced his leadership style and decision-making during the South Pole expedition. In addition, Anthi (1999) links Amundsen's regression to a paranoid state with unresolved feelings of guilt and rivalry. This perspective provides insight into his reaction to Johansen's critique, which he perceived as a direct threat to his authority.

In summary, survival in extreme environments is as much a psychological challenge as it is a physical one. The ability of a team

to maintain cohesion under stress, support one another, and stay focused on their mission is critical to their success. The experiences of Amundsen's South Pole expedition underscore the complex interplay between leadership, psychological resilience, and group cohesion in such settings. Leaders must not only manage the physical aspects of the environment but also attend to the psychological and social needs of their team to ensure both individual and collective survival.

Methodology

Out of the eight expedition members who participated in the false start, diaries from all except Helmer Hanssen and Jørgen Stubberud were utilised in this study (Amundsen, 2010; Bjaaland, 2011; Hassel, 2011; Johansen, 2011; Prestrud, 2011; Wisting, 2011). When these lines were written, most of these diaries were only available *in extenso* in Norwegian. The only exceptions seem to be Amundsen's diary (Amundsen, 2010), and parts of Bjaaland's diary (Huntford, 2012) where English translations had been published. For this study, the relevant sections of all diaries except Amundsen's were translated from Norwegian into English by the author, who reads Norwegian fluently.

It could be noted that Helmer Hanssen did keep a diary from expedition, but his original version appears to have been stolen a few years later (Michaelsen, 2011). However, Hanssen provided some of his thoughts about the false start in his later autobiographical writings (Hanssen, 1941). Jørgen Stubberud also kept a diary, but it was lost while being lent out to a journal (Kløver, 2011). Nevertheless, Stubberud's later autobiographical writings include a number of details from the expedition, including his views on the false start (Stubberud, 2011). These texts by Hanssen and Stubberud were used in this study in the same manner as the diaries by the other men.

It could also be noted that Kristian Prestrud's diary does not include any material that relates directly to the false start (Prestrud, 2011). He had left some empty pages in the diary, apparently to write about the event later, but that never happened and there does not seem to exist any other writings by Prestrud about the incident. Finally, Adolf Lindstrøm, the cook at the base camp *Framheim*, must have witnessed the argument between Amundsen and Johansen, but he is not known to have kept an expedition diary. Thus, the main primary sources that this paper relies on are the diaries of Roald Amundsen, Olav Bjaaland, Sverre Hassel, Hjalmar Johansen, and Oscar Wisting, in combination with the aforementioned autobiographical writings by Helmer Hanssen and Jørgen Stubberud.

A qualitative research design was employed for the analysis of these sources, utilising an integrated approach that combines Narrative Analysis and Thematic Analysis to examine the dynamics of leadership, conflict, survival, and group cohesion during Roald Amundsen's South Pole expedition. As mentioned above, the primary sources for this analysis consist of the diaries and autobiographical writings of key participants in the expedition. These first-hand accounts provide a rich basis for exploring the individual and collective experiences that shaped the expedition's outcome.

The study employs both Narrative Analysis and Thematic Analysis, two well-established qualitative research methods, to explore the primary sources. These methods were chosen for their complementary strengths in examining both the structure of individual accounts and the broader themes that emerge across multiple narratives.

Narrative Analysis was chosen to explore how each participant constructed their story and positioned themselves within the

broader context of the expedition. This method is particularly useful for understanding how individuals make sense of their experiences through storytelling and how they present their identities in relation to others (Chase, 2011; Riessman, 2008). The Narrative Analysis focused on:

- **Storytelling Structure:** The analysis examined how the events of the expedition were narrated, including the linearity or non-linearity of the accounts, the emphasis on certain events, and the overall tone of the narratives.
- **Self-Presentation:** The study investigated how each participant presented themselves within their narrative—whether as leaders, followers, dissenters, or survivors—and how these self-representations influenced the overall dynamics of the group.
- **Perspective and Voice:** The analysis considered the perspective from which the stories were told, including the use of first-person or third-person voice, and how this influenced the reader's understanding of the events.

Thematic Analysis was employed to identify and explore the key themes that emerged across the different narratives. This method is particularly effective for examining patterns of meaning within qualitative data and understanding how these patterns relate to broader social and psychological processes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The Thematic Analysis focused on coding the data for recurring themes, patterns, and concepts, which were then analysed to understand their significance within the context of the expedition. The key themes identified include:

- **Leadership and Authority:** The study explored how leadership was exercised and perceived by different members of the expedition, with a particular focus on the contrast between Amundsen's authoritative style and Johansen's critique of his decisions.
- **Conflict and Tension:** The analysis examined the sources and manifestations of conflict within the group, particularly the tension between Amundsen and Johansen, and how this affected group cohesion.
- **Survival and Hardship:** The study analysed the participants' experiences of physical and psychological hardship, and how these challenges influenced their actions and relationships.
- **Group Cohesion and Loyalty:** The analysis also focused on the varying levels of loyalty exhibited by the expedition members—whether to Amundsen, Johansen, the expedition goals, or the well-being of the group—and how these loyalties shaped the dynamics within the team.

The integration of Narrative Analysis and Thematic Analysis was employed to leverage the strengths of both methods and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the expedition. Narrative Analysis offers deep insights into how individuals construct and communicate their personal experiences, while Thematic Analysis allows for the identification of broader patterns and themes across multiple narratives. By combining these methods, the study was able to examine both the unique perspectives of individual participants and the shared experiences that defined the group as a whole.

This integrated approach is particularly suited to complex historical events like Amundsen's South Pole expedition, where understanding the interplay between personal narratives and collective themes is crucial for a full appreciation of the dynamics at

play. The integration of these methods allowed for a nuanced exploration of how leadership, conflict, survival, and loyalty interacted to shape the outcome of the expedition, providing a richer and more detailed analysis than would have been possible using either method alone (Frost et al., 2010; Josselson, 2011).

Results

As mentioned above, this study employs an integrated approach combining Narrative Analysis and Thematic Analysis to explore the dynamics of the false start and the subsequent conflict between Roald Amundsen and Hjalmar Johansen during the South Pole expedition. By merging these two methods, we gain a deeper understanding of both the individual narratives and the shared themes that influenced the expedition's outcome, shedding light on the complex interplay between leadership, conflict, survival, loyalty, and group cohesion.

Narrative structures and key storytelling elements

The narratives of key expedition members—Roald Amundsen, Hjalmar Johansen, and others—offer distinct and often contrasting perspectives on the critical events of the expedition. Roald Amundsen's narrative is characterised by a structured and linear account of the journey, reflecting his self-perception as the authoritative leader responsible for the survival and success of the team. His narrative emphasises the importance of decisive leadership, particularly in making difficult decisions, such as the choice to turn back during the initial push toward the South Pole. For instance, Amundsen justifies his decision to retreat by stating, "To risk men and animals by continuing stubbornly once we have set off is something I couldn't consider." This statement encapsulates his leadership philosophy—pragmatic, cautious, and focused on the broader mission of reaching the South Pole. Amundsen's narrative consistently underscores his role as the figure who must bear the responsibility for the team's welfare, often framing his decisions within the context of ensuring the expedition's success under extreme conditions.

In contrast, Hjalmar Johansen's narrative offers a markedly different perspective, one that is emotionally charged and non-linear. His account reflects his deep-seated frustration with Amundsen's leadership style, particularly criticising the lack of communication and what he perceived as reckless decision-making. Johansen's narrative includes flashbacks and introspective reflections, which reveal his growing disenchantment with the leadership decisions that, in his view, compromised the safety and cohesion of the team. Johansen poignantly expresses his discontent when he states, "It was senseless not to have maintained contact between the participants," highlighting his belief that the leadership's decisions endangered the group. This critical stance is a recurring theme in Johansen's narrative, as he positions himself as an experienced explorer who was sidelined by what he viewed as Amundsen's authoritarian approach.

The narratives of other key figures in the expedition, including Oscar Wisting, Helmer Hanssen, Olav Bjaaland, and Sverre Hassel, generally align more closely with Amundsen's perspective. These narratives are similarly structured around the practical challenges of the journey and tend to emphasise the collective effort required to overcome the extreme conditions of the Antarctic. While these accounts acknowledge the tensions within the group, they often downplay the conflict between Amundsen and Johansen, focusing instead on the shared determination to achieve the expedition's

goals. For example, Wisting underscores the team's collective resolve, stating, "Everyone had to let go of the weakest dogs as they couldn't keep up," reflecting the shared commitment to the mission despite the hardships. These narratives highlight the importance of unity and collective effort in the face of adversity, suggesting a broader acceptance of Amundsen's leadership, even as they navigate the psychological and physical challenges of the expedition.

Thematic analysis

Thematic Analysis of these narratives reveals several key themes that shed light on the expedition's internal dynamics. *Leadership and authority* emerge as central themes, with Amundsen's authority being both asserted and contested throughout the narratives. Amundsen's leadership style, characterised by decisive and sometimes autocratic decision-making, is portrayed as essential for the expedition's success. His decision to exclude Johansen from the final polar journey is framed in his narrative as a necessary measure to maintain focus and cohesion within the team. In contrast, Johansen's narrative challenges this portrayal, advocating for a leadership style that prioritises inclusiveness and the safety of all team members. This tension between authoritative leadership and the ethical considerations of inclusiveness and safety is a key dynamic in the expedition's story.

Conflict and tension, particularly between Amundsen and Johansen, are significant themes that surface in the narratives. The conflict, which stemmed from differing views on leadership and decision-making, was a major source of tension within the team. Amundsen's decision to exclude Johansen was seen by other team members as a necessary step to preserve order and maintain the expedition's focus. However, this action also highlighted the underlying discord within the group. Bjaaland's narrative captures this tension, noting that "there was quite an uproar today. They were angry about being left behind and Johansen said things he should have kept to himself." This theme illustrates the challenges of managing internal conflicts in high-stakes environments, where leadership decisions can have far-reaching consequences for group cohesion.

Survival and hardship are pervasive themes in all the narratives, reflecting the extreme conditions of the Antarctic and the constant threat they posed to the expedition members. The harsh environment made survival the foremost concern, with Amundsen's leadership decisions often framed as critical to navigating these challenges. His narrative suggests that strong, centralised leadership was essential for managing the life-threatening conditions they faced, reinforcing the idea that survival depended on his ability to make quick and effective decisions. However, Johansen's perspective provides a counterpoint, suggesting that some of Amundsen's decisions, particularly those involving communication and coordination, may have compromised the team's safety. This divergence in perspectives underscores the complexity of survival in extreme environments, where different approaches to leadership can have significant implications for the team's well-being.

Group cohesion and loyalty emerge as crucial themes in understanding the internal dynamics of the expedition, particularly considering the conflict between Amundsen and Johansen. The varying levels of loyalty among the team members significantly influenced their interactions and the overall cohesion of the group. Loyalty within the group was multifaceted, encompassing loyalty to Amundsen as the leader, loyalty to

Johansen as a fellow explorer, loyalty to the overarching goals of the expedition, and loyalty to the well-being of the group as a whole.

Amundsen's team included seasoned veterans like Hanssen and Hassel, whose loyalty stemmed from past expeditions, alongside younger and less experienced members, such as Stubberud and Bjaaland. The younger men were often less vocal about challenges, possibly due to their subordinate position or a desire to prove themselves. This contrast in experience and response to adversity shaped the group dynamics and reinforced cohesion.

Oscar Wisting and Helmer Hanssen exhibited the strongest loyalty to Amundsen, consistently supporting his decisions and demonstrating unwavering trust in his leadership. Wisting's narrative emphasises the importance of unity and shared purpose, reflecting his commitment to the expedition's success under Amundsen's guidance. For instance, Wisting notes, "The cold was unbearable, but we pushed on knowing that turning back was not an option," highlighting his dedication to the mission and his belief in Amundsen's leadership. Hanssen similarly exhibited strong loyalty, trusting Amundsen's judgement even in difficult circumstances. It could be noted that Hanssen, like Lindstrøm, had previously accompanied Amundsen on the Northwest Passage expedition and was invited again to join the polar expedition. This repeated selection undoubtedly strengthened his loyalty toward Amundsen. This level of loyalty reinforced Amundsen's authority and helped maintain group cohesion, particularly during moments of tension and conflict.

Jørgen Stubberud and Olav Bjaaland, while generally loyal to Amundsen, displayed more nuanced perspectives on leadership. Stubberud's loyalty was rooted in a pragmatic focus on survival and the practical challenges of the expedition. He expressed concern for the physical well-being of the team, as seen in his own struggles with frostbite, and supported Amundsen's leadership while also recognising the difficulties faced by the group. Bjaaland acknowledged the tensions within the group and Johansen's frustrations but ultimately remained supportive of Amundsen's decisions. His narrative reflects an understanding of the complexities of leadership in extreme environments, where difficult decisions must be made to ensure the expedition's success.

While Kristian Prestrud did not record anything in his diary regarding the fallout between Johansen and Amundsen, the writings of other expedition members suggest that, despite his physical struggles during the return from the false start, Prestrud demonstrated a quiet but firm loyalty to the expedition as he did not publicly support Johansen and instead remained silent during the confrontation (Bjaaland, 2011; Hanssen, 1941). This passive loyalty contributed to maintaining group cohesion at a critical time, as Prestrud's silence and compliance likely helped to diffuse the tension that Johansen's defiance had sparked. In addition, Prestrud's loyalty to Amundsen was also evident in his acceptance of the reassignment to lead the King Edward VII Land expedition. Due to frostbite sustained during the return from the false start, Prestrud was not physically fit to join the South Pole dash. Nevertheless, Amundsen entrusted him with the leadership of the smaller King Edward VII Land expedition, a task he undertook without complaint. This reassignment highlights both Amundsen's strategic decision-making and Prestrud's quiet but steadfast commitment to the overall goals of the expedition.

Sverre Hassel's loyalty was more balanced, as he recognised the strain that the conflict between Amundsen and Johansen placed on the group. Hassel's narrative captures the delicate balance between maintaining group cohesion and acknowledging the underlying

tensions that threatened the expedition's stability. His observation, "Loyalty to the mission kept us together, but the cracks were beginning to show," suggests that while he valued unity and was committed to the expedition's goals, he was also aware of the potential long-term consequences of suppressing dissent and marginalising those who challenged the status quo.

Hjalmar Johansen's loyalty, in contrast, was primarily directed towards the safety and ethical treatment of the group. His willingness to challenge Amundsen's decisions, particularly when he perceived them as endangering the team, reflects a deep commitment to the well-being of his fellow explorers. Johansen's narrative underscores his belief that leadership should be exercised with a focus on collective responsibility and safety, even if it means dissenting from the leader's decisions. This stance ultimately led to his marginalisation, as Amundsen sought to maintain control and focus by excluding Johansen from the final polar journey. Johansen's narrative highlights the ethical dilemmas faced by leaders in extreme environments, where the balance between authority and inclusiveness can have significant implications for group cohesion and success.

Integration of narrative and thematic insights

By integrating Narrative Analysis and Thematic Analysis, along with an exploration of the varying levels of loyalty, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the return journey and the conflict between Amundsen and Johansen. The Narrative Analysis reveals how each individual constructed their story and positioned themselves within the broader expedition, highlighting the differences in perspective that contributed to the conflict. Amundsen's narrative emphasises his role as a decisive leader, framing his decisions within the context of the mission's success and the need for a unified, focused team. Johansen's narrative, however, challenges the ethical implications of these decisions, advocating for a leadership style that prioritises safety and inclusivity. The narratives of other team members generally align with Amundsen, though they also reflect the underlying tensions caused by the conflict, particularly in terms of group cohesion and morale.

The Thematic Analysis identifies the recurring themes of leadership, conflict, survival, and group cohesion, showing how these themes were experienced and expressed across the different narratives. Leadership and authority are central to all narratives, with Amundsen's authority being both asserted and challenged. The theme of conflict, particularly between Amundsen and Johansen, is intricately linked to the broader issues of group cohesion and loyalty. The extreme conditions of the Antarctic environment amplify these themes, making survival a primary concern and intensifying the existing tensions within the group.

This integrated approach to analysing the narratives, themes, and levels of loyalty within the South Pole expedition offers a richer, more nuanced understanding of the events and the dynamics involved. The combined Narrative and Thematic Analysis, enhanced by a consideration of the varying levels of loyalty, reveals the complex interplay between individual perspectives, shared experiences, and the differing allegiances that shaped the expedition's outcome. This dual perspective is essential for a full appreciation of the complexities of leadership, conflict, survival, and loyalty in one of the most extreme environments on earth.

Discussion

In this section, the findings from the Results are interpreted in the context of the study's research questions, offering a deeper

understanding of the dynamics of leadership, conflict, survival, and loyalty within Amundsen's South Pole expedition. This discussion also explores the broader implications for leadership in extreme environments.

Leadership and authority

The results reveal that Amundsen's authoritative leadership was a double-edged sword. On one hand, his decisive and pragmatic approach was crucial in steering the expedition through the harsh and unforgiving Antarctic environment. His ability to make tough decisions, such as turning back during the initial push and later excluding Johansen, was essential for maintaining the focus and cohesion of the team. These decisions, while controversial, underscore the importance of strong, centralised leadership in extreme conditions, where survival often hinges on quick and unambiguous action.

While Amundsen's leadership style aligns closely with traditional definitions of transactional leadership, characterised by clear structure, rules, and task-oriented decisions, the extreme context of the South Pole expedition suggests that this form of leadership may possess additional dimensions when applied in high-stakes environments. Unlike conventional settings where transactional leadership might focus purely on efficiency and task completion, Amundsen's approach required balancing these objectives with the immediate physical and psychological survival of his team. This context highlights the need to consider emotional resilience and ethical decision-making as integral components of transactional leadership in extreme environments. The harsh Antarctic conditions and the life-and-death stakes of the mission necessitated a form of transactional leadership that was not only task-focused but also adaptive to the extraordinary stressors faced by the team.

However, the findings also suggest that Amundsen's leadership style generated significant internal conflict, particularly with Johansen, but there were also several conflicts with other men during the dash to the South Pole. For instance, on 19 December, Amundsen decided to send Bjaaland back with Hassel as his navigator after a quarrel, though he later reversed this decision following Bjaaland's apology the same day (Hassel, 2011, p. 134). Similarly, on 1 December, Hassel noted in his diary that Amundsen "as usual became angry when someone allowed himself a diverging opinion," a comment prompted by Hassel's disagreement with Amundsen over the decision to depot crampons (Hassel, 2011, p. 138). Another instance occurred on 18 January, when a disagreement between Amundsen and Hanssen about the smell of a dog led Amundsen to refuse to speak to Hanssen (Hassel, 2011, p. 154). These incidents underscore the recurring tensions within the group and reflect the challenges of maintaining cohesion under the pressure of extreme conditions.

Johansen's narrative highlights the ethical dilemmas inherent in such authoritative leadership, especially when it comes at the expense of communication and inclusiveness. The tension between Amundsen's need to assert control and Johansen's call for a more safety-oriented leadership approach reflects the broader challenge of balancing authority with the ethical considerations of team welfare. This dynamic is particularly relevant in extreme environments, where the stakes are exceptionally high, and the consequences of leadership decisions are magnified.

Amundsen's leadership style reflected a strong need to maintain authority, evident beyond the South Pole expedition. During the *Maud* expedition, he reportedly sent oceanographer Harald Ulrik

Sverdrup to conduct ethnological investigations rather than remain aboard for critical oceanographic work, likely fearing that Sverdrup's university degree might outshine him during the long winter months (Næss, 2004). This sensitivity to challenges against his authority extended to the exclusion of Johansen from the South Pole dash, following Johansen's public critique, which Amundsen found intolerable.

Amundsen's response to Johansen's critique following the false start provides critical insight into his leadership style. As Næss (2004) observes, Amundsen did not view Johansen's remark as a legitimate critique, whether justified or not, but instead defined it as an act of mutiny. This interpretation reflects Amundsen's intolerance of dissent and his prioritisation of authority over open dialogue within the team.

Conflict and tension

The conflict between Amundsen and Johansen, as revealed in the narratives, underscores the potential for tension in high-pressure environments, particularly when leadership decisions are perceived as compromising safety. Amundsen's exclusion of Johansen can be seen as a strategic move to assert control and maintain the expedition's focus, yet it also had the effect of marginalising dissent and potentially undermining long-term group cohesion. This conflict raises important questions about how leaders in extreme environments should manage dissent. The decision to suppress Johansen's voice may have been effective in the short term, but it also highlighted the risks associated with a top-down leadership style that prioritises authority over inclusiveness.

Interestingly, while Amundsen's leadership was predominantly transactional, the success of the expedition also relied on elements typically associated with transformational leadership. For instance, despite his authoritarian approach, Amundsen's ability to inspire a shared vision of reaching the South Pole and his capacity to maintain the morale of his team under extreme conditions suggest that his leadership style contained elements of transformational leadership. This blending of styles raises questions about the rigidity of the transactional-transformational dichotomy in leadership theory, particularly in extreme environments. Amundsen's approach challenges the conventional boundaries between these models, suggesting that effective leadership in such settings may require a dynamic combination of both transactional and transformational elements.

Survival and hardship

Survival in the Antarctic was a central concern for all expedition members, and the findings suggest that Amundsen's leadership was critical in navigating these challenges. His narrative frames survival as dependent on strong, decisive leadership, with his authority seen as crucial in managing the life-threatening conditions they encountered. However, Johansen's contrasting perspective suggests that some of Amundsen's decisions may have compromised the team's safety, particularly due to a lack of communication and coordination. This divergence in perspectives highlights the complex relationship between leadership and survival in extreme environments, where different approaches to decision-making can have profound implications for the safety and well-being of the team.

Group cohesion and loyalty

The varying levels of loyalty within the team played a significant role in the expedition's dynamics. While some members exhibited

unwavering loyalty to Amundsen, helping to maintain group cohesion, the conflict with Johansen introduced fractures in the group. Hassel's observation about the "cracks" beginning to show suggests that while the mission's goals kept the team united, the underlying tensions could have long-term consequences for group cohesion. This finding emphasises the importance of managing internal conflicts in a way that preserves unity and morale, particularly in high-pressure environments. The experiences of the expedition illustrate how loyalty to the leader, to the group, and to the mission's objectives can vary significantly among team members, influencing the overall dynamics and success of the expedition.

The findings from Amundsen's expedition also suggest broader implications for leadership theory, particularly in how leadership models might be adapted for extreme environments. The necessity for swift, unilateral decision-making in life-threatening situations, as demonstrated by Amundsen, indicates that leadership theories must account for the unique pressures of such contexts. This could involve developing new frameworks that integrate the need for authoritative decision-making with ethical considerations of team welfare and psychological resilience. Future research could explore how these adaptations of traditional leadership theories can be applied across various extreme environments, from polar expeditions to military operations and space exploration, thereby broadening the applicability and relevance of leadership theory.

Broader implications

The study's findings offer valuable insights into the dynamics of leadership in extreme environments, with implications that extend beyond the specific historical context of Amundsen's South Pole expedition. The tension between authoritative leadership and the need for inclusiveness and ethical decision-making is a key challenge for leaders in high-stakes contexts. Amundsen's South Pole expedition serves as a case study that underscores the importance of balancing decisive leadership with the psychological and relational needs of the team. The experiences of Amundsen and his team provide lessons that are relevant not only to historical contexts but also to contemporary leadership challenges in similarly extreme or high-stakes environments. Seeger (2003) identifies polar exploration as a context where leadership lessons are amplified by the harsh environment, testing a leader's ability to remain adaptable, scrupulously fair, and focused on the ultimate goal. Amundsen's handling of team dynamics, especially in the exclusion of Johansen, underscores the complexity of leadership in such settings.

Conclusion

This study provides an in-depth examination of the leadership dynamics within Roald Amundsen's South Pole expedition, with a particular emphasis on the conflict between Amundsen and Hjalmar Johansen following the false start. By integrating Narrative and Thematic Analyses, the research has illuminated the complex interplay of leadership, conflict, survival, and loyalty that shaped the expedition's outcome.

The findings demonstrate that while Amundsen's authoritative leadership was crucial in navigating the harsh Antarctic conditions and ensuring the expedition's success, it also generated significant internal tensions. Johansen's exclusion from the final polar journey highlights the ethical challenges of prioritising authority over inclusiveness. Similarly, variations in loyalty among team

members—rooted in their experiences, allegiances, and perceptions of leadership—contributed to differing responses to Amundsen's decisions. These dynamics underscore the complexity of leadership in extreme environments, where the stakes are exceptionally high, and survival often hinges on rapid, unilateral action.

The study also sheds light on broader theoretical implications. Amundsen's leadership style predominantly reflected transactional principles, but elements of transformational leadership—such as fostering a shared vision of success—also emerged. This blending challenges the traditional dichotomy between these leadership models, suggesting that effective leadership in high-stakes settings requires flexibility and a dynamic balance of approaches.

Despite these contributions, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The reliance on autobiographical writings and diaries introduces potential biases, as selective recollections and retrospective justifications could affect interpretations. Furthermore, focusing on a single expedition limits the generalisability of the findings. Future research could expand on this work by exploring leadership dynamics across multiple expeditions or applying insights from contemporary fields, such as organisational psychology or crisis management.

The lessons from Amundsen's expedition extend beyond polar exploration, offering valuable insights for leaders in similarly high-stakes environments. One key takeaway is the importance of balancing decisiveness with empathy. While Amundsen's authoritarian decisions ensured operational efficiency, they often came at the cost of team cohesion and individual morale. Modern leaders can adapt this duality by integrating task-oriented and relational leadership strategies.

Another critical insight is the constructive management of dissent. Johansen's criticisms, though valid in some respects, were dismissed in a manner that escalated tensions. Leaders in extreme conditions must recognise dissent as an opportunity for dialogue and innovation rather than a threat to authority.

Finally, the psychological dimensions of leadership are crucial in high-pressure contexts. Amundsen's expedition underscores the necessity for leaders to address the mental well-being of their teams, fostering trust, inclusivity, and shared purpose to sustain resilience and morale.

By examining the interplay of leadership, conflict, and survival, this study not only deepens our historical understanding of polar exploration but also provides actionable guidance for contemporary leadership in extreme environments, from crisis response to space exploration. These lessons remain as relevant today as they were over a century ago, emphasising the enduring importance of adaptability, inclusiveness, and ethical decision-making in leadership.

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