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EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES IN MULTICULTURAL STUDENT TEAM
Case *ship Startup Festival

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ABSTRACT

The research examined the effective leadership styles within the context of student-organised events with a specific focus on the *ship Startup Festival. It utilised the path-goal leadership framework to explore how leader behaviours, tasks and followers' characteristics influence team performance in multicultural teams. As a qualitative data collection method, semi-structured interview was used to gather the data from participants from the *ship Startup Festival over three years, and thematic coding for the data analysis was employed to identify the key elements.

According to the findings of this research leadership effectiveness depends on the ability of a leader to adapt different strategies to address diverse characteristics of followers and tasks within a multicultural environment. The study suggested a balanced approach that incorporates directive, participative, achievement-oriented, and supportive behaviours for the various tasks the team performs annually.

Managerial implications include the development of a guidebook that can be used by the *ship Startup Festival future leaders and team members, providing practical recommendations for the event organisation, balancing the team composition, and aligning the leadership strategies with follower characteristics. The study can be used as a basis for the guidebook. Moreover, it identifies the areas for future research to explore the topic of student and peer leadership dynamics further in-depth. This research offeredd valuable insights into leadership practices within student-led initiatives and provided clear, actionable recommendations for enhancing team performance in multicultural contexts.

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Appendix 1. Interview guide

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and commissioner

Nowadays leadership is a highly demanded and valued skill that has gained the attention of researchers worldwide. People are interested in what it takes to be a good leader and continue to buy enormous self-help books on this topic – only Amazon offers more than 60,000 of them (Amazon 2024) because leadership is needed not only in business and work settings but also is a driving force of a learning process. In his book, Northouse (2021) states that followership is a way of learning leadership, as followers can observe and critically assess the leadership behavioursused.

The commissioner of this thesis is Xentre, Research & Development Unit of the South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Science (Xamk) which organises the *ship Startup Festival (Xamk 2024) – a 2-day event for starting entrepreneurs to get mentoring and pitch their ideas on stage - and involves students with multicultural backgrounds annually. Although the main focus of Xentre is to organise events for starting entrepreneurs and enhance the Startup and entrepreneurship mindset in the Kymenlaakso region in Finland, the event has been a great platform for students to get fruitful networks and new experiences, especially in the event management field. The extensive involvement of the author in the *ship Startup Festival over three years highlighted the need for this research. As a former volunteer and current leader of the Startup & Mentor team, the significant impact that effective leadership can have on the event's success was observed. Moreover, to ensure the continuity of the event exploring different approaches that will be able to address the main challenge of involving students resulting in annual changes in team composition.

Leadership is a highly researched topic even in the context of event management – in fact, according to Northouse, the first definitions of leadership emerged in the 1930s (Moore 1927 cited in Northouse 2021). Nevertheless, most of the existing approaches to leadership are more descriptive and cannot give us a

comprehensive answer on how to implement successful leadership strategies, while researchers state that leadership is an important component of team effectiveness (Hackman 1987; Manz & Sims 1987; McIntyre & Salas 1995 cited in Morgeson 1998). Moreover, leadership and its impact on the effectiveness of teamwork is essential in the context of the learning journey of multicultural student-team in the context of event management.

1.2   Development settings

This thesis studied the effective leadership strategies that can be implemented to enhance the effective work performance and learning outcomes of a multicultural student team in the context of event management. The study focused on leadership strategies available in the multicultural work team and used by student organisations, as an example of a student team. Therefore, the research question was: What leadership strategies can be implemented to maximise learning outcomes and professional development in multicultural student team in the context of *ship Startup Festival?

The main aim of the research is to evaluate the effectiveness of different leadership approaches in the context of student-team and multicultural teams to develop recommendations to the *ship Startup Festival on how to implement those in the context of event management and the *ship Startup Festival particularly. The stated objectives to achieve this aim were: (1) to identify leadership strategies used in multicultural student teams, (2) to determine the main tasks performed by students and their characteristics to organize the *ship Startup Festival, (3) and to analyze data and develop the recommendations on what leadership strategies can be adopted by the *ship Startup Festival.

1.3   Research methods

The study will be based on pragmatism as its research methodology, since it emphasises the practical implications of research findings, aligning with the goal of providing actionable recommendations for the *ship Startup Festival (Rylander

2024). The methodological choice is justified by the need to explore the complex interplay between multicultural student team dynamics and leadership styles used to manage followers and efficiently perform tasks in the event management context. Previous research in leadership studies, particularly in student-team effectiveness and organisational behaviour in multicultural settings, provides a foundational basis for this approach.

The sampling strategy will involve criterion sampling to select participants who have joined the *ship Startup Festival within the last three years and have served as followers within multicultural student teams. This approach ensures a diverse range of perspectives and experiences, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the challenges faced by followers over time. Participants will be selected based on their involvement in various tasks within the *ship Startup Festival.

The qualitative data collection method will primarily consist of 6 semi-structured interviews with individual followers involved in the marketing of the *ship and teams related to communication with startups and mentors as analysis units. These interviews will allow for a detailed exploration of participants' experiences, challenges, and detailed tasks performed within the *ship Startup Festival over the past three years. By focusing on individual experiences, the research aims to capture the evolution of challenges and tasks faced by followers over time, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of leadership within multicultural student teams. Access to data will be facilitated by the involvement of the author in the *ship Startup Festival on these stages.

1.4 Theoretical framework and limitations

According to Andrew J. DuBrin (2010), leadership is a process by which the individual leader influences a group of followers to achieve a common goal. While leaders and followers share a close connection, it's typically the leader who takes the initiative in forming the relationship, establishes communication channels, and shoulders the responsibility for sustaining it (Northouse 2021). Nevertheless,

leaders and followers need to be studied in close relation to each other jointly, since they are equal parts of the leader-follower relationship (Hollander 1992).

That is especially essential in the context of multicultural teams which bring diverse perspectives, experiences, and insights affecting the decision-making process. Effective leaders in multicultural teams must skillfully navigate these differences to foster an inclusive environment where all voices are heard and respected. (Hofstede 2011.) On the other hand, multicultural teams can present challenges related to communication and collaboration due to language barriers and cultural differences. To mitigate these challenges, leaders should use strategies such as establishing clear communication channels, providing cultural sensitivity training, and fostering a culture of mutual understanding. (Earley & Mosakowski 2004.) Moreover, multicultural teams offer opportunities for personal and professional growth for leaders, since they learn to adapt their leadership style to multicultural settings.

In his book, Northouse mentions that there are over 60 different classification systems that describe leadership from different perspectives. For example, from the trait perspective, leadership can be considered as a set of special traits and characteristics that some individuals might possess. Some scholars follow the skills approach to leadership suggesting that an effective leader must have specific knowledge and skills, while others consider behaviour to be the main reason affecting the performance of followers. (Northouse 2021.) Therefore, there is already a vast of research done on the topic of leadership, but this work will focus particularly on the leadership approaches for multicultural teams and student teams and the linkage of leadership style and team performance. Moreover, although the author acknowledges the specifics of the event management field such as its temporary nature and project-based structure, this study will be limited only by these key differences. It will be mostly aligned with the theory of leadership for work or student teams without a significant focus on events.

A limitation of this study is the potential impact of retrospective perceptions on the tasks performed by individuals who participated in *ship in 2022 and 2023. Their answers during the interviews may be subject to memory biases or inaccuracies, which could affect the reliability of their insights into the tasks they undertook. As the team composition changes annually due to student participation, the study will focus solely on individuals performing core tasks crucial for the success of the event. This includes communication with mentors, startups, and marketing activities. Supporting roles such as accounting, logistics, IT-support are assumed to be managed by the core team and event manager and will not be analysed. Additionally, the effectiveness of the study may be restricted by the current activities of the 2024 team, which could result in the neglect of crucial tasks that are yet to be accomplished, considering the event's approaching deadline of one month.

Furthermore, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations related to the anonymity of the interviewees. The study leverages the path-goal theory of leadership presented in chapter 2 and focuses on the characteristics of the task, since the leader and followers change annually, to provide practical recommendations on what leadership style to use for various cornerstone tasks to organize the *ship. While the data on the tasks performed by the interviewees and the characteristics of these tasks was collected, the tasks cannot be presented in the data analysis case by case to preserve anonymity. For instance, communication with startups has always been a fundamental task, while the team members responsible for this varied annually: in 2022, a Startup Trainee handled it; in 2023, it was the responsibility of the Startup & Marketing team; in 2024, it was the Mentor & Startup Trainee.

2   PATH-GOAL APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP IN MULTICULTURAL STUDENT TEAMS

2.1 Cultural dimensions and group behaviour

Scholars conceptualise cultural dimensions as a framework for understanding the fundamental values and behavioural patterns that distinguish one culture from another (Hofstede 2011). These dimensions provide a structured approach to analysing cultural variations across societies, illuminating how different cultures perceive and respond to various societal norms and practices (House et al. 2004.) Cultural diversity can have both positive and negative effects on team dynamics. Diverse teams are important in the organisational setting since they bring together people with different professional skills and cultural backgrounds to ensure higher creativity (Jackson & Ruderman 1995). It is the responsibility of the leader to mitigate any disadvantages caused by cultural differences in order to ensure team efficiency. Hence, it is important to examine how exactly cultural differences may impact group behaviour and leadership strategies consequently.

For example, Hofstede's (2011) cultural dimensions, such as individualism versus collectivism and uncertainty avoidance, have a profound influence on communication styles within multicultural teams. In individualistic cultures, direct communication may be preferred, while collectivist cultures prefer indirect communication to maintain harmony (Hofstede 2011). Effective leaders acknowledge these differences and adjust their communication strategies accordingly to promote comprehension and cooperation among team members.

Additionally, power distance as one of Hofstede's dimensions may affect decision-making processes in multicultural teams (Wolf 2006). Cultures with high power distance may favor hierarchical decision-making, where the leader holds centralised authority, while low power distance cultures may prioritise participative decision-making, involving input from all team members (Hofstede 2011).

Finally, Hofstede's dimensions also impact leadership styles in multicultural teams (Wolf 2006). For example, cultures with a high level of uncertainty

avoidance may prefer autocratic leadership styles to provide structure and certainty. In contrast, cultures with a low level of uncertainty avoidance may be more receptive to participative leadership approaches. Effective leaders adjust their leadership style to align with the cultural expectations and preferences of their team members, promoting inclusivity and maximising team performance.

Also, Fons Trompenaars (1993 cited in Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1997) introduced cultural parameters providing a nuanced analysis of cultural differences. These parameters include Universalism vs. Particularism, Individualism vs. Communitarianism, Affective vs. Neutral, Specific vs. Diffuse, and Achievement vs. Ascription. Universalism vs. Particularism describes how individuals judge the behaviour of others; universalistic cultures value adherence to rules and impartial treatment regardless of circumstances, whereas particularistic cultures make judgments based on situational context. Individualism vs. Communitarianism reflects the balance between individual and collective well-being; individualistic cultures emphasize individual autonomy and goal attainment, while communitarian cultures prioritize community well-being and conformity. Affective vs. Neutral explores the expression of emotions; affective cultures openly express emotions, whereas neutral cultures control and suppress them. Specific vs. Diffuse explores personal space; Specific cultures maintain distinct public and private spheres, while Diffuse cultures have permeable boundaries between public and private spheres. Finally, Achievement vs. Ascription examines status attribution; Achievement cultures value achievement and merit-based status, whereas Ascription cultures emphasise inherent qualities and social connections for status recognition. (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1997.)

While most of the studies focus on identifying the cultural patterns that are common in different areas of the world, Erin Meyer identified eight features that can be used to analyse multicultural efficiency. These include communication (low context vs. high context), evaluation (negative feedback, direct or indirect), persuasion (based on principles vs. applicability), management style (egalitarian

vs. top-down), trust level (task-based vs. relationship-based), disagreement (confrontational vs. pacifistic), and planning (linear time vs. flexible time); all of which are grouped by country. (Meyer 2016 cited in Paiuc 2021.)

Finally, in their Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness (GLOBE) study House and his colleagues analyzed 62 societies in 10 regions (so-called clusters) of the world on 9 major dimensions of culture to finalise the 6 universally-accepted leadership styles (Wolf 2006) that will be discussed in the next sub-chapter. Based on Hofstede's 6 dimensions of cultural variations such as power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, long-term vs. short-term orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint (Hofstede 2011) project GLOBE identified 9 independent variables (House et al. 2004).

In their framework, future orientation reflects a focus of society on planning, investing in the future, and delaying gratification, leading to economic prosperity and advancements in various fields. Gender egalitarianism highlights efforts to minimise gender role differences and promote gender equality. Assertiveness measures the degree to which individuals are assertive and confrontational in social relationships. Humane orientation highlights the significance of fairness, altruism, and kindness towards others. In-group collectivism reflects pride, loyalty, and cohesion within organisations or families, while institutional collectivism refers to institutional practices that promote collective action and resource distribution. Performance orientation emphasises encouraging and rewarding group members for improving their performance and achieving excellence. Power distance measures the degree of acceptance of hierarchical power structures within organisations or societies. Uncertainty avoidance reflects the extent to which individuals rely on established social norms and rituals to avoid uncertainty. These dimensions offer a complete framework for comprehending cultural differences and their effects on organisational and societal dynamics. (House et al. 2004.)

2.2 Leadership and intercultural management

Effective leadership in multicultural teams - teams of individuals with different cultural backgrounds but still interdependent in their tasks and sharing the responsibility for the outcomes (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008) - is crucial. Although these heterogeneous groups usually outperform the mono-cultural teams (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008) due to the diverse perspectives and broader skill sets, different cultural background causes some challenges such as communication barriers, perceptual problems, and differences in the habits of individuals of diverse cultures (Tyagi 2015). Moreover, as Williams and O'Reilly stated (1998 cited in Halverson & Tirmizi 2008) the diversity of the group does not guarantee a positive impact on the team performance, since in multicultural settings its effectiveness depends on whether they can or cannot eliminate the disadvantages of the diversity (Tsui & O'Reilly 1989 cited in Halverson & Tirmizi 2008). And that is where leadership comes to foster communication, overcome stereotypes, and enhance cultural intelligence (Szydlo et al. 2022) making multicultural leadership the main priority in 90% of the biggest companies in 68 countries (Palmer 2006 cited in Paiuc 2021). Moreover, effective leadership in such teams is essential for attracting, retaining, and developing top talent (Szydlo et al. 2022).

Clearly, efficient leaders in multicultural settings need to appreciate the diversity leading to inclusion and equity. Hence, understanding cultural intelligence (CQ) and intercultural competencies (IC), the terms that are usually interchangeable, is crucial. Ang Soon & Linn Van Dyne (2015 cited in Paiuc 2021) explain cultural intelligence as one's capability to effectively perform in culturally diverse situations with individuals and organisations. According to Livermore (cited in Paiuc 2021), CQ has four main dimensions: (1) drive towards multicultural situations, (2) knowledge about the similarities and differences between various cultures, (3) strategy on how to behave in multicultural interactions, and (4) action which is an ability to adjust to work or interpersonal relations in multicultural settings. Often globalisation and emerging needs in cross-cultural and

multicultural teams force leaders to act according to CQ without having proper CQ knowledge and developing a CQ strategy (Paiuc 2021). Therefore, since people from different cultures perceive successful leadership and interpret leaders' actions differently (Yukl 2002 & House et al. 2004 cited in Deng & Gibson 2008) it is reasonable that different leadership approaches should be used in different cultural settings (Dickson et al. 2003 cited in Deng & Gibson 2008).

This statement is also relevant in the context of intercultural competence (IC) – the set of skills allowing one to communicate, interact, and work effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds. It requires understanding and respecting cultural differences, as well as adapting one's behaviour, communication style, and attitudes in diverse cultural contexts. Intercultural competence involves skills such as cultural awareness, empathy, communication proficiency, flexibility, and conflict resolution abilities. (Deardorff 2006.) Therefore, intercultural competence is a component of CQ, which encompasses a comprehensive set of skills and capabilities necessary for successful interaction and leadership in multicultural contexts.

In leadership studies, Gupta (2009 cited in Armstrong 2020) argues that adaptability and cultural competence (and intercultural as well, since it describes the ability to interact with people from various cultures) are essential skills for success in cross-cultural environments, both domestically and internationally. Therefore, leaders must explore the critical abilities that are fundamental to perform successfully in an intercultural environment. Margaret D. Pusch presents Deardoff's key behavioural abilities required for effective intercultural communication: managing psychological stress, effective communication, utilising cultural differences and knowledge, and taking advantage of cultural interfaces. The management of change in a borderless environment is increasingly important as national borders dissolve and cultures encounter each other more frequently through technology. (Pusch 2009.)

The researchers from the GLOBE project mentioned in the sub-chapter 2.1, identified 6 global leader behaviours as follows. Charismatic/value-based leadership aims to inspire and motivate others based on core values, including visionary, inspirational, self-sacrifice, integrity, decisiveness, and performance orientation. Charismatic/value-based and team-oriented leadership styles are distinct, whereas team-oriented leadership focuses on building effective teams and pursuing common goals, with subscales such as collaborative team orientation and team integration. Participative leadership involves including others in decision-making processes, with autocratic and non-participative subscales. Humane-oriented leadership prioritizes support, compassion, and generosity, with subscales including modesty and humane-oriented qualities. Autonomous leadership represents independent and individualistic leadership, while self-protective leadership focuses on ensuring safety and security, including subscales like self-centeredness and status consciousness. These six leadership styles offer a complete framework for comprehending leadership behaviours and preferences across various cultural contexts. (House et al. 2004). In his review, Wolf (2006) emphasises charismatic/ value-based, team-oriented, and participating leadership behaviours as outstanding behaviours, while humane-oriented is considered to be neutral and moderate, and autonomous and self-protective leadership are reported negatively.

Interestingly, the global leader behaviour suggested by project GLOBE aligns with the leadership behaviour described in path-goal theory. According to Northouse (2021), path-goal theory explains how leaders motivate followers to achieve the intended goals. Moreover, according to House (1996 cited in Northouse 2021) the main responsibility of an effective leader in the path-goal theory is to align leaders' behaviour with the organisational environment and followers' abilities ensuring their satisfaction and eliminating their shortages. Leadership in the path-goal approach is designed to explain how leaders should behave to generate motivation of the follower by increasing the reward or by additional mentoring to remove the obstacles towards the goal and making the work process more satisfying (House and Mitchell 1974 cited in Northouse 2021).

Leader behaviour, the first element of a path-goal theory, also partially corresponds to the leader behaviours suggested by the project GLOBE and consists of 4 leadership behaviours (House & Mitchell 1974 cited by Northouse 2021). First, directive leadership involves giving clear instructions to followers about their tasks, expectations, methods, and deadlines. Supportive leadership, on the other hand, focuses on creating a friendly and approachable environment while attending to followers' well-being and human needs (House 1971; Hemphill & Coons 1957; Stogdill 1963 cited in Northouse 2021). Achievement-oriented leadership challenges followers to excel by setting high standards and fostering continuous improvement to increase confidence in their abilities. Finally, participative leadership creates a space where a leader consults with team members and takes their input into account for decision-making. Path-goal theory, proposed by House and Mitchell in 1971 (cited in Northouse 2021), emphasises that leaders can exhibit multiple styles depending on situational and follower needs and advocates for adaptive leadership behaviours.

2.3   Student leadership

Furthermore, there has been a lot of interest among researchers in the student perspective on leadership, as young people are vital representatives of the future. In this work, we discussed how most scholars view leadership as a set of abilities and skills (Northouse 2021; Konuk & Posner 2021) that can be acquired or improved, rather than innate traits as suggested by the Great Man or Trait theory. Therefore, it is important to study how young people develop their leadership skills and qualities within educational institutions. Unlike traditional leadership models, which often focus on hierarchical structures and authority, student leadership emphasises collaboration, inclusivity, and empowerment among peers. Skalicky et al. (2018) provide an example of how leadership can be developed through immersion in student-led programs that focus on delivering institutional priorities.

Effective student leaders demonstrate cognitive ability, leadership capacity, self-efficacy, social perspective-taking, resilience, and motivation (Brungardt 1996; Chan & Drasgow 2001; Dygan & Komives 2010; Dugan 2011; Dugan et al. 2014; Dugan et al. 2013; Chan & Drasgow 2001 cited in Correia-Harker 2016). Leadership capacity includes the skills, knowledge, and attitudes required for effective leadership. Self-efficacy represents the belief in one's leadership abilities, while motivation drives engagement in leadership development (Chan & Drasgow 2001 cited in Correia-Harker 2016). In their article, Mozhgan et al. (2011) summarise the student-specific factors that affect the development of leadership competencies during the educational process. These factors include the student's major, grade point average, gender, living arrangements, interactions with peers and professors, and participation in university activities.

Moreover, student leadership can be analyzed from the perspective of assigned and emergent leadership. Assigned leaders within student organisations or institutions can hold formal positions of authority. These positions are typically filled through election or appointment and come with specific duties and responsibilities. Emergent leaders, on the other hand, are individuals who naturally rise to leadership positions based on their influence, expertise, and ability to inspire others, regardless of formal titles or positions (Northouse 2021). In his book, Northouse summarises that to be assigned as a leader, a person should be verbally involved, well-informed, considerate of others' opinions, initiate new ideas, and maintain a firm yet flexible behaviour (Ellis & Fisher 1994 cited in Northouse 2021). Similarly to other approaches, personality traits play a significant role in leader emergence – individuals who demonstrate dominance, intelligence, and confidence are more likely to be identified as leaders by their peers (Hogg 2001 cited in Northouse 2021). Additionally, Judith A. Kolb (1998) emphasises that leader emergence is closely related to task-related behavior, frequency of talk, performance self-esteem, gender, interpersonal attraction, and self-monitoring.

Student leaders exhibit distinctive characteristics compared to leaders in other contexts. Firstly, the nature of student leadership is influenced by its development - the process in which a person acquires leadership skills and knowledge (Mozhgan et al. 2011). This developmental aspect suggests that student leaders may exhibit more variation in their leadership styles and effectiveness compared to experienced leaders in professional or community settings. Secondly, student leadership is usually closely related to peer leadership, which involves the formal engagement of fellow students with a community (Keup 2020). This creates a different dynamic compared to leadership roles in professional settings. Therefore, student leaders may focus more on community building, event organising, and peer mentoring.

Interestingly, while there are various studies assessing the impact of institutional leadership on the learning outcomes of students and some works focused on the student leadership affecting the learning outcomes of students being served (Robinson 2007; Malechwanzi 2018; Leithwood et al. 2004), there is little research done explaining the impact of student leadership on student leaders. For example, in their work "Effects of Peer Mentorship on Student Leadership", Walters and Kanak (2016) summarise the short and long-term benefits of students who served as mentors for first-year students. Short-term benefits of the training included the development of interpersonal communication and group work skills, while the main long-term benefit was the development of career-related skills.

As a conclusion, Neil Dempster and Alf Lizzo (2007) highlighted a significant issue in the research on student leadership: the lack of attention to students' perspectives. There is a heavy reliance on quantitative analysis and adult-driven viewpoints, with little exploration of student leadership development from a theoretical perspective. This approach overlooks the unique experiences of students, which are crucial to understanding their leadership potential. This lack of understanding of a student perspective is significant, while the topic is

important not only for the development of student leaders but also for the improvement of education and communities. (Dempster & Lizzio 2007.)

2.4 Leader-follower dynamics

This chapter explains the vital role that followers play in the leadership process and highlights that despite the societal emphasis on a leader, the process of leadership requires followers who accept the influence of a leader to achieve a common goal. In his book, Northouse emphasises the leader-centric approach to conceptualising leadership overlooking the shared process of leadership that requires interdependence between a leader and followers (Uhl-Bien et al. 2014 cited in Northouse 2021). The concept of followership is open to a variety of interpretations, with connotations ranging from positive, as seen in military contexts or orderly procedures, to negative, such as in instances of cult followings or harmful group behaviours (Carsten et al. 2014 cited in Northouse 2021).

Moreover, Northouse (2021) explores and summarises different typologies of followership resulting with active-engaged, independent-assertive, submissive-compliant, and supportive-conforming followers, as well as passive, antiauthoritarian, and proactive followers. It also provides labels for individuals engaged in the leadership process (Carsten et al. 2014 cited in Northouse 2021). In a further contribution to the field of followership theory, Uhl-Bien and colleagues (2014 cited in Northouse 2021) propose a formal framework comprising four constructs that elucidate the process of followership.

Followership can be divided into two main categories: role-based and relational-based (Uhl-Bien et al. 2014 cited in Northouse 2021). The role-based perspective observes the typical behaviours of followers within the hierarchical systems, with a particular focus on the impact of these behaviours on leaders and organisational outcomes. Conversely, the relational-based approach, which is rooted in social constructivism, views followership as a co-created phenomenon

between leaders and followers in specific situations. This approach emphasises the interplay between leading and following behaviors. Figure 1 illustrates the process where followers and leaders have a mutual influence on each other resulting in leadership that affects the outcomes. (Carsten et al. 2010; DeRue & Ashford 2010; Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien 2012 cited in Northouse 2021.)
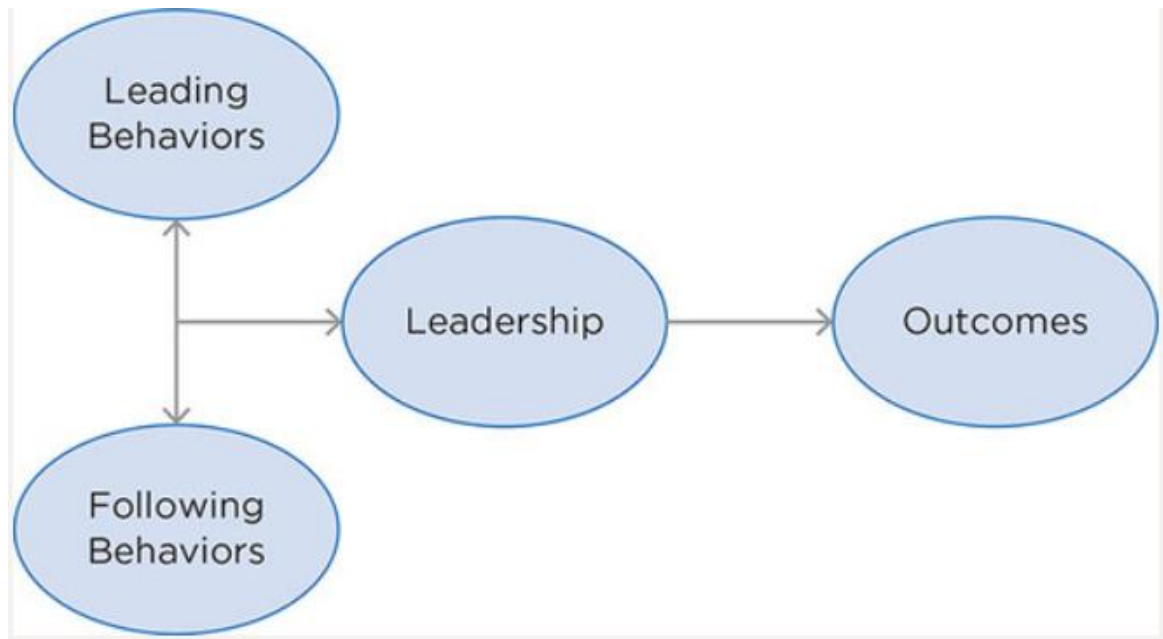

Figure 1. Leadership as a co-created process (Northouse 2021).

Furthermore, the approach to leadership as a co-created process aligns with the path-goal theory on leadership where followers' characteristics play a crucial role in defining the leadership style used. According to this approach, followers with a strong need for affiliation tend to favor supportive leadership, finding satisfaction in leaders who display friendliness and concern. Conversely, followers characterised by dogmatic and authoritarian traits, particularly in uncertain situations, are more likely to benefit from directive leadership, which offers clarity and structure to tasks, aligning with their preference for certainty. The path-goal theory also considers followers' locus of control, with internally focused followers favoring participative leadership, empowering them in decision-making, while externally focused followers respond better to directive leadership, reflecting their

belief in external influences from a leader. Additionally, followers' perceived task ability influences their motivation, with higher perceived competence reducing the need for directive leadership. Overall, follower characteristics, including needs for affiliation, locus of control, and perceived task ability, significantly shape the effectiveness of different leadership styles in motivating followers within the path-goal framework. (Northouse 2021.)

2.5 Leadership and group performance

In sub-chapters 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3, this study examined the influence of cultural dimensions on leadership and the dynamics between leaders and followers, with the objective of identifying the impact of leadership on effective team performance. Consequently, the concept of team performance and techniques for measuring team performance will be presented in this chapter, in order to provide a comprehensive overview of this pertinent topic.

In the context of the *ship Startup Festival, the concept of team performance can be defined as the willingness of team members to invest effort into the production of the event, with a particular focus on the application of new knowledge. Furthermore, the generated number of new ideas, methods, and approaches of the team members is also considered an important aspect of team performance. (Cohen & Cohen 1991 cited in Kratzer; Leenders & Van Engelen 2004). High-performance teams are those whose members are deeply committed to each other's personal growth and success. These teams have been observed to outperform average teams in a number of ways. Firstly, they are more likely to have unchangeable and complementary skills. Secondly, they are more likely to have a deeper sense of purpose. Thirdly, they are more likely to have more ambitious performance goals. Fourthly, they are more likely to have complete approaches to problem-solving. Finally, they are more likely to have fuller mutual accountability than average teams. (Katzenbach & Smith 1999 cited in Matveev & Milter 2004.)

In their research on the impact of teams within organisations and their value in achieving tasks effectively Katzenbach and Smith (1993) presented the team performance curve which is presented in Figure 2. This curve distinguishes the differences between working groups and teams and describes the processes by which a working group becomes a high-performance team. Overall they differentiate two ways of a working group becoming a high-performance team. The first way leads to a pseudo team – a group of people who work together but still quite individually despite the fact that the task may require teamwork. The performance of such a team is usually lower than the performance of the working group. When the performance of the pseudo team increases, it reaches the stage of the potential team. In a potential team, the group members realise that the interdependency in the work-related tasks affects their performance and try to work together. On the stage of a real team, the team members are jointly committed to the common goal and consider each other equally accountable for the team's performance. And finally, the high-performance team stage represents the full realisation of the team's potential via the collective actions of the team members. (Katzenbach & Smith 1993 cited in Hayes 2002.)
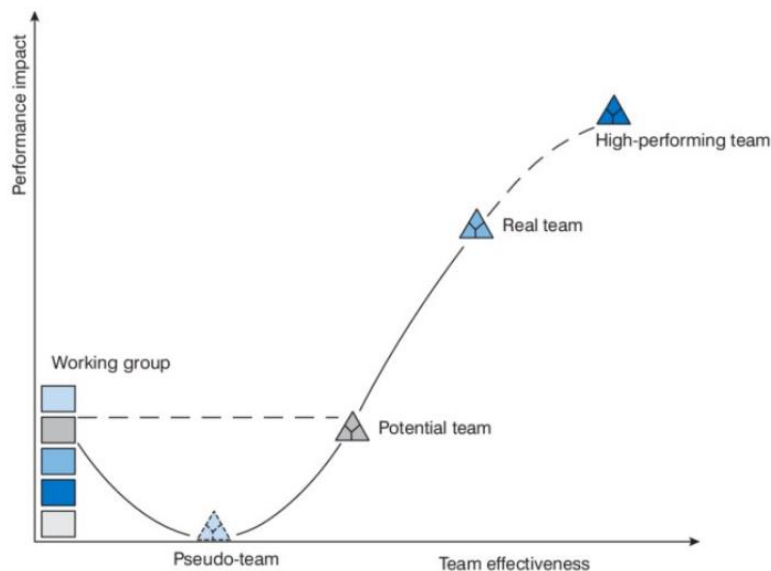

Figure 2. Team performance curve (Katzenbach & Smith 1993 cited in Knights & Willmott 2017).

Furthermore, Katzenbach and Smith identified five key factors indicating a high-performance team. The first factor, themes, and identity, refers to the ideas in which members express the purpose and nature of their team and can be demonstrated by team mottos and patterns, for example. Secondly, high-performance teams are typically positive and energetic about working in a team and tend to have a high motivation towards the work. Thirdly, the high-performance teams have a history of challenges and setbacks that confirm their capabilities to overcome problems occurring in the future. Moreover, it has been observed that team members in high-performance teams establish close relationships with each other and create a positive atmosphere by achieving shared goals. Finally, the effective teams are highly results-oriented. (Katzenbach & Smith 1993 cited in Hayes 2002.)

Another approach towards team performance in innovative teams was presented by Anderson, Hardy, and West (cited in Hayes 2002), who presented the key characteristics of successful teams. According to them, there are four factors that allow a team to be a driving force toward positive change within the organisation. Firstly, the team should have a clearly articulated purpose and shared vision. The atmosphere of trust in the team is a second key element of an innovative team since it encourages team members to generate new ideas and challenge existing practices. Moreover, the working environment should promote the achievement-orientation and thrive to get the best result possible. And finally, the team should welcome new ideas and approaches in order to enhance performance and efficiency. (Hayes 2002.)

As stated before, multicultural teams typically perform above or below average effectiveness and this is explained by the way in which diversity is managed (Kovach 1977 cited in Adler 2002). Moreover, a well-managed diverse team of people with different cultural backgrounds can be considered as an asset, while ignorance of cultural differences causes issues and diminishes the team's performance. According to Adler (2002), there are three main factors to consider

when managing multicultural teams: leadership which was discussed in sub-chapter 2.2 of this study, task characteristics, and development stage.

The second element affecting the performance of multicultural teams is task characteristics. Usually, multicultural teams tend to perform better in non-routine and complex tasks requiring creativity and innovation, while diversity negatively impacts the team's efficiency in routine tasks requiring procedures and clear guidelines. (Adler 2002.)

Moreover, task characteristics are the third crucial element of the path-goal approach to leadership, since it significantly influences how a leader's behaviour impacts the motivation of followers. These characteristics according to Northouse (2021) include the design of followers' tasks, the formal authority system within the organisation, and the dynamics of the primary work group. In situations where tasks are clearly structured, with strong group norms and an established authority system, followers may feel motivated and capable of achieving their goals without significant leadership mediation. However, in situations where tasks are ambiguous or repetitive, or where the formal authority system or group norms are weak, leadership involvement becomes crucial. Leaders should provide structure, support, and assistance in building cohesiveness and role responsibility within the workgroup. The path-goal theory emphasises the leader's role in helping followers overcome obstacles in the work environment, either by removing barriers or assisting followers in navigating around them. This facilitates follower motivation and goal attainment. Table 1 illustrates the three key elements of the path-goal theory: leadership behaviour, task and follower characteristics, and suggests how these elements are related to each other. (Northouse 2021.)

Table 2. Path-Goal Theory (Northouse 2021).

Leadership Behaviour	Follower Characteristics	Task Characteristics
Directive Leadership: provides structure	Dogmatic Authoritarian	Ambiguous Unclear rules

		Complex
Supportive Leadership: provides nurturance	Unsatisfied Need for affiliation Need for human touch	Repetitive Unchallenging Mundane
Participative Leadership: provides involvement	Autonomous Need for control Need for clarity	Ambiguous Unclear Unstructured
Achievement-Oriented Leadership: provides challenges	High expectations Need to excel	Ambiguous Challenging Complex

Finally, the effect of a team's diversity on performance depends on the various development stages. When the team requires diversity in order to function creatively, the impact of cultural diversity is positive. Conversely, when integration and cohesion are needed, the existence of cultural diversity makes the process more difficult. Table 2 presents the impact of cultural diversity stage by stage. (Adler 2002.)

Table 2. DImpact of Diversity on Team performance (Adler 2002).

Stage	Team Process based on	Impact of Diversity
Entry	Using similarities and understanding differences	More difficult
Work	Using differences	Easier
Action	Recognizing and creating similarities	More difficult

Further, Anderson and West (1994 cited in Hayes 2002) developed the Team Climate Inventory (TCI) as an instrument to rank the factors that promote

innovation within the team and affect team performance, especially in multicultural settings. The TCI questionnaire is presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Team Climate Inventory (Hayes 2002).

Factors	Question
Vision	Does the team have a clearly articulated vision?
	Is the vision clearly stated?
	Was the vision negotiated by the whole team?
	Is the vision attainable?
Participative safety	Do the team members share information fully?
	Do all team members participate in decision-making?
	Are team members ready to propose new ideas?
	Do team members discuss work-related anxieties and success?
	Is there a climate of trust within the team?
Climate for excellence	Is excellent team performance of central importance?
	What procedures and methods are used to improve the team performance?
	Are all team members committed to excellent standards?
	Are team members prepared to discuss opposing ideas?
Support for innovation	Do team members support new ideas?
	Do team members cooperate to implement new ideas?
	Does the team leader support and encourage new ideas?
	Does the team leader offer particular help to develop new ideas?

In conclusion, although the path-goal theory has been extensively studied in various organisational contexts, its application in multicultural settings of student teams remains relatively underexplored. However, for forthcoming research investigating leadership strategies within multicultural student teams managing the *ship Startup Festival, this framework offers valuable insights. The adaptive nature of the path-goal theory aligns well with the dynamic nature of the event,

which undergoes annual changes in leadership and team composition. This framework enables a nuanced understanding of how leaders can effectively motivate and guide diverse teams toward shared goals by focusing on task characteristics and follower traits. Although research in multicultural settings is limited, the path-goal theory is a suitable lens for examining leadership behaviours within the context of the *ship Startup Festival due to its contextual relevance and adaptability. Therefore, this research will use the path-goal theory to uncover the most effective leadership approaches for enhancing team performance and achieving organisational objectives in multicultural student teams.

3   DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

3.1   Research and development process

The aim of this research was to assess distinct leadership strategies that can be used by the multicultural student team of the *ship Startup Festival and provide actionable recommendations for enhancing work performance.

The research development process consists of a comprehensive examination of leadership literature, with a particular focus on its application within multicultural teams and student organisations, leader-follower dynamics, and team performance. This involves a detailed investigation of various leadership approaches, including trait-based perspectives, skills-based approaches, and behavioural theories resulting in a path-goal theory as the main approach utilised in the study due to its applicability in the context of a multicultural team and the context of an annually changing team. Moreover, the theoretical framework encompasses the challenges and opportunities presented by multicultural contexts, considering factors such as diversity, communication barriers, and cultural differences. Finally, the research describes the relationship between leadership and group performance.

Qualitative research was selected for this study to gather insights from participants who have been actively involved in the *ship Startup Festival over the past three years. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with individuals representing different teams within the festival, such as marketing teams and teams involved in communication with startups and mentors. These interviews aim to capture rich and diverse perspectives on leadership strategies, task performance, challenges faced, and experiences within multicultural student teams. Qualitative research offers a valuable opportunity to gain insight into the personal experiences of participants in the *ship. It is particularly useful in exploring sensitive issues such as perceptions of leadership styles, particularly those related to the roles of leaders and followers. (Hennik et al. 2020.)

3.2   Data collection

The data was collected using semi-structured interviews that were recorded and noted by the author. The interviewees were chosen from the participants who have been actively involved in the *ship Startup Festival over the past three years. The sampling method of the research was heterogeneous and criterion sampling as it involved selected interviewees based on specific criteria such as the year of participation in the event organisation and role within the team in the context of this research (Polit & Back 2021). The semi-structured interviews were chosen for this case study since they allow for gathering in-depth information from the interviewees' perceptions on the different leadership styles, leveraging the path-goal theory of leadership, which interview participants may not be familiar with. It is also suitable for the small sample group of Ship Startup Festival participants. (Adams 2015.)

The data collection happened mostly online via Teams with only one physical interview. All 6 interviews were recorded and transcribed or noted by the author and lasted from 50 minutes to 1 hour 15 minutes. The chosen participants were approached and invited to share their experiences on the leadership for this research and further development of a guidebook for the *ship Startup Festival.

Since the author has had experience working at *ship, a trusting atmosphere has already been established. The names and other sensitive information such as specific tasks performed by the interview participants and the years they participated in the event organisation are confidential information to secure privacy. Moreover, the data will be presented further in the past tense for all the cases to ensure the interviewees who organise *ship Startup Festival in 2024.

The theme of this interview was to find an answer to the research question: What leadership strategies can be implemented to maximise professional development in multicultural student team of *ship Startup Festival? However, as the selected theoretical approach on leadership suggests, the effectiveness of leadership is contingent upon the characteristics of both the follower and the tasks in question. Consequently, in the interview, personal perceptions on leadership behaviours were discussed in order to analyse the characteristics of the followers. Furthermore, the interviews were focused on the specific tasks that the participants had encountered since the task characteristic is the only element of the path-goal approach on leadership that remains constant. The semi-structured interviews were chosen for this purpose as the research required in-depth information while still allowing respondents to elaborate their answers (Fontana & Frey 2005). The interview guide can be found in Appendix 1.

3.3 Data analysis

After the interviews, recordings were transcribed and one of the interviews was translated into English as it had been conducted in Russian. The data collection lasted for 3 days due to the limited timeline. The data collection was followed by data analysis since thematic coding as a qualitative data analysis method was chosen to identify common topics and themes (Caulfield 2022). The first and second-order themes conceptualised in the theoretical review were used to identify leadership behaviour, tasks, and follower characteristics as well as multicultural differences. Consequently, the deductive approach may be employed in the thematic analysis of this research, given that the author has

already formed perceptions regarding the leadership behaviours and characteristics of followers and the structure of the interview questions.

4   RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The use of tables is a valuable help in the data categorisation process in this study. The categorisation of the data serves two purposes: firstly, to clarify the results; and secondly, to enhance the credibility of the study (Creswell & Cheryl 2018). The interviewed participants of the *ship Startup Festival were the units of this study and they are presented as cases. Unfortunately, in order to maintain the anonymity of the participants in the interviews, it is not possible to provide any information regarding the duration of their involvement in the *ship Startup Festival organisation or their team membership. This decision can be explained by the relatively small teams. Nevertheless, the research was conducted by interviewing followers from the last three teams of the *ship Startup Festival, who were involved in marketing roles and roles that required communication with startups and mentors. Table 3 below presents the data categorization and the most relevant themes mentioned in the interviews.

Table 3. Interview data categorization.

Case	Themes mentioned by the interviewee	1st order themes	2nd order themes
1	"I was always able to reach out to the leader. The leader responded to me right away even very late" "When I had a first meeting the leader came there with me because I did not feel confident to do it myself"	Supportive leadership	Leadership behaviour
	"I felt that I have a say and my opinion matters"	Participative leadership	
	"I think the leader should have been putting more pressure"	Achievement-oriented leadership	

	"This leadership gets tasks done but does not motivate or increase the interest towards the entrepreneurship which is the whole idea of *ship"	Directive leadership	
	"I wish we had more of a team spirit and get-togethers"	Need for affiliation	Follower characteristics
	"In this kind of student-organized event, it is important that students have a say"	Need for control	
	"I got the basic guidelines and then I did my own timeline and asked for acceptance";	Unclear	Task characteristics
	"It is very stressful to do something you are not sure about and when you feel that maybe you are not 100% capable";	Unclear and challenging	
	"The workload does not stress me, but when I do not know what people expect from me is very stressful"	Unclear and ambiguous	
2	"If we had a problem I received more emotional support than clear and concrete guidance on how to solve it"; "The leader emphasized that we needed to not stress and relax"	Supportive leadership	Leadership behaviour
	"Sometimes I missed the leader to say «Hey, this week we need to work harder to achieve this specific goal»"	Achievement-oriented leadership	
	"I would prefer less autonomy and have more interaction with other team members"	Need for affiliation	Follower characteristics

	"I wanted sometimes to have push talks from the leader. I do not like to be under pressure all the time, but I think it is good for the project"	Need to excel	
	"I felt that we did not bring all the value we could find but that we did only our parts of the work"	Need for control	
	"The decision on how to execute the task came from us"	Autonomous and need for clarity	
	"I needed to understand my role and talk about the tasks and how I do them step by step"; "I did as much as I could but was not sure if it was enough and I needed to focus on something else"; "Although the roles were prescribed in advance we still had a meeting and discussed with a leader what I needed to do"	Unclear Unclear and ambiguous Unclear and unstructured	Task characteristic
3	"The leader was more a friend than a boss – I felt I always could talk about my issues"; "I did not know that I could always give suggestions on the leader's behavior"	Supportive leadership	Leadership behaviour
	"There was a freedom to perform and act, but sometimes I had too much freedom and did not know how to use it"	Need for clarity	Follower characteristic
	"There was the *ship knowledge base from previous years, but this info was	Unstructured	Task characteristics

	not structured, so if you did not know where and what exactly to look up, you would not manage yourself";		
	"I felt lost in the beginning because I had a goal but the tasks to achieve it were not discussed";	Unstructured and complex	
	"Communication within the team was challenging since my job required the involvement of other teammates and they usually had their tasks and priorities"	Unstructured and complex	
	"I had the freedom to do it my way, but still there are rules I needed to follow and they were not clear";	Unclear rules	
	"I did not have relevant experience, so I needed to learn by doing"	Unclear rules and complex	
	"The leader wanted to talk and support me, but I thought I was called on the carpet"		Multicultural differences
4	"I got a lot of validation from the leader on my work"; "We need to see people and understand that we are not meant to be perfect"; "When you have support from a leader, can make your input and get the guidance, the results will automatically come"	Supportive leadership	Leadership behaviour
	"The leader would always make sure to inform me or discuss with me certain decisions";	Participative leadership	

	"I always felt I and my team were included and the leader made sure we were ok"		
	"As a part of the team, we did not see the transparency from the leader's side"; "We had experienced people, so it was reasonable to involve them in decision making"; "Further the details about our goal were decided by me and my team"	Need for clarity Need for clarity and affiliation Need for clarity and control	Follower characteristics
	'I considered that as my responsibility to plan it afterward'; "My characteristic is to anyway do 120% of my capacity, so the leader asked me to slow down sometimes and relax"	Need to excel and autonomous Need to excel and have high expectations	
	"It is very important when you choosing a leader to make sure the person has some kind of experience or trait so others want to listen and follow him/her"	Dogmatic	
	"The timeframe we worked in was challenging – we started a bit late"	Complex and challenging	Task characteristics
	"There were overall guidelines but then I needed to develop my own framework in detail"	Unstructured	
	"Finnish people are more time-oriented";		Multicultural differences

	"International students tend to compete and overperform since they need to be recognized and secure a future"		
5	"The leader helped me to delegate the tasks from my table and cleared the timeline, so I would not feel overwhelmed"; "It is important for a leader to be with a team frequently so he/she can feel how teammates interact"	Supportive leadership	Leadership behaviour
	"When there are too many cooks making a soup, it becomes a disaster"; "The environment was welcoming to bounce the ideas around"	Participative leadership	
	"The leader challenged me to experience things out of my comfort zone and I enjoyed it in the end"	Achievement-oriented leadership	
	"It is hard to have an environment where people from different campuses can interact but it was useful"	Need for human touch	Follower characteristic
	"Workload was too much since I had courses running along"; "Timeframe was a common challenge for everyone"; "The resources affecting the whole team in a way that a leader had a lot on the table"	Challenging Challenging Challenging and complex	Task characteristics
	"I felt the guidelines were clear for me due to my role in the team"	Unchallenging	

	"Our team was so rich because of the people with different cultural backgrounds"		Multicultural differences
6	"The leader challenged me and in the end, it turned out well, while at the time it did not feel like that. I decided that I needed to do it even if I did not want to because that is how you grow"	Achievement-oriented leadership	Leadership behaviour
	"Only because a person is a leader does not mean they know the best way to do things"	Directive leadership	
	"The reason why it went so smoothly is that the leader gave me the freedom to do things my way"	Autonomous	Follower characteristic
	"Although I got guidelines I still did not understand the whole picture"; "In the beginning, I would prefer more support and clear instructions"	Unclear rules Unclear rules and unstructured	Task characteristics

Based on the data categorisation, several key elements corresponding to the path-goal theory emerged consistently across multiple cases. Among them, are leadership behaviour, task characteristics, follower characteristics, and multicultural differences. These second-order themes were identified as key themes, while some of the first-order themes were mentioned more frequently than others.

4.1   Task characteristics

The characteristics of the tasks assigned to students during the organization of the *ship Startup Festival encompass various aspects. Notably, the most frequent challenge encountered is the lack of role-specific guidelines and goals when

students commence their journey as *ship trainees. The majority of interviewees indicated that they were aware of their primary tasks as "securing mentors for the event" and "inviting startups to participate in the event". However, they lacked a detailed, step-by-step plan by a leader that would delineate the procedures for initiating the project, the necessary resources, and the specific tasks to be performed. This was due to the fact that the composition of the team changes annually, and individuals with the same title may perform different tasks within the team. Therefore, the lack of directive and participative leadership behaviours in the initial stages of the project was identified.

Another significant challenge in the context of event planning is the fact that not all team members have attended the *ship Startup Festival as visitors or volunteers. This lack of familiarity with the event and its operations makes it challenging for them to conceptualise and execute the event with precision. A further challenge arises from the fact that while there is a knowledge database that all team members can access and check the documents from previous years, it is not particularly user-friendly. Consequently, newcomers are unable to find the information they require if they do not know where to ask, or even more often, they are unaware that certain documents exist. This challenge reflects the ambiguous and unclear task characteristics and may be addressed by directive and participative leadership behavior.

While the *ship Startup Festival provides an invaluable opportunity for students to gain experience in entrepreneurship and event management, as well as to gain practical work experience, it is important to recognise that some students may lack the specific experience required to perform to the best of their abilities. These cases are considered ambiguous, challenging, and complex tasks for the followers and require achievement-oriented leadership behaviour according to the path-goal theory discussed in sub-chapter 2.5.

The overarching theme that encapsulates the final task is the "lack of resources." It is of the utmost importance to recognize that, in addition to their commitments

at *ship, students are also juggling their academic courses. Furthermore, some leaders and followers may have initiated their thesis process, as *ship typically occurs in the spring. Additionally, April, the month preceding the event, poses significant challenges with its numerous deadlines, further complicating the delicate balance between student and work life. Furthermore, the limited timeframe for event organization presents a significant challenge. Teams typically commence their efforts in February, just three months before the event, which can overwhelm students who are eager to gain valuable experience and support from their peers.

4.2   Follower characteristics

The characteristics of followers provide insight into the behaviours and preferences of team members within the context of the *ship Startup Festival. One frequently mentioned characteristic is the desire of participants to be involved in the decision-making process. This aspect holds particular significance, especially when the event focuses on student startup ideas, as is the case in 2024. Hence, students can offer valuable insights on how to market the event effectively.

Furthermore, this point can be viewed from the perspective of motivation and experiential learning. As highlighted in interviews from Case 1, there is a lack of motivation when individuals are consistently directed by leaders without the opportunity to contribute their ideas. Empowering team members to have a say and suggest innovative ideas is crucial for fostering motivation and enriching their experience. This aligns well with the innovative team approach to team performance discussed in chapter 2 of this study.

Another common theme is the sense of belonging to the group. Several interviewees emphasized the importance of team gatherings, noting that they are essential for fostering camaraderie and trust within the team. For some, these gatherings represent days of enjoyable bonding where they can build

relationships and understanding among members. Others stressed the significance of work-related interactions, highlighting the importance of team-working days over solely relying on online communication, as face-to-face interactions are essential for building strong teamwork and rapport.

Furthermore, within the context of student leadership, it is essential to emphasize the achievement-oriented nature of both followers and leaders within the team. While their motivations for participating in the organization of the *ship Startup Festival may vary, event management in the startup sphere is inherently dynamic, attracting proactive students who seek to excel and gain valuable experiences. It is notable that in Finland and the Kymenlaakso region, gaining entry into the event-production team without prior experience is challenging, with students typically joining such events as volunteers. However, at *ship, participants have the opportunity to gain hands-on experience, which, as one interviewee aptly put it, serves as a "driving force for their future career".

The challenge highlighted in the context of student-led initiatives underscores the intricate relationship between follower characteristics and leader behaviour. Particularly, the imperative for followers to recognize and follow the guidance of a leader, despite potential challenges arising from flat hierarchies or similar peer statuses, poses a significant leadership dilemma. This observation underscores the necessity for leaders to establish their authority and credibility within the team effectively. As elucidated in one case, this can be achieved through various means, such as hiring a leader with extensive experience in the domains of leadership or work-life or possessing distinct traits or skills that set them apart from the group. By embodying such qualities, leaders can effectively assert their leadership and inspire followers to adhere to their guidance, thereby mitigating the risk of their authority being undermined within the team dynamic. This emphasizes the pivotal role of leader behaviour in fostering followers' recognition and adherence, thereby overcoming challenges posed by follower characteristics in the context of student-led initiatives.

4.3   Leadership behaviour

The term "leadership behaviour" encompasses the actions and approaches adopted by a leader. The primary themes identified in this context align with the path-goal theory on leadership, which was previously discussed. Consequently, in the data analysis, we will focus on the followers' perspective on these behaviours.

The most frequently mentioned leadership behaviour identified in the study is supportive, particularly as the focus was on the challenges encountered by followers. Supportive leadership encompasses various dimensions, including emotional support, task-related assistance, and the establishment of an empowering and safe environment within the context of this study. Furthermore, followers have underscored the importance of striking a balance between participative and directive leadership styles. While followers desire involvement in the decision-making process, decisions must be made within their areas of responsibility, accompanied by clear guidelines and instructions.

Lastly, followers noted an intriguing perspective on achievement-oriented leadership. Initially, followers viewed this leadership style as less preferable, as it sometimes pushed them beyond their comfort zones and perceived capabilities. However, upon reflection, followers recognize this leadership style as a pivotal aspect of their journey, one that facilitates personal growth and development.

4.4   Multicultural differences

The multicultural aspect of leadership was also explored in this research. Interestingly, when asked about cultural differences and their impact on team dynamics, respondents initially struggled to identify them and often viewed differences as personal traits. However, one notable cultural difference emerged concerning power distance, exemplified by Finland and Russia. Finland tends to have a relatively low power distance (33), whereas Russia scores 93 (The Culture Factor Group, 2024), leading to distinct reactions during 1-on-1 revision

meetings with leaders or supervisors. Specifically, Finnish students welcomed these meetings as opportunities to discuss progress and seek clarification, whereas individuals with Russian cultural backgrounds (or similar) perceived them as threats, interpreting them as signals of impending criticism or attack from the leader.

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 Key results and findings

The research question aimed to identify effective leadership strategies for ensuring the professional performance of student teams in the context of the Ship Startup Festival. The analysis supported the path-goal approach to leadership, suggesting the need for varied strategies tailored to different followers and tasks within a multicultural context.

In essence, there is no universal strategy for leading a student team. Nevertheless, effective leadership necessitates the utilization of four principal behaviours– directive, participative, achievement-oriented, and supportive – in order to address the diverse characteristics of followers and to maintain motivation levels that are suitable for the requirements of different tasks.

5.2 Managerial perspective

The primary objective of this research was to lay the groundwork for a guidebook tailored for ship leaders and their followers, which will be developed utilizing this study. The ultimate aim of this guidebook is to enhance the professional performance of student teams. The study was commissioned to provide recommendations to the sponsoring company on leveraging leadership strategies effectively within the context of the *ship Startup festival. Through data collection and analysis, it became evident that the guidebook should encompass clear descriptions of the main roles of team members involved in the festival. Furthermore, the guidebook should not only outline the broad task descriptions

but also provide specific actionable steps for both followers and leaders, along with critical deadlines to ensure the seamless progression and sustained adoption of best practices. By incorporating these elements, the guidebook aims to facilitate effective leadership, streamline task execution, and foster a culture of accountability and excellence within student-led initiatives. Furthermore, the guidebook should incorporate the accumulated knowledge system, which can be accessed and utilised by subsequent team members. To ensure accessibility to individuals lacking prior experience, the knowledge system should be designed in a user-friendly manner.

The data indicates that the timeframe for organizing the event should be reconsidered. This could involve either starting the organization process earlier to allow for more time or considering holding the event after summer when students typically have fewer academic responsibilities and can dedicate more time to event planning.

In addition, while the study primarily focused on followers and their perceptions, the data underscores the importance of exploring ways to support the leader. Leaders face the challenge of balancing their student life with their responsibilities to the team and event organization. However, it remains crucial to maintain the *ship Startup Festival as a student-organized event, as it provides invaluable leadership experience in a professional setting.

Based on the findings of the interviews, it is recommended that the composition of the team be balanced at a ratio of 50/50 between individuals who have previously organized the *ship Startup Festival and newcomers. This balance ensures the continuity of the event while also bringing in fresh perspectives. Furthermore, leaders could facilitate connections between the current team and the previous year's team by organizing 1-on-1 meetings where past members can train and answer questions for those newly starting at *ship. This practice benefits both newcomers and experienced individuals, as they may hold different positions and can learn from each other's insights and experiences.

In terms of leadership strategies, as per the original focus of this research, the path-goal theory provides valuable insights into tailoring leadership approaches based on follower characteristics. It is recommended that leaders carefully consider their own strengths when assembling their teams. For instance, a leader proficient in nurturing and fostering trust may struggle to collaborate effectively with authoritarian followers who require detailed supervision. Furthermore, the data indicates that directive leadership may be beneficial during the initial stages of follower training, particularly during the first week. This period often involves navigating unclear rules and grappling with complex tasks due to a lack of specific experience. Despite potential reluctance, providing challenges to followers is appreciated, as noted by the interviewees. This opportunity to step out of their comfort zones can ultimately lead to personal growth and enhanced team performance. By aligning leadership strategies with the characteristics of followers and adapting to the evolving needs of the team, leaders can effectively guide their followers towards success in student-led initiatives. Moreover, as a part of supportive leadership behaviour, it is recommended to organise team working days, where a leader can check up the atmosphere within the team and get valuable insight about each individual within the team. Furthermore, it is essential to organize a team-building day where team members can establish closer relationships and discuss the differences in their working cultures. This can be achieved by utilizing Hofstede's cultural dimensions. These differences provide invaluable insights for the leader in understanding how to effectively address certain issues with individual team members.

Regarding the participative style, the leader must initiate the event organization process by meeting with all team members to discuss their specific responsibilities. It is crucial to include as many team members as possible in these discussions. This ensures everyone is aware of their roles and responsibilities. By taking this proactive approach, situations where tasks are left undone due to misunderstanding or unclear delineation of responsibilities could be prevented.

This study furthermore does not provide more specific suggestions on what leadership strategies a leader needs to implement based on the task characteristics, since the task characteristics also vary on the follower characteristics. However, it is still very useful for the future leader of *ship Startup festival, as it provides a clear framework the leader can rely on when he or she does not know what leadership style to use in a specific situation. Furthermore, this study will serve as a solid foundation for the guidebook, which will outline the primary tasks each team member must complete and some of the most common role tasks. It will also suggest the leadership style to be used.

5.3   Reliability of the discussion and further development

The reliability of this research is unquestionable. It was based on the use of deductive coding, which identified predefined themes in the literature review and was used as a framework for data analysis. The results were enhanced with the semi-structured interviews in a study analyzing three different teams and settings. The team of *ship Startup Festival has been working for the last three years and provided significant insights for the future development of the event.

The author has been involved in the organization of the *ship Startup Festival for three years, which increases the credibility of the research. The need for the study was born during the author's involvement in the project and supported by the commissioner's company. The managerial implications of this research work include practical suggestions for the Xentre as the main organizer of the *ship Startup Festival and future leaders of the *ship Startup Festival. Furthermore, the research will be followed by the author's creation of a recommended guidebook based on the conducted interviews and gathered data.

Future development ideas were collected and suggestions were included for diving deeper into student leadership and peer leadership, as it is mainly studied from the perspective of educational institutes. Moreover, the effects of leadership

on a student leader can be better analyzed in the context of the *ship Startup Festival particularly.

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INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

2.5.2024 Sabina Akhmetova

✳ Introduction to the interview and its goals

✳ Task characteristics :
- Can you describe the tasks and responsibilities you had within the team?
- •How would you characterize the complexity and autonomy associated with your tasks?
- Did you have clear guidelines for your tasks, or did you need to make decisions independently?
- Can you describe any interactions with team members or leaders while working on your tasks? How did these interactions contribute to your role?
- Did you encounter any challenges or changes in your tasks during the event, and how did you address or adapt to them?

✳ Leadership behaviour:
- How would you assess the clarity of goals and tasks set for your team during the event? Please provide examples.
- Did you feel adequately supported by your leader(s) during the event? If so, how?
- Were you involved in decision-making processes related to your tasks? If yes, how did it impact your performance and motivation? What are the examples?
- How did your leader(s) challenge you and your team to excel in your roles during the event?

✳ Team performance:
- How did the leadership style(s) employed during the event impact team dynamics and overall performance? If applicable, ask participants to reflect on how team dynamics and performance changed in response to shifts in leaders and their leadership strategies.

✳ Multicultural differences:
- Could you provide some insights into the diversity within your team in terms of cultural backgrounds, and how this diversity influenced team dynamics and collaboration?

✳ Follow-up:
- Could you describe this a bit further...
- Could you elaborate...
- Any additional comments on this?