"*Co-construction of Leadership in an Intercultural Context from a Follower's Perspective*"

A Qualitative Case Study in the Finance Industry about the Dyadic Relationship between Manager and Employee

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Abstract

Introduction: The co-construction of leadership is a relatively new theoretical concept that is growing in demand in the field of science. Since our global workforce becomes more heterogenous and attitudes towards leader-follower relationships evolve, a successful interaction between leaders and followers becomes more central to the overall functioning of an organisation. With a global business climate that gradually shifts its focus on employing more horizontal modes of organising, more emphasis is put on improving the quality of dyadic work relationships.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore the esteemed role of follower behaviour in the co-construction of leadership in an intercultural context. Since most literature emphasis on leader-follower relationships we are interested in exploring a follower-centric perspective on the co-construction of leadership. By adding the aspect of intercultural contexts, a broader understanding of the impact of culture and communication can be applied to this study.

Research methodology: This study is a case study based on a qualitative research method with an inductive research approach. We have held nine recorded semi-structured interviews nearly equally spread between leaders and followers with different cultural backgrounds working for a MNC in the finance industry. We have created a conceptual theoretical model which was constructed based on findings of empirical data, which is based on the following five themes - *follower behaviour, leader behaviour, working in an intercultural context, leader-follower relationship,* and *co-construction of leadership*.

Results and analysis: The result of this study reveals that follower behaviour, leader behaviour, dyadic leader-follower relationships, and constructive communication are important aspects to have knowledge of to comprehend what actions can be undertaken to facilitate the co-construction of leadership in an intercultural context.

Conclusion: The role of *follower behaviour* in the *co-construction of leadership* in an *intercultural context* plays an active role in the co-constructing of leadership. By displaying certain desirable *behaviour and traits*, as well as *communicating constructively*, followers can positively influence leadership. This can be facilitated by leaders that enable followers with *trust*, *partnership* and *growth*. In addition, *interculturality* adds an additional layer that encompasses diverse perspectives and approaches and encourages personal growth.

Key words:

Co-constructing Leadership, Follower Behaviour, Leader Behaviour, Leadership, Followership, Leader-Follower-Relationships, Intercultural Communication, Dyadic Relationships, Constructive Followership

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List of Abbreviations

- ➢ **CWX** - Co-worker Exchange
- ➢ **GLOBE -** Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness
- ➢ **HIP -** High Influential Person
- ➢ **LIP -** Low Influential Person
- ➢ **LMX -** Leader-Member Exchange
- ➢ **MIP -** Medium Influential Person
- ➢ **MNC -** Multinational Corporation
- ➢ **NIP -** No Influencing or autonomic Person
- ➢ **SME -** Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

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1 Introduction

Communication is one of the most challenging aspects of leadership, especially when considering the co-construction of leadership. The introduction chapter aims to highlight literature the importance of the topic researched in regards to communication, the co-construction of leadership and the need for followership, and comprises four sections. Furthermore, the introduction section aims to highlight the challenges encountered whilst intending to effectively communicate in leader-follower relationships in intercultural contexts. Moreover, the study focuses on the MNC perspective in the financial services sector based on interviews with persons from this sector. We will argue why the topic is a significant and relevant area to study, present the research questions and objective of the study, and end by providing the outline of this thesis.

1.1 Background

The development of globalisation has led to a growing complexity of challenges within intercultural settings (CIPD, 2021). In particular, many international business ventures lack an understanding of intercultural skills and competence, communicate ineffectively at a global level and fail to follow adequate business etiquettes in negotiations (Melvin, Ephraim, & Otis, 2012; Okoro, 2019). This is supplemented by cultural imperialism, inadequate global workforce diversity management and a lack of focus on interpersonal relationship and group communication (Okoro, 2019). Also, the increasing multicultural nature and growing heterogeneous workforce results in specific challenges on the quality of work relationship development (Vatanen, 2003). Communication is an imperative task for any individual, business or entity and thus needs careful consideration. Subsequently, the meaning or interpretation of a message can be misunderstood, henceforth the receiver of the message is likely to feel confused or misinterpret the intended message that leaves an unclear or unambiguous understanding (Weick, 1995).

We have to endorse that all humans are followers to some extent, and therefore we need to acknowledge that followership is a core concept of human interaction (Mellon, 2016).

Understanding the underlying followers' cultural orientations and their commitment in relation to internal and external relationships become more imperative with growing degrees of globalisation and cross-cultural organisational development (Averin, 2019). The dynamic interplay between leaders and followers is an antecedent of organisational effectiveness, and presents that effective followership and leadership are equally important in achieving organisational goals (Mellon, 2016). Hence, establishing what role follower behaviour has between leader and follower relationships and identifying the challenges around it contributes to the exploration of the co-construction of leadership.

1.2 Problem Discussion and Relevance of Study

Multiple researchers argue that there is a need to focus more on adopting intercultural communication rather than employing a cross-cultural perspective (Schneider, Barsoux, & Stahl, 2014; Szkudlarek, Osland, Nardon, & Zander, 2020). Although many theories with respect to cross-cultural management help in establishing a basic understanding on how to communicate between two or more cultures, it is based on generalisations of national culture and thus we should seek to explore the cultural assumptions and interculturality that lies beneath the metaphorical iceberg or invisible boundaries of global business (Meyer, 2014; Schneider et al., 2014). Therefore, more research should be carried out on exploring how two or more individuals from different cultures or social groups coincide and co-create meaning (Szkudlarek, et al., 2020). Thus, the co-creation of meaning between diverging cultures needs further scientific exploration. Also, the majority of theory on intercultural communication is instigated by Western scholars with a comparative and arguably quantitative bias (Falkheimer & Heide, 2006). Factors that revolve around the complexity of intertwining relationships between education, politics, economics, and communication in intercultural settings seeks a more current, innovative and contemporary base of study.

It is imperative to study the relationships between leaders and followers and delve deeper into understanding how both parties can effectively collaborate with and contribute to one another (Alvesson et al., 2017; Schneider et al., 2014). Initially, research on the relationships between leaders and followers are predominantly focused on the

leader-follower relationship perspective rather than a follower-leader perspective (Alvesson et al., 2017). There is a significant lack of follower-centric research compared to leader-centric theories (Dinh et al., 2014). Ergo, shifting the focus to exploring follower-leadership relationships or bottom-up or upward approaches can contribute to a more complete understanding of the relationship between each other (Alvesson et al., 2017). Moreover, dyadic or bilateral relations between leaders and followers has not been researched extensively and more insights could potentially lead to positive outcomes for leaders, followers and organisations (Vatanen, 2003). Additionally, past research has examined leader and follower characteristics as imperative factors contributing to the quality of dyadic relationships. However, insufficient factors have been researched and therefore a larger number of characteristics should be studied to assess its importance and relation to each other. Furthermore, a successful interaction between leaders and their followers are central to the overall functioning of an establishment, most notably related to factors such as organisational commitment, job satisfaction, employee performance, empowerment and delegation (Ibid).

Furthermore, there is a growing demand for co-constructing leadership rather than depending on the traditional view that leaders construct followers (Alvesson et al., 2017). To exemplify, reflexive followership, effective followership and courageous followership are emerging concepts that can mediate leadership practices (Alvesson et al., 2017; Chaleff, 2009). Also, organisations are becoming flatter. Henceforth, employing horizontal modes of organising becomes more common and accepted (Alvesson et al., 2017; Szkudlarek, et al., 2020). For that reason, the aim of this study is to emphasise on a follower-centric approach in co-constructing leadership that considers the perspective of followership indispensable. Followers are vital to prevent or mitigate significant failures by communicating to leaders the risks or flaws they have identified in systems (Chaleff, 2009). Ensuring that followers are empowered to facilitate healthy upward communication or information flows in organisations could potentially result in the avoidance of severe organisational missteps or negligence, elevated support for leaders and reduced cynicism.

Essentially, the research consists of two interrelated aspects that require further investigation – leader-follower relationships and intercultural communication. On the one hand, leader-follower relationships traditionally have a dominant focus on the impact of leaders on followership rather than emphasising how followers can contribute to co-constructing leadership practices, identity, relations and outcomes (Alvesson et al., 2017; Vatanen, 2003). On the other hand, scholars have a large focus on cross-cultural management with many theories comparing two or more cultures, but there is relatively little focus on the concept of intercultural communication (Schneider et al., 2014; Szkudlarek, et al., 2020). The combination of exploring and assimilating both lesser investigated topics and critically contrasting and comparing them could contribute to an enlightened understanding of the influence of intercultural communication on leader-follower relations. Therefore, the main objective of this research is to investigate how the role of follower behaviour can contribute to co-constructing leadership in an intercultural context. This will most likely reveal the significance of the role of communication in the co-construction of leadership. Subsequently, the innovativeness of combining intercultural communication and followership could contribute to a better comprehension of the co-construction of leadership.

Practical implications that can be derived from this research will allow individuals and businesses to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of leader and follower relationships. On the one hand, you can empower a follower or subordinate with the knowledge and skills to assist their leader or superior to contribute in the co-construction of their leadership (Chaleff, 2007). At the same time, a leader or superior is empowered with the knowledge and skills that build a better understanding of how mutual clarity of roles, responsibilities, shared meaning or understanding, and interpersonal relationships can contribute to a more effective and harmonious collaboration between both parties involved (Vatanen, 2003). Furthermore, we intend to contribute with valuable practical implications that reveal what types of behaviour or attitudes are desirable and what aspects are deemed most productive or impactful or significant to co-constructing leadership. In essence, this research intends to dive deeper into the leader-follower, intercultural communication and co-construction of leadership research area and provide useful implications that may

empower persons and businesses with an increased understanding and expanded knowledge of the researched topics.

1.3 Research Question and Purpose of Study

1.3.1 Research Question

In the previous sections, we highlighted the three main issues of study regarding the co-construction of leadership, a lack of focus on intercultural communication, and the predominant angle on the impact of leadership on followership and research gaps in how leaders and followers mutually influence each other in the co-construction of leadership. The research question and sub-questions have been formulated to contribute to the research gaps and accommodate the aim of this study. The research question and sub-questions are stated below:

Research Question:

"What is the role of follower behaviour in the co-construction of leadership in an intercultural context?"

We have formulated sub questions to help in supporting an adequate breakdown of the main research question. Since the role of follower behaviour in the co-construction of leadership is very broad, our first sub question serves to narrow down the scope of study, with a focus on followers. The aim of the sub question is to dive deeper in the perceptions of followers and investigate how they use communication to mediate their leaders in reaching business goals.

Sub Question 1:

How do followers contribute to their leaders in co-constructing leadership practices in an intercultural context?

The second sub question is compiled to shed light on aspects that leaders find desirable in their followers. Since the co-construction of leadership involves two parties, the aim of this

sub question is to derive a deeper understanding of what leaders perceive as ideal followers or active participants in the co-construction of leadership. 'Seek' refers to the ideal behaviour leaders look for in followers, while 'expect' is about the minimum expected traits of followers.

Sub Question 2:

What behaviour and traits do leaders seek or expect from their followers to contribute to leadership in an intercultural context?

1.3.2 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the esteemed role of follower behaviour in the co-construction of leadership in an intercultural context. Primarily, we are interested in finding out more about how followers can contribute to the co-construction of leadership in an intercultural context. This perspective lacks in the majority of studies that focus on leader-follower interactions instead of a follower-centric approach, and therefore we believe this area needs further exploration. Furthermore, we want to investigate whether there are any aspects that regard the co-construction of leadership in relation with followership in intercultural contexts that we have no prior knowledge of. Any unknown aspects that come out of this study may potentially contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity of dynamics between dyadic leader-follower relations.

1.4 Thesis Outline

This master thesis is structured in six chapters, which are the Introduction, Methodology, Literature Review, Findings, Discussion, and Conclusion.

The first chapter gives an introduction to the thesis topic chosen, commencing with the background of the study, followed by the problem discussion and relevance of the study, research questions, and is summarised with an outline of the thesis.

The second chapter aims to clarify the research methodology. This includes describing the process of how all empirical data is collected, and the analysis process of the research method. The research is carried out by means of a qualitative research method, which is supplemented by an inductive research approach.

The third chapter focuses on the review of empirical literature. The main topics that are being discussed are contemporary leadership theories, followership, and followership in an intercultural context. The aforementioned fields of study are interconnected and are used as a basic understanding of this study, which is further deepened by the revelations that come out of the interview process and the further analysis of the results.

The fourth chapter reveals the findings of the research. Based on the thematic analysis the themes have been designed and form the basis of empirical analysis. First, the chapter sheds light on the relevance of the case company to our research. Subsequently, the interviewee's experiences and insights are categorised into five distinct categories, showing the aggregated results for both leader and follower relationships in intercultural contexts.

The fifth chapter comprises critical analysis of the findings section. The empirical data will be analysed and connected to our findings, which sheds light on a comparison between both leader-follower relationships with each other related to the co-construction of leadership. The chapter is finalised by a discussion of the analysis, critically comparing and assimilating leader-follower relationships whilst integrating theoretical data.

The sixth chapter draws conclusions and provides recommendations for future research. Most notably, practical contributions and ways of handling the dyadic relationships between leaders and followers in an intercultural context may reveal new insights on this topic that can be perceived as transferable among the scientific community and business in practice.

2 Methodology

The methodology chapter describes how the research for this thesis is conducted. First, it details the research design and argues why this is the best approach to answer the research question. Secondly, it elaborates further upon data collection and data analysis. Subsequently, this chapter discusses various quality criteria for this thesis, as well as ethical considerations and study limitations.

2.1 Research Design

2.1.1 Research Philosophy: Pragmatism

This thesis follows a pragmatist research philosophy. As argued before, there is a lack of research on the follower's perspective and influence on the co-construction of leadership, as well as the effect of intercultural contexts on this dyadic relationship. Therefore, our goal is to start bridging this knowledge gap, and to generate insights that enable a practical solution and inform future practices. We aim to support action by focusing on the practical consequences of the results (Saunders et al., 2019). In other words, our research is concerned with and strives to yield knowledge that has a practical impact on the reality it studies. Our investigation is practice- and problem-oriented, aiming to produce valuable insights on the role of follower behaviour in the co-construction of leadership, in intercultural contexts (Brinkmann et al., 2014).

2.1.2 Research Approach: Induction

Due to the lack of existing theory and research, we used an exploratory and inductive approach. The results of this study rely on generating an understanding of the empirical data gathered through qualitative research methods. Rather than formulating a hypothesis based on existing theory, we openly gathered data on the research topic through an empirical investigation. This data was then used to develop a robust explanation and theoretical model we call 'constructive followership', based on the observations and insights from the empirical, qualitative research (Phillips, 2014).

An inductive approach allowed us to openly explore the role of follower behaviour in the co-construction of leadership in intercultural contexts, without being limited by existing theory. Our research does not aim to falsify or confirm theory, but to delve into unanswered questions about the topic of interest (Locke, 2007). It is a data driven approach that enables a better understanding of the nature of the challenges by acknowledging the context in which the events take place. We collected and analysed empirical data to yield findings that are rooted in the practical business world, recognising the social context of leader-follower relationships, in line with pragmatist philosophy. Furthermore, the inductive approach permits alternative explanations of what is going on. Our study attempts to generate insights and formulate new theory, but also acknowledges that this is but one perspective. (Saunders et al., 2019).

Though the research of this thesis is not guided by a theoretical concept, it is nevertheless important for an inductive researcher to be aware of existing literature. The inductive approach does not rely on an existing theoretical perspective, but it does not disregard theory either (Saunders et al., 2019). Knowing the theory helps to place the findings and results in the right context (Phillips, 2014). Therefore, we also conducted a literature review, to elaborate upon existing concepts necessary to grasp the context of the study and its results.

2.1.3 Methodological Choice: Qualitative Research

The empirical data gathered for this thesis comes from qualitative research, as this fits best with our inductive and exploratory approach. A qualitative study recognises that reality is a social construct and the variables within the research are interconnected, complex, and difficult to measure (Klenke & Wallace, 2016). This method allows for an in-depth study of the participants' meanings, as well as the relationship between participants. These meanings are derived from the analysis of words and stories instead of numbers (Saunders et al., 2019). The purpose of qualitative research is to understand participants' voices and interpret their meanings while recognising the context in which the data is gathered (Klenke & Wallace, 2016). Specifically, we used semi-structured interviews to gather qualitative data. By analysing this data and searching for patterns and common themes, we

were able to generate insights which resulted in the formulation of a new conceptual theory, the 'constructive followership model'.

There were many benefits to using qualitative research for this thesis. It is a flexible method, which is ideal for an explorative study. The data collection and analysis are easily adapted to accommodate emerging findings rooted in practicality. Furthermore, the approach allowed the participants to be more descriptive in their replies. This resulted in more extensive data in the form of examples and descriptions of experiences and situations. Such rich and detailed data was more beneficial to this study than quantitative research methods could have provided. It enabled us to search for practical insights that are rooted in a real-life context, accommodating the practice and problem-oriented perspective of pragmatist philosophy. Moreover, we examined people's experiences and perceptions, aiming to yield insights that reflect the followers' and leaders' perspectives on the research topic. Qualitative methods enable this goal better than quantitative methods due to their flexible and in-depth nature (Boeije, 2010).

2.1.4 Research Strategy: Case Study

To gather the required qualitative data, we used the case study methodology. This enabled an in-depth study into the research topic within its real-life setting. The role of follower behaviour in the co-construction of leadership cannot be separated from its context. Moreover, the type of setting is crucial for this thesis as we specifically studied intercultural business environments. Therefore, understanding the context is crucial. The case study methodology yields a better understanding of the interaction between the topic and its setting. Furthermore, it leads to rich, qualitative, empirical data and facilitates generating insights that lead to theory development (Saunders et al., 2019).

The studied case is a company in the financial services sector, whose name will not be mentioned for privacy reasons. It fits within the scope of this research because it is an international organisation that spans across multiple continents and cultures. There are plenty of leaders and followers within the business case that work in an intercultural environment. Furthermore, this is a descriptive case study using in-depth interviews to

investigate the research topic. Our purpose is to develop a holistic, detailed view on the thesis subject and yield a better understanding of the studied dynamics (Schwandt & Gates, 2018). Therefore, to have multiple instances within the case and gather an adequate amount of data, the participants are from different departments and regions in the company.

2.1.5 Research Technique: Semi-Structured Interviews

We collected the empirical, qualitative data via semi-structured interviews, conducted in the company case. An interview guide was made beforehand, consisting of open-ended questions that broach multiple aspects of the research topic (Appendix I & II). Additional queries and elaborations were asked during the interview to get a better sense of the participant's perspective and ideas. The interviews were done on an individual basis with nine different leaders and followers working in the case company and in an intercultural environment.

Interviews are ideal for exploring people's perceptions, understandings and constructions of things they have a stake in (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Semi-structured interviews, specifically, allow for a certain level of consistency without compromising the ability to go in-depth. Therefore, we can probe for responses in interviews, asking the participant to elaborate and give examples. This facilitates gaining a better understanding of the context and the subject at hand. It also adds richness and depth to the data. Moreover, it allowed participants to broach aspects of the research topic beyond the initial questions, which provided valuable insights. Furthermore, the semi-structured nature enabled us to compare the participants' answers in order to identify main strategies used by multiple interviewees. (Saunders, et al., 2019)

2.2 Data Collection

2.2.1 Sample Selection

There are two types of participants for this study: leaders and followers. To approach potential participants and to facilitate the interview, we used 'manager' as proxy for leader and 'subordinate' or 'frontline employee' as proxy for follower. In addition, in our findings

section we have used 'management role' as proxy for the role of leaders and 'supporting role' as proxy for the role of followers. As we are particularly interested in the dyadic relationship between followers and leaders, we aimed to select participants that are in a direct follower-leader (employee-manager) relationship as much as possible. To add variety to the empirical material, we selected them from different departments and geographical regions within the case company, and from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, we opted for a mix of female and male participants. To safeguard their anonymity, aspects of the GLOBE study were employed to adequately assign nationalities of the participants in country clusters (House et al., 2012). The research participants have been assigned by the following country clusters: Anglo, Eastern Asia, Eastern Europe, Germanic Europe, and Latin Europe.

As this is a qualitative study that focuses on specific people and situations within the case study, we used non-probability or non-random sampling. Our decisions on who to interview were based on who would be able to offer a valuable perspective on the research topic (Rapley, 2014). Specifically, we used heterogeneous purposive sampling, also called maximum variation sampling, to select participants. Participants were chosen based on having adequately diverse characteristics that provide optimal possible variation in data collection. This enabled us to collect sufficient data from a small sample of participants and to observe key themes regarding the research topic (Saunders et al., 2019). The sample selection criteria were different regions and departments within the case company.

Our initial desired sample size was eight participants, with an equal mix of followers and leaders. We surpassed this goal with nine participants, and reached empirical saturation as the last interviews decreasingly yielded significant new insights. The interviews were equally spread between people from leader and follower positions, and perspectives within the field of finance in a MNC. To exemplify, we interviewed four leaders, four followers, and one participant that has relevant experience from both levels (Appendix VI).

2.2.2 Interview Process

As discussed in the research design, we gathered data using semi-structured interviews. The first step in the process was the creation of an interview guide (Appendix I & II). This series of questions guided the interviews and enabled us to gather rich and detailed responses relevant to the research question. However, it also left space open for additional questions, remarks and new topics from interviewees. Since there are two types of participants, followers and leaders, two separate interview guides were designed. Subsequently, the interview guide was continuously tested and refined throughout the interview process (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

The participants of the study were contacted directly by one of the authors of the research study, due to their working relationships. Potential candidates were presented with the scope of our research and asked if they are willing to participate in this research by means of an online interview. Further elaboration on the research topic was provided to the participants of the study once they agreed to participate in the study.

We conducted the interviews via video call. This allowed more accessibility and convenience for both the participants and us, while still maintaining the benefits of a face-to-face interview (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Since the participants are spread out across different geographical regions, this was a logical approach. The interview duration was approximately 45 to 60 minutes, with only one interview having a duration of 30 minutes. This included a general introduction disclosing the topic and anonymity of the study, as well as a closing dialogue for additional remarks and/or feedback.

Furthermore, all interviews were conducted with both authors in attendance. This allowed one of us to focus on guiding the interview and the other to take notes. Moreover, it increased data richness as both of us could ensure all aspects of the research topic were covered. Additionally, to guarantee no valuable data was lost, all interviews were audio-recorded, with permission of the participant. This enabled more accurate and unbiased records, which is useful for the data analysis (Saunders et al., 2019).

2.3 Data Analysis

The qualitative data gathered from the interview was both verbal data in the form of audio-recordings and textual data in the form of notes. We combined the two by transcribing the recordings in the CAQDAS programme MAXQDA, creating one document of textual data per participant. Then, we used thematic analysis to analyse the subsequent dataset. This is a flexible yet systematic approach that enables the development and testing of explanations and theories based on the discovered thematic patterns. Therefore, it was a suitable method for our inductive, exploratory thesis. (Gibbs, 2014; Saunders et al., 2019)

Our objective was to look for and determine key themes and patterns across the interviews. This process involved condensing the data by coding it. Essentially, we grouped data units with similar meaning together in order to compare them to other groups of data (in the form of quotations). These similar groups of data were classified under a code. Examples of such codes are 'multicultural attitude' and 'dealing with cultural challenges'. We then used sub-codes to gain a deeper understanding of a code, i.e. the sub-code 'walk away from bad apples' relates to the code 'dealing with cultural challenges'. To maintain a structured overview, we used MAXQDA to code and analyse the data. (Gibbs, 2014; Saldaña, 2013)

The next step in the data analysis process was combining the coded data into categories. This was a challenging but interesting activity that required us to continuously redefine and refine our codes and categories. The result was a number of categories which were then classified under five themes. By analysing these findings and comparing it to existing theory, we were able to build our conceptual theoretical model (Saldaña, 2013). The following scheme visualises the process (figure 1).

Empirical Analysis

Theoretical Model

CATEGORIES

THEMES

Constructive Followership Model

Theory Building

Follower Behaviour

Leader Behaviour

Working in an Intercultural Context

Follower-Leader Relationship

Co-Construction of Leadership

Transparency | Curiosity & Learning | Considerate Communiation
Proactivity | Self-Suffiency | Critical Thinking | Accountability

Empowerment | Leading by Example | Transparent Communication | Vision
Empathy | Sensible | Open to Feedback | Enabling Growth | Partnership

Communication Challenges | Cultural Openness | Beyond National Culture
Cultural Awareness | Adaptability | Cultural Clash | Cultural Bias

Feeling Unappreciated | Resistance | Trust | Hierarchy | Self-authority
Comfortableness | Feeling Valued | Interpersonal Skills | Task Clarity

Guidance & Mentorship | Upward Communication | Management Support
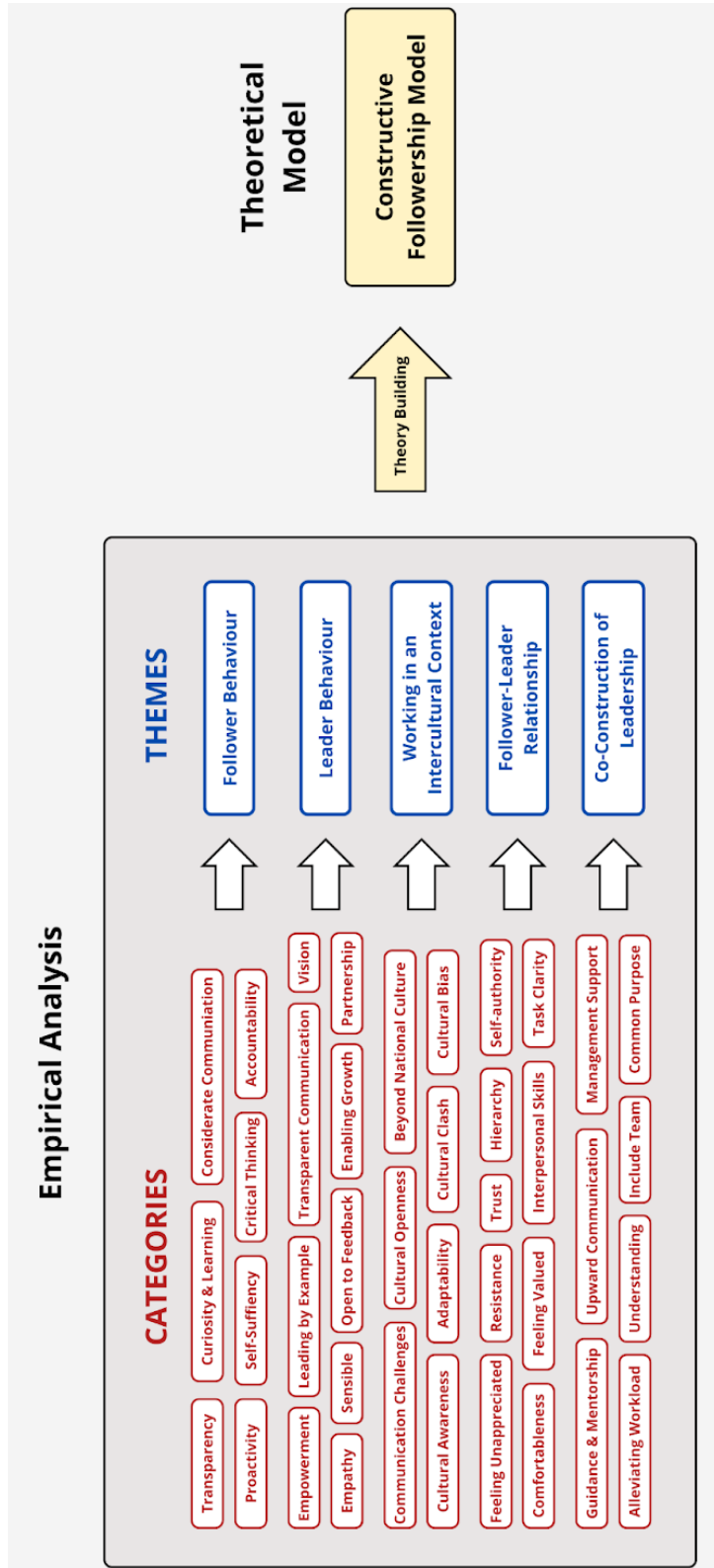Alleviating Workload | Understanding | Include Team | Common Purpose

Figure 1: Data Analysis to Theory (Own Construct)

2.4 Quality Criteria

To ensure the quality and integrity of the research, we uphold a number of quality criteria. These relate to the entire process, from the research question formulation to the end results. It is important to note that the quality criteria of qualitative research differ from traditional quality criteria of quantitative research. Traditionally, reliability and validity are the two most important factors. Reliability relates to the possibility of achieving the same results with the same methods (Clarke & Braun, 2013). However, qualitative research is more open to influence from the researcher and is not necessarily intended to be repeated due to changing times and environment (Saunders et al., 2019). Therefore, in this thesis we rather speak of dependability, which refers to the general trustworthiness of the data collection and analysis methods. Validity, on the other hand, is defined as to which extent the research actually shows what it claims to show. As qualitative research recognises the social construction of reality, this can be hard to pinpoint (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Therefore, we use credibility as a criteria, referring to the specificity of the study (Boeije, 2010), the scope of the access to the participants' experiences and knowledge and the ability to generate meaning from this (Saunders et al., 2019).

We did a number of things to uphold these criteria. First, everything was accurately documented to ensure methodological accountability (Boeije, 2010). We have described the process with transparency, and details such as the interview guide are included in the appendices. Furthermore, all interviews were conducted and analysed by both authors. This enabled researcher or analyst triangulation, which reduces potential bias (Boeije, 2010). A team allows for more standpoints and perspectives than one individual researcher (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Moreover, the interviews were conducted in a semi-structured, systematic way and a test interview was held to ensure the questions were comprehensible and yielded the intended results (Boeije, 2010). Additionally, we are aware of and recognise the context of the topic and the environment of the case study.

Lastly, a note on generalisability should be made. Generalisability, or external validity, refers to the ability to generalise the results of the study beyond the specific research context and apply the findings to other environments than the studied case (Boeije, 2010).

This is not a quantitative study with a big sample size, so it is hard to say this research is generalisable. However, our main objective is to gather new insights into a relatively unexplored topic. Typicality is not the intent (Schwandt & Gates, 2018). Therefore, we do not claim that the results of this study are applicable to every business and cultural context. However, there is a flexible generalisability, or transferability, to this research (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Aspects of it can be transferred to other contexts. Therefore, we have described the specific settings and circumstances of the participants, as far as ethical privacy considerations allow. Whether the insights and results are transferable to other contexts, is up to the discretion of the reader and further research.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

There are a number of ethical considerations that affect the process of this thesis, particularly concerning the data collection and analysis. Above all else, we try to avoid any harm to the participants and treat them all equally and with respect. We continuously strive to be open minded and fair by employing an unbiased and objective view that emphasises truthfulness, accuracy and transparency. Furthermore, all interviews were on a voluntary basis, so informed consent was obtained from every participant. Sufficient information about the research was shared beforehand to enable them to consent fully. They also had the right to stop the interview at any point and decide to withdraw their participation. (Flick, 2020; Saunders et al., 2019)

Moreover, privacy and data protection are primary concerns that were kept in mind at all times. Confidentiality and anonymity are especially relevant in this research due to its small setting and the direct relationships between some of the participants. As some information can be sensitive, readers should not be able to identify the interviewees (Flick, 2020). Therefore, all data was consistently anonymised by retaining identifying characteristics such as name, department, company and country. For the purpose of recognising different cultural contexts, as needed for the topic of this thesis, the participants are assigned to country clusters in accordance with the GLOBE study (House et al., 2012). Audio-recordings and detailed transcripts of the interviews are not shared with the public and are deleted upon completion of the thesis. For quotations, no

identifying information is shared except for the leader or follower status. On a side note, clearly disclosing the anonymity and confidentiality of the research to the participant is beneficial, as it creates a safe space for them to share opinions they might not want to disclose to others (Lowton, 2018).

2.6 Research Limitations

Due to limited time and resources, there are limitations to this research. The single case study methodology limits this study in its ability to be generalisable. The results of this thesis cannot be readily transferred into other areas outside of the case. Furthermore, as fits a pragmatist, inductive approach, we recognise that this is but one perspective into the research topic. However, this does not take away the value of the generated insights. This thesis takes a first step into researching the role of follower behaviour in the co-construction of leadership in intercultural contexts, a point of view that is not often studied. It is an inductive, exploratory, qualitative study that is limited in its scope. Therefore, it requires further research into other cases and sectors than the financial services industry, or can be complemented by a deductive, quantitative study to further develop the theory and yield generalisable results.

3 Literature Review

The theoretical chapter reviews literature that poses relevance to the topic researched, and comprises three sections. The literature review addresses leadership, followership, and followership in an intercultural context.

3.1 Leadership

Just as one cannot talk about leaders without talking about followers, we cannot discuss followership without writing a few sentences on leadership. Therefore, this subchapter lists some of the main contemporary leadership theories and elaborates on the meaning of the co-construction of leadership.

3.1.1 Contemporary Leadership Theories

Leadership is a well studied field over the past century and there are many interesting theories and concepts. Listing all of these is beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore, we focus on giving a brief overview on three of the most influential, contemporary leadership theories: transformational leadership, leader-member exchange theory and authentic leadership. These theories were chosen because they strike us as particularly relevant to our research, and we hope they give the reader a better understanding of the overall context.

Transformational leadership is one of the most dominant and most researched leadership theories in modern research (Dinh et al., 2014). Initially, Burns (1978, p. 4) defines the transforming leader as one who "*recognizes and exploits an existing need or demand of a potential follower. But, beyond that, the transforming leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower.*" In essence, a transformational leader motivates followers to do and be more than originally expected. The leader attempts to 'transform' the followers and enables them to reach their full potential and transcend their own self-interest (Bass, 1985). The definition of transformational leadership and how to achieve it has been discussed and altered many

times throughout the years by various authors, many containing tautologies and other problems. Therefore, a certain lack of clarity around the definition of the concept has arisen, which is one of the critiques on the theory. Other concerns include research biases and doubts about the causality between observed behaviours and outcomes. Nevertheless, transformational leadership is an influential and ever changing theory that should be taken into account. (Stock et al., 2022)

Arguably one of the most influential theories when it comes to the relationship between leaders and followers is the leader-member exchange theory (LMX). This theory focuses on the dyadic relationship between followers and leaders rather than focusing on the individual leader and follower. It views this relationship as crucial to understanding the effects leaders have on members, teams and organisations. Therefore, it is an interesting concept to discuss, as this thesis also focuses on the dyadic relationship between followers and leaders. The LMX approach argues that leaders form high-quality relationships with a subset of their team and low-quality relationships with others. This depends on the depth of the social exchange and aspects such as trust, affect and respect. LMX arguably has influence on job satisfaction, work turnover, performance, etc. and relates to other relationships such as co-worker exchange (CWX). LMX theory aims to both understand how the relationship between leader and member is constructed, how it affects the quality, and the effects or consequences (Bauer, & Erdogan, 2015). However, while LMX is a popular leadership theory and has its merits, it is also criticised and has its limitations. Specifically, there are doubts concerning the clarity of the definition of LMX, and the validity and generalisability of analysing the theory. The concept is rather ambiguous, its measures are limited and the causality between LMX and its outcomes is hard to establish (Gottfredson et al., 2020).

The third influential leadership theory we would like to discuss is authentic leadership, which can be defined as *…"a set of leadership behaviours through which leaders enact their true selves, … reduces silence and motivates speaking up in employees low on proactivity personality, but hardly affects employees who are proactive by nature, because proactive employees are less susceptible to social influences* (Guenter et al., 2017, p.49)*"*.

According to Gavin (2019), authentic leadership is a leadership style that puts emphasis on integrity, accountability, and using your inner compass to guide your daily actions that follow the tendency to establish meaningful relationships in a team that are related to an organisation's mission and purpose. Authentic leaders usually possess a few distinct character traits - (1) they are committed to bettering themselves, (2) they cultivate self-awareness, (3) they are disciplined, (4) they are mission-driven, and (5) they inspire faith. Subsequently, authenticity could lead to better relationships with colleagues, higher levels of trust, greater productivity, and a more positive working environment. Since authentic leaders know who they are and are true to themselves and interact transparently with others may result in fostering open and positive work relationships between leaders and followers (Guenter et al., 2017). This could be attributed to the high levels of self-reflective or self-aware behaviour that instantly reflect a leader's internalised moral perspective, which contributes to developing and establishing trust. Also, they are approachable and actively and properly try to balance feedback from subordinates to help understand a situation better given its specific context. All in all, making authenticity paramount to a business strategy can lead to substantial returns personally, team-wise and organisationally (Gavin, 2019).

3.1.2 Co-construction of Leadership

Rather than viewing leadership as a static and hierarchical concept, we understand leadership as dynamic, social and relational. DeRue & Ashford (2010) conceptualise the construction of leadership identity across three levels: individual internalisation, relational recognition and collective endorsement. The leadership and follower identities are not just within a person's self-concept, but are also dependent on the recognised relationship between individuals and the social context in which the identity is endorsed. Therefore, leadership identity construction and development are about the construction of a relationship. Individuals mutually influence each other to construct their identities as leaders and followers collectively, thus creating the leader-follower relationship. This relationship is a two-way street and can change over time. The dynamics of this relationship is the basis of leadership discussions within this thesis.

"Whether we lead or follow, we are responsible for our own actions, and we share responsibility for the actions of those whom we can influence" (Chaleff, 2007, p.13). Followers as casual agents function as important antecedents to organisational outcomes. The focus is on follower orientations, traits, schemas and characteristics, and how followers work with leaders in ways that possibly contribute to leadership and organisational outcomes. Followers should therefore be seen as active subjects rather than passive objects or receivers of leadership (Alvesson et al., 2017). Generally speaking, good leader-follower relationships are based on a clear sense of responsibility, mutual trust and a win-win mentality that adheres to dyadic influence. Thus, in an ideal scenario leadership should be co-constructed in social and relational interactions between a set of individuals. Depicting followers as active, skilled, participative and harmonious in relation with leaders further stresses the importance of rethinking followership's potential. Also, active followers are not tied to a fixed position, but rather tied to behaviour. This entails that the leadership process is influenced by relational interactions between people that position themselves to their presumed leader, and as a result contribute to the character of its relationship (Ibid).

3.2 Followership

As this thesis focuses on the perspective and the behaviour of the follower, it is important to have a sense of existing theories regarding followership. Therefore, this subchapter gives an overview of relevant concepts and argues why followership is needed. The discussed theories were chosen due to their popularity in the research field and the relevance to our thesis.

3.2.1 Need for Followership

Followership is a vital topic that needs to be taken more seriously (Alvesson et al., 2017; Chaleff, 2007). According to Kelley (1988, p.142), *"Organizations stand or fall partly on the basis of how well their leaders lead, but partly also on the basis of how well their followers follow"*. Presumably, the preoccupation and charm of leadership tends to make us neglect the importance of the follower and its nature. In essence, without followers there

is no real leadership but rather an attempt at leadership (Alvesson et al., 2017). Thus, the increasing interest in followership and follower-centric approaches accommodates the search for a progressive understanding of leadership research. Followership becomes an increasingly more important area of focus, given that the recent shift in followership interest presents data that leans toward favourable organisational outcomes (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Subsequently, the role-based approaches and constructionist approaches related to followership gain a more prominent role in examining followership (Oc & Bashhur, 2013; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). A role-based approach points out that followers can be seen as a position or rank (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). A constructionist approach endorses that leadership is a co-creation between leading and following. Some choose a followership role in one context and a leadership role in another context, but still acknowledge the essence of legitimising the followership role (Kelley, 1988). There are certain new theories that regard the nature of the relational aspect between leaders and followers, such as shared leadership and servant leadership (Chaleff, 2007). Nonetheless, there are still some limitations that shadow such concepts. Hence, we need to seek for a more dynamic model of followership that provides balance and supplements dynamic leadership.

Internal pressures on leaders can result in ego strength and once reinforced it can make leaders more ego driven (Chaleff, 2007). If such pressures are not managed well from below, usually more authoritarian behaviour is expected to be implemented by leadership, and therefore not following a participative or partnering direction that is desired. When escalated, leadership can become destructive and dangerous to control (Padilla, Hogan & Kaiser, 2007). There is a certain seductiveness and pitfalls that ascertain the power of leadership. Bad or destructive leaders can take advantage of a situation where they can perform influence on a broader group, creating susceptible followers that may conform or collude. Significant character traits associated with those leaders are charisma, narcissism, and an inclination to exercise power (Erickson et al., 2015). A prominent historical example of the influence of power is Milgram's experiment on obedience to authority, which was conducted in the 1960s (Kellerman, 2008; Riggio, Chaleff & Lipman-Blumen, 2008). This experiment shed light on how easily people are influenced to follow orders, and the potentially disastrous repercussions that could result from that. The dangers of

leadership can be counteracted by having courageous followers, decreasing the amount of control a leader can have, and by educating the larger public to identify any act upon any cues that point out to potential disastrous leadership (Padilla et al., 2007).

On the other hand, followership is predominantly associated with undesirable positions or insults, and is not very commonly accepted in the real world (Alvesson et al., 2017; Kellerman, 2008). This preoccupation, however, is not in line with current predicaments of the importance of leader-follower relationships, mainly since the impact and power of followers become increasingly more important and leaders less. Even though leaders generally have the ability to exercise more power and authority, leaders rely heavily on their followers and should not neglect the importance of them (Kellerman, 2008).

3.2.2 Followership Styles

According to Averin (2019), *"Development of a sense of belongingness and association with a group and leadership is a critical element for productive leader and follower relationships and efficient organisational performance"* (p.116). Thus, the development of followers' commitment to leadership goes in line with well-established leader and follower relationships, as a result leading to enhanced organisational performance. Certain characteristics of followers distinguish between effective and not effective followers, which revolve around levels of intelligence, enthusiasm, and self-reliant participation (Kelley, 1988).

Based on the research of Kelley (1988) regarding followership, there are two dimensions that reveal the degree of effectiveness of a follower. The first dimension regards to what degree a follower exercises independence and critical thinking. The other dimension displays how passive or active followers are perceived. Assimilating both dimensions led to the identification of five followership types – sheep, yes people, alienated followers, survivors, and effective followers, as depicted in *figure 2*. One could opt that yes people and effective followers are the most committed followers. On the other hand, sheep and alienated followers are the least committed followers, supplemented by survivors or undifferentiated followers. What can be derived from this model is that passive followers

are non-critical and dependent thinkers, not active in participation and are obedient to leadership instructions. Alternatively, effective followers are capable of self-management, are independent and critical thinkers and act willingly. Moreover, they are active participants in an organisation and do not shy away from risk or conflict.
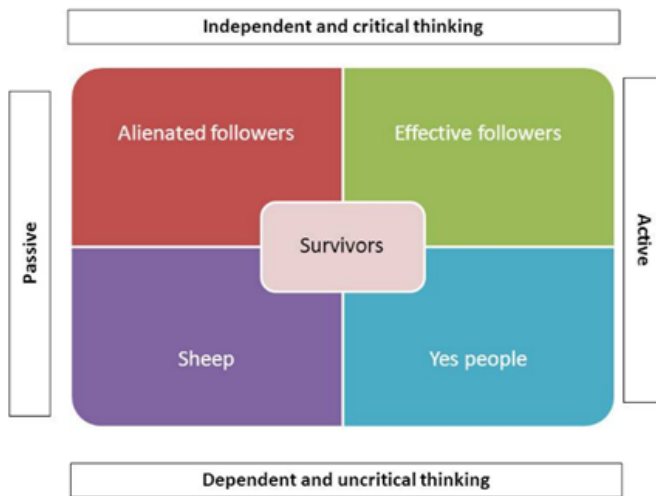
Figure 2: Follower Types (Source: Kelley, 1988, p. 145)

Similarly, Chaleff (2009) has proposed a followership style quadrant that encompasses followers' degree of challenging leadership and followers' degree of support of leadership, as depicted in *figure 3*. A resource has low support of leadership and low challenge of leadership, indicating that they will do sufficient work to retain a position but will not actively engage. An individualist has low support of leadership, but a high challenge of leadership. This is a follower type that speaks up when others are silent, but their voice can be marginalised if they are too chronically contrarian. An implementer has high support of leadership, but has low challenge of leadership. Although high support is mostly appreciated from a leader's perspective, low follower challenge can present a risk since costly mistakes are not cautioned for. A partner has a combination of high support of leadership and high challenge of leadership. A follower in this position does not only assume full responsibility for its own behaviour but also the leader's behaviour and therewith they act accordingly. One could argue that Chaleff's (2009) dimension of challenging leadership is similar or roughly equivalent to the critical thinking axis in Kelley's (1988) model. Similarly, Chaleff's (2009) dimension of willingness to support leadership encompasses aspects that are roughly equivalent to the active or passive

participation axis in Kelley's (1988) model. Ideally, a follower is a partner to leadership and in that way contributes to leader-follower relations in the most effective and adequate manner (Riggio et al., 2008).
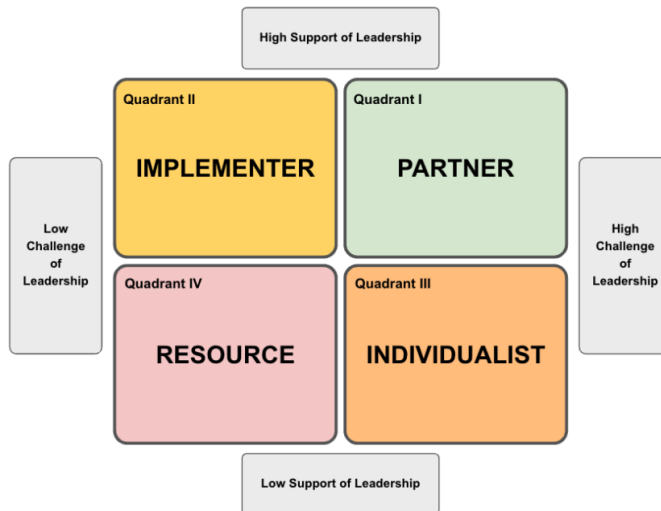
Figure 3: Followership Styles (Source: Chaleff, 2009, p. 40)

3.2.3 Reflexive Followership

Traditionally, it is viewed that followership is constructed by leadership. It stresses how followers are the object of leadership, ...*"as a direct consequence of the traits, styles and acts of the leader – the subject"* (Alvesson et al., 2017, p.80). The personality, style and behaviour of the leader are implied to have an effect on the demeanour and behavioural nature of the employees that potentially influence engagement, professional conduct and performance. Not to mention, followers are viewed as rather passive actors, reliant on and susceptible to provocation from a leader. However, according to Alvesson et al. (2017), *"ignoring the work context, culture and other organisational conditions as well as individual characteristics suggest that this is an overly simplified logic that relies more on the traditional leader assumptions than on in-depth investigations of leader and follower interactions in real-life organisations"* (p.80). This calls for a more reflexive understanding of followership.

Reflexive followership sheds more light on moving away from asymmetrical power imbalances between leaders and followers. It rather stresses on the voluntary follower relationship and puts more emphasis on employing more horizontal modes of organising (Alvesson et al., 2017). When shifting away the focus of using components of vertical modes of organising – leadership, management, and power; we can take a stance with an emphasis on horizontal modes of organising – group work, network-based peer influencing, and autonomy. The latter are referred to as alternative modes of organising. Moreover, reflexive followerships puts a follower in a dyadic relational atmosphere with leadership wherein they act as active co-constructors of leadership rather than passive objects of leadership. In addition, Kelley (1988) argues that follower self-management gives effective followers the autonomy to engage in leadership effort with low to no superior control or supervision. As such, the more reflexive a follower is, the better they can contribute to the bigger picture (Alvesson et al., 2017).

According to Alvesson et al. (2017), the influence an individual can achieve can be divided into different categories – high influential person (HIP), medium influential person (MIP), low influential person (LIP), and no influencing or autonomic person (NIP). Persons that are associated with any of the aforementioned categories can navigate through different levels of influence. Important to note is that we do not always need leadership, but rather we need to focus on followership more. People can think for themselves and thus should not be confronted by bad leaders or managers, but be more respected and given more autonomy to perform better. In essence, stressing the importance of communal and single-mindedness efforts far outweigh individualistic competition that can deteriorate the team balance (De Pree, 2004). Nevertheless, it is important to consider that the co-construction of leadership identities, relationships and processes does not in fact insist on the meaning of equality or symmetrical relationships between leader and followers (Alvesson et al., 2017). Followers who are critical, rational, yet respectful to their leader can help in shaping leadership and instigating acceptance and followership from interrelated followers to ensure proper engagement and efficacy of the leadership initiative (Alvesson et al., 2017; Kelley, 1988).

3.2.4 Effective Followership

The behaviour of followers comprises active and passive followers, dependent and independent thinkers, some critical and some less or uncritical (Kelley, 1988). The most ideal follower behaviour can be found in the effective follower. They are respected by peers and superiors due to their assertiveness, bravado, devotion, and problem-solving capabilities. Being an effective follower involves independence, and anticipating needs from their own level of competence and understanding. A leader can safely delegate responsibility to effective followers, as they are credible, competent and committed to the organisation. Moreover, motivated effective followers disclose larger means of productivity in comparison to less motivated followers. An addition to the vertical modes of organising is that a leader can facilitate the subordinates participation in decision-making, otherwise referred to as participative management (Alvesson et al., 2017). Self-confident followers are committed to something tangible, and view their superiors as co-constructors and their colleagues as collaborators. Effective followers are highly competent and focused, and reflect on their strengths and weaknesses well. In addition, according to Mellon (2016), self-regulation and co-cultural competence are characteristics found to be pertaining to the demonstration of effective followership. Also, the ability of co-cultural competences do not differ between leader and follower.

3.2.5 Courageous Followership

Courageous followers are considered leadership's most valuable subordinates (Kelley, 1988; Chaleff, 2009). They are highly supportive and critical thinkers who are not afraid to challenge leadership with constructive dissent. Eminent to leadership is that courageous followers keep a leader honest, sustain their integrity and humble them to put the organisational vision afront of their own ambitions (Kelley, 1998). Followers are intended to effectively partner with leaders, and Chaleff (2009) has explored how this can be done most effectively, in particular by leveraging advances in communications technology. Subsequently, Chaleff (Ibid) has proposed five dimensions of courageous followership - courage to assume responsibility, courage to serve, courage to challenge, courage to participate in transformation, and courage to take moral action. Additionally, after the

relational aspect of courageous follower principles it is important to consider supplementing factors such as the courage to speak to the hierarchy, and courage to listen to followers. This model serves as the foundation that followers do not serve leaders, rather that leaders and followers serve a common purpose, and each of the stakeholders does it in their own role (Riggio et al., 2008).

Courageous followers do not only assume responsibility for the organisation, but also to themselves (Chaleff, 2009). They are keen on discovering or creating opportunities to fulfil their potential and maximise their value to the organisation, depicting a sense of common purpose and mutual influence. This entails that one acts in accordance to the common purpose, which enables them in a position to decide whether or not receiving and executing direct orders from leadership.

Courageous followers assume new or additional responsibilities to unburden the leader and serve the organisation (Chaleff, 2009). This entails that they are able to use their strengths to complement the leader's in achieving an organisations' purpose and stand up for their leaders when required. This also speaks to the courage to do everything possible that contributes to the enablement of a leader's success.

Courageous followers follow their moral compass and thereby are not afraid to give voice to the discomfort or unjust they feel or experience when a group conflict or leader's behaviour or policies conflict their sense of moral right or ethics (Chaleff, 2009). When the common purpose is threatened, constructive dissent is a tool that followers can use to constructively challenge a leader's or group's behaviour.

Certain behaviour that jeopardises the fulfilment of a common purpose encourages courageous followers to recognise and reveal the need for transformation (Chaleff, 2009). While leadership and group members struggle with the challenge of managing real change, courageous followers become involved in the change process in a way they deem appropriate to accommodate a given situation most favourably. This could include a combination of improving organisation's performance and leader-follower relationships.

In some particular situations moral actions taken by followers are needed to serve a common purpose (Chaleff, 2009). Especially when obeying to higher moral standards than a leaders' decision one might choose to refuse obeying to direct orders, becoming a whistleblower, or appealing the objectionable situation to a higher level of authority.

With regards to the five dimensions of courageous followership it is important to consider how a follower can most effectively communicate and influence higher levels of the corporate hierarchy by means of strategies and developing sensitivities to voice themselves (Chaleff, 2009). After further elaboration of the five dimensions of followership the leader is encouraged to listen to their followers. This entails the leader's responsibility to support the conditions of courageous followership and to respond productively to acts of courageous followership.

3.2.6 The Future of Followership

Changes in culture and technology contribute to the more influential position that followers ascertain in society nowadays (Kellerman, 2019). Advances in technology have most significantly transformed the dynamics between leaders and followers, with the increasing power of social media at the forefront. To exemplify, according to Kellerman (2019), *"Social media embolden followers to pressure leaders, to push leaders as they never have previously been pressed or pushed"* (p.43). This indicates that followers are now in a more favourable position to pressure leaders, although the amount of influence differs by the magnitude of different positions of social influence. Kellerman (2019) argues that there are some practical implication that come out of these new dynamics between leaders and followers: (1) decline of authority, (2) rise of animosity (3), dominance of minority (4), leaders on a leash, and (5) contextual consciousness. The latter practical implications give voice to a decrease in power and influencing power from leaders, most notably present in liberal democratic societies. Subsequently, Kellerman (2019) describe the moral implications that the change of leader-follower dynamics incorporate: (1) the individual responsibility of followers, (2) the collective accountability of leaders, (3) the focus on followers, (4), rethinking assessing, and (5) reinventing learning. Ethical considerations that concern this shift in power dynamics reveal that both leaders and followers have a

more active role to participate in striving for the common good, where the involvement of each individual stakeholder becomes more eminent.

3.3 Followership in an Intercultural Context

This subchapter delves deeper into the meaning of an intercultural context, which is an aspect of the research problem. Here, we discuss the concept of intercultural communication and elaborate upon the cultural mapping used in this thesis. These topics are crucial to getting a better sense of the context of our research.

3.3.1 Importance of Intercultural Communication

Before we understand the importance of intercultural communication we first need to understand what intercultural communication entails. According to Szkudlarek et al. (2020), intercultural communication is focused on evaluating the cognitive processes that occur when people from divergent cultures communicate. Similarly, Rogers and Hart (2002) define intercultural communication as the study of heterophilous interpersonal communication between a set of different cultures (Rogers & Hart, 2002). In addition, many aspects of intercultural communication such as haptics, kinesics, proxemics, and gaze are often not incorporated in conceptualised research, which might in fact contribute to a better understanding of intercultural communication practices (Schneider et al., 2014). To support this notion, Szkudlarek et al. (2020) disclose that *"Each intercultural encounter generates a novel combination and unknown results that are negotiated through the interplay among individuals' background, characteristics, situational circumstances, and contextual cues"* (p.2). Therefore, a more processual approach can help in mapping the cultural sense-making process. In this process, antecedent experiences, situational crossroads, and individual susceptibility accommodate the determination of interpretative schemes that decode intercultural encounters, further substituting to the co-creating of meaning. Subsequently, dimensions of social, economic, political, organisational, and power relationships should be taken into account for their impact on influencing and ascribing meaning to intercultural communication (Ibid). In addition, fostering intercultural relationships that increase well-being of not only the organisation but also its members is

intended to positively manifest an advantageous business climate (Okoro, 2019; Szkudlarek et al., 2020). Moreover, according to Ferris et al. (2009), the foundations of organisations are good work relationships. The main focus is on the importance of establishing interpersonal skills that accommodate interpersonal relationships. The nature of dynamic relationships in work relationships are key actors of organisational competency. Herein, trust acts as an essential factor for sustaining profitable and rewarding relationships.

According to Glisby and Holder (2011), *"The ability to create and share knowledge across cultural boundaries is the key to competitive competence for companies; however, it is not merely a question of being able to understand one's counterpart's culture, values, and business model, as the traditional view has it.* (p.65)*"* Following that notion, what makes intercultural communication equally more complex is that people from different cultures have difficulties in fully comprehending each other due to different meaning systems with emphasis on language and cultural frames of references or interpretations (Falkheimer & Heide, 2006). Also, the context of information and how this is embraced in the initial message presents different means of interpretation, which can be attributed to low vs high-context communication (Meyer, 2015). Thus, one needs to require a proficient understanding of a differing cultural group and language (Falkheimer & Heide, 2006). In contrast, Rogers and Hart (2002) argue that the most compelling intercultural communication issues can be found in the *individualism-collectivism* cultural dimension, which takes part on both a cultural level and an individual level. This comes hand in hand with esteemed power dynamics from more authoritative structures that usually are enforced in collectivism to more egalitarian structures that are more common in individualism.

3.3.2 Intercultural Communication Competence

According to Deardorff (2018), intercultural competence is one of the most important aspects of the leadership process. In business, cultural intelligence is employed as the means to assess intercultural competence. Subsequently, Deardorff (2006) has proposed a framework for lintercultural competence utilised and is implementable in several countries.

Developing intercultural competence is a life-long process which revolves around continuous evaluation and modifying current knowledge. One component of the process is to distinguish that one should emphasise on the appropriateness rather than effectiveness of employing intercultural communication. Spitzberg (1997) confirms that one must consider that intercultural competence revolves around appropriateness and effectiveness taken into account that it is always context-specific. He emphasises that appropriateness relates to valued norms, rules and expectations of a given relationship and that those should not be violated significantly. On the other hand, effectiveness is about how valued goals and rewards are accomplished relative to costs and other alternatives. Finding a proper balance between appropriateness and effectiveness of intercultural communication indicates that one is deemed an optimal interactional communicator. Most literature on intercultural communication competence provides a list of adequate skills, attitudes and abilities. To exemplify, one can possess high levels of adaptiveness, empathy, and self-consciousness. However, it is nearly impossible to tell what skills are most imperative in a given situation, and it is fairly difficult to assess how such skills relate to each other (Ibid). Nonetheless, one's ability to create and share knowledge across cultural boundaries is part of tacit knowledge that springs from experience, and can help in codifying situational knowledge with regards to social interactions (Glisby & Holder, 2011).

Erin Meyer (2015) has extensively researched how communication differs among cultures. Her research is based on decades of cultural research and living and working internationally whilst being exposed to numerous different cultural encounters. She revealed that the vast majority of managers that conduct business internationally have little to no understanding about the impact that culture puts on their work. Therefore, intercultural communication competence can help any business leader in grasping the significance of culture in business. A competent communicator usually can be inferred by being friendly, trustworthy and assertive (Spitzberg, 1997). Picking up contextual cues that help you understand culture while living abroad helps to decode means of communication and adapt accordingly. Also, communicating with diverging cultures online together with different points of references and thus expectations need to be considered as one can miss the cultural subtleties that can impact the intended meaning of a message, which can be

severely misinterpreted. Furthermore, we are naturally used to seeing the world according to our own culture or ethnocentric bias. As this seems commonplace we find it hard to imagine that different cultures have a different perception of what is normal. Thus, when you are able to identify what is typical in your own culture, but atypical in another culture you can commence to properly explore the course of intercultural learning, sharing and ultimately gaining a more comprehensive understanding of diverging cultures (Meyer, 2015). These are all aspects of intercultural communication that may reveal intercultural communication competence and incompetence.

3.3.3 Cultural Mapping

Geert Hofstede is one of the most quoted researchers of cross-cultural research. The model proposed by Hofstede (1996) sheds light on differences between national culture, and has been adopted and continuously modified since it first emerged (Hofstede et al., 2010). The main dimensions of culture identified by Geert Hofstede are as follows: Power Distance, Individualism vs Collectivism, Masculinity vs Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long vs Short Term Orientation, and Indulgence vs Restraint. The study focuses on the antecedents of national culture on the latter cultural dimensions and provides generalised insights and comparisons between different countries. Although the cultural pyramid of Geert Hofstede presents relevant findings related to cross-cultural dimensions, one should not neglect the limitations around the theory. The theory is based on a generalisation of national culture, and does not properly consider deviations within national cultures. Meyer (2015) argues that *"Speaking of cultural differences leads us to stereotype and therefore put individuals in boxes with 'general traits'. Instead of talking about culture, it is important to judge people as individuals, not just products of their environment"* (p.13). However, if you approach every interaction assuming that culture does not matter, the default mechanism is likely to employ one's own cultural lens or ethnocentric bias which potentially leads to judgement or misjudgement accordingly.

Similarly, Meyer (2015) has proposed eight cultural scales that represent one key area that managers must be aware of while they work in intercultural environments. The eight scales of the culture map are the following: Low-context vs High-context communication,

evaluation by employing Direct negative feedback vs. Indirect negative feedback, Principle-first vs. Applications-first persuasion, Egalitarian vs. Hierarchical leading structures, Consensual vs. Top-down decision-making, Task-based vs. Relation-based trust, disagreeing by means of being Confrontational vs. Avoiding confrontation, and Linear-time vs. Flexible-time scheduling. The culture map can be employed to compare a set of different cultures with each other, mostly related to doing business with current or potential business partners from different cultures. An example of how cultures differ in certain aspects is displayed in *figure 4*. This sheds light on the presumptions that certain Asian cultures are more or less the same, and the same applies to Western cultures (House et al., 2012). However, the nuances between different cultural backgrounds and its differences are clearly present in the aforementioned figure. It shows how both Western and Asian neighbouring countries are distinctly different in different aspects related to culture.
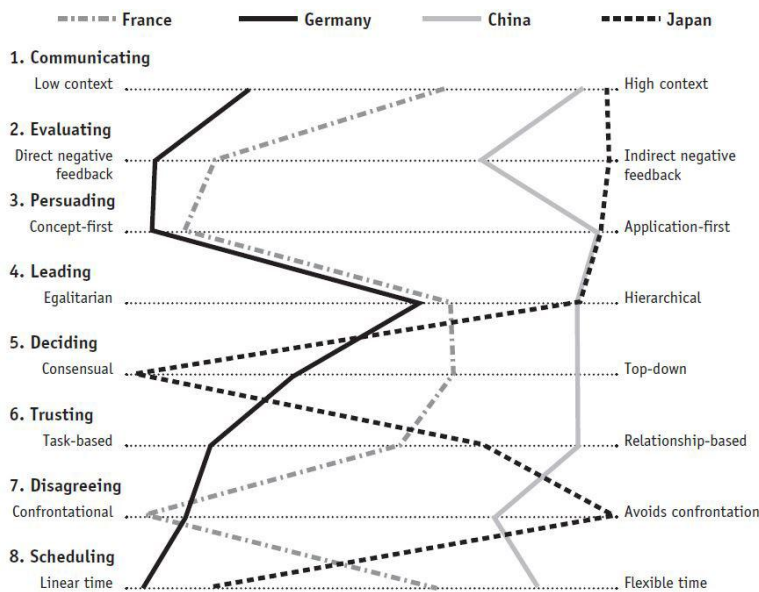

Figure 4: the Culture Map - Comparison between France, Germany, China, and Japan (Source: Meyer, 2015, p. 264)

3.3.4 GLOBE Project

The Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness (GLOBE) sheds light on intriguing relationships between societal culture and organisational behaviour. More

than 200 researchers across the globe have contributed to the project that examines the complex effects of culture on leadership and organisational effectiveness, and the scope of the research has been expanded beyond the latter by including cultural drivers that affect human condition and societies' economic competitiveness (House et al., 2012). Within the GLOBE project comparisons are frequently based on a different set of country clusters or cultural characteristics (Deardorff, 2018; House et al., 2004). To exemplify, results derived from the GLOBE project indicate that four traits or styles are prominent in most societies – inspirational, integrity, performance-oriented, and visionary (Deardorff, 2018). Also, House et al. (2002) have concluded that substantial aspects of charismatic and transformational leadership are strongly and universally endorsed across 62 cultures as part of the GLOBE project study. The cultural dimensions that are being studied are power distance, uncertainty avoidance, institutional collectivism, in-group collectivism, gender egalitarianism, humane orientation, performance orientation, assertiveness, and future orientation. This is supplemented by the global leadership dimensions, which are charismatic/value-based leadership, team-oriented leadership, participative leadership, humane-oriented leadership, autonomous leadership, and self-protective leadership (House et al., 2012).

3.3.4.1 Cultural Clusters

The GLOBE Project went beyond national culture and has attempted to cluster countries as can be seen in *figure 5*. Clusters offer a valuable practical framework for managing the intricacies of multi-cultural ventures (House et al., 2012). Based on the empirical and conceptual process a set of ten different societies emerged: Southern Asia, Latin America, Nordic Europe, Anglo, Germanic Europe, Latin Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe, Middle East, and Confucian Asia. In essence, each country cluster has its unique corresponding characteristics concerning the desired leadership style. In regards to our research participants, we assume that most of our participants are likely to be associated with the following cultural clusters: Anglo, Eastern Europe, Germanic Europe, Latin Europe, and Southern Asia.
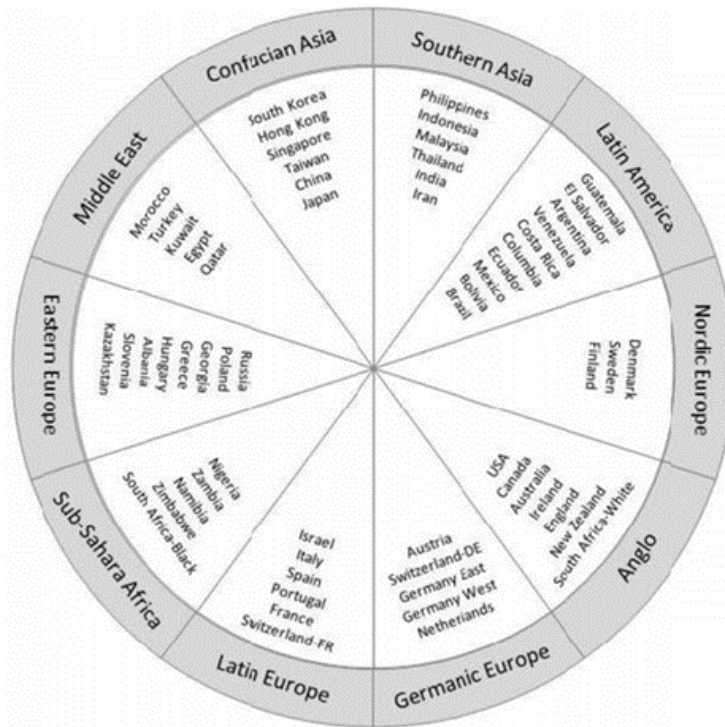
Figure 5: GLOBE Project - Cultural Clusters (Source: House et al., 2012, p. 190)

3.3.4.2 Cultural Dimensions

House et al. (2004) have deepened the research of Hofstede (1980) and Trompenaars (1997) by establishing a new take on cultural dimensions. Nine dimensions have been established, including one dimension that focuses on different aspects of collectivism (*figure 6*). In addition, the cultural dimensions assertiveness, gender egalitarianism and performance orientation are dimensions that gauge a deeper understanding of underlying cultures (House et al., 2004). The GLOBE study has included some cultural dimensions of Geert Hofstede's study such as power distance, uncertainty avoidance and future orientation, which is similar to long vs. short-term orientation. Although one might argue that the study provides generalisations on a cluster of national cultures, it is important to note that this study puts emphasis on societal culture and organisational behaviour. Moreover, national culture may indirectly influence the behaviour of leaders based on leadership expectations of societies (House et al., 2012).

Power Distance	The degree to which members of a collective expect power to be distributed equally.
Uncertainty Avoidance	The extent to which a society, organization, or group relies on social norms, rules, and procedures to alleviate unpredictability of future events.
Humane Orientation	The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards individuals for being fair, altruistic, generous, caring, and kind to others.
Collectivism I (Institutional)	The degree to which organizational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action.
Collectivism II (In-Group)	The degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their organizations or families.
Assertiveness	The degree to which individuals are assertive, confrontational, and aggressive in their relationships with others.
Gender Egalitarianism	The degree to which a collective minimizes gender inequality.
Future Orientation	The extent to which individuals engage in future-oriented behaviors such as delaying gratification, planning, and investing in the future.
Performance Orientation	The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and excellence.

Figure 6: GLOBE Project - Cultural Dimensions (Souce: House et al., 2012, p. 516)

4 Findings

After interpretation of the collected data we have come up with five distinct themes and have dedicated categories that encompass the most significant findings. These themes are Follower Behaviour, Leadership Behaviour, Working in an Intercultural Environment, Leader-Follower Relationship, and Co-construction of Leadership. For most categories and its sub-categories we have used quotes from a leader and follower, but for some parts we have used two leaders or two followers as that information was most relevant to the data. All further elaborating and interpretation of the findings is taken from the angle of the interview participants to the best of our ability.

4.1   Relevance of the Case Company

Before we elaborate on the company we have instigated our research in, we must first acknowledge that we will not mention the company directly, for privacy reasons. The same applies to the respondents of the study who have agreed to take part in this study. We have ensured that we will uphold the preservation of anonymity with high academic standards, meaning that we have undertaken steps in our research that will minimise the possibility that any information can point out to any person, department, business unit or company. We will only highlight factors and information that represent relevancy of this company with regards to our research.

The company that we have done our research in is a MNC in the finance industry, specifically focused on the financial services sector. The company is a global publicly traded company that specialises in distinct areas of financial services. In addition, the research company has a global presence, with offices spread across multiple continents and a workforce of more than 1,000 employees. Due to its workforce diversity and global presence we perceive the company as extremely relevant and applicable to our research, taking into account our main focus on the co-constructing leadership in an intercultural context. Also, within the distinct areas of the company there is a high variety of different teams, departments and business units that collaborate together, and most are interconnected in the business. The participants of our study come from divergent fields

and areas of the business, which contributes to a variety of different perspectives that inspires us to look at any aspect of this study from a multitude of different angles. Moreover, our respondents have different cultural backgrounds, further adding to the intercultural context of our research.

4.2 Summary of Findings

4.2.1 Follower Behaviour

In order to understand what behaviours are deemed most relevant in an intercultural context with regards to the co-construction to leadership, we identified follower behaviour as one of the *first themes*. This subchapter lists the categories that were touched upon most often by participants. In order to highlight perspectives of both followers and leaders, most categories within this theme follow quotations from one leader and one follower. However, for some aspects only leader perspectives or follower perspectives have been used. The presentation of interviewee categories can be found in *Appendix III, IV & V*.

4.2.1.1 Transparency

"If there is an issue that the subordinate is experiencing, they need to let me know, or if there is something that I have said and I have offended them by accident, they need to let me know, they need to communicate that very clearly so we can just resolve it right away." (Leader)

"I do expect honesty. I think that is the quality I am looking for because that is a very objective quality and this is extremely important in your professional and in your personal life. Honesty can be treated as honesty to actually do your duties properly, and also being able to admit your mistakes." (Leader)

As illustrated by these quotes, the topic of transparency and honesty of followers was touched upon mostly by leaders. Three out of five participants in a management role expressed their desire for a subordinate to be honest and transparent in their communication. They deem it an essential aspect to creating a long lasting and trusting relationship and partnership.

4.2.1.2 Proactivity

"Demonstrating that you know what is at stake and can accurately answer something and not have to turn around and make sure that it is cleared by somebody else. I think it shows that you care, but also that you know what is going on". (Follower)

"I am looking for people who are displaying the skills of a manager. So, those who are able to manage others, or are displaying the qualities of being able to manage others in the future, are volunteering to take over duties that I am currently fulfilling, or showing potential and interest in potentially being able to do them with some training. So you always look for people who are displaying the hunger and ambition to fulfil certain tasks" (Leader)

As illustrated by these quotes, the topic of proactivity and task management was touched upon equally between leaders and followers. Two participants in a management role and two participants in a supporting role agree that proactivity is an important quality to possess. Leaders deem it a quality that shows whether employees are assertive and have the potential or ambition to grow in their future, whereas followers view it as the ability to redirect problems voluntarily and being aware of what is going on in their business.

4.2.1.3 Curiosity and Willingness to Learn

"You get a better understanding of what is needed, of what the business needs. Then as you continue to progress in a career, you have a better view of trying to problem solve and not suggesting something that will immediately get turned down because you did not understand what is at play. The biggest strength that you can have is this ability to be curious and flexible." (Follower)

"The people who have this learning curve with positive outlook and energy, you actually want to work with them more because at some point they will become self-sufficient and add more inputs back" (Leader)

The topic of curiosity and willingness to learn is addressed by the majority of leaders and followers, as depicted by the aforementioned quotes. Three out of five participants in a

managerial role expressed their desire in curious and flexible subordinates. They deem it important to become better at your job and continue to function better, and it shows that you are curious and flexible. On the other hand, two out of five participants in a supporting role considered curiosity an important quality to possess as it shows that you care about what you do and continuous effort that you put in it, and also being willing to make mistakes and learn from them.

4.2.1.4 Self-sufficiency

"When I am working I consider myself really responsible. I always like to do my job correctly, I am exigent, a little bit. So when one thing is not how I need to do it, I feel bad. I need to find a solution and do it." (Follower)

"People who are self-sufficient, you tell them what is required or even if you do not tell them they will know what is required and without taking any time and energy from you." (Leader)

As can be depicted in the quotes above, the topic of self-sufficiency has been touched upon by leaders, and supplemented by followers. Four out of the five participants in a management role endorse the desirability of self-sufficient team members. According to most leaders, self-sufficiency stresses the importance of working independently, being responsible, committed and taking ownership for your work. Two out of five followers consider self-sufficiency valuable to exemplify their confidence in handling their work and taking responsibility for doing their job in the correct way.

4.2.1.5 Considerate Communication

"I think you have to kind of deliver that constructive feedback, respectfully and professionally. Do it in a very respectful way as well so that it does not come across as you are suddenly telling them what they are doing wrong, even though that is kind of what you are saying" (Follower)

"One thing that is beneficial for everyone is a clear cut communication on what they want, and if there are any changes to it, be clear and record it properly." (Leader)

As depicted from the quotes with regards to clear communication and constructive feedback, in which considerate communication is overarching, this topic has been touched upon by leaders and followers. Three out of five participants in a management role agree that followers that are considerate communicators show professionality, respect and honesty, and are aware how to construct their feedback positively, not just complaining. Also, four out of five participants in a supporting role agree on the importance of considerate communication, which they deem as empathy, openness, and showing their understanding by backing up their feedback with results.

4.2.1.6 Critical Thinking

"Being able to take a look at problems in unique ways and not being the kind of robot taskmaster, thinking outside of the box, those types of critical thinking skills are always valuable. " (Follower)

"If there is an issue, you do not just put a Band-Aid on it, you think about the long term and how to prevent this issue from happening altogether." (Leader)

As illustrated by these quotes, the topic of critical thinking was mentioned by two leaders and one follower. Two out of five participants in a management role deem critical thinking as a desirable trait in followers, as it portrays that they can think outside-the-box and know how to tackle an issue before it occurs. One out of the five participants in a subordinate role perceives critical thinking as ways to tackle problems in unique ways, which can provide a different perspective on a matter.

4.2.1.7 Taking Accountability

"The most important soft skill, which is not taught anywhere, is accountability. So someone who knows what they have to do, takes ownership for it and gets it done. It is also about the fact of realising 'okay, this is something I can do, this is something I cannot do'." (Leader)

As illustrated by these quotes, the topic of followers that are taking accountability and ownership was touched upon only by leaders. Two out of five participants in a

management role expressed their desire for a subordinate to be taking accountability and being honest and transparent in their communication. They deem it an essential aspect to creating mature and professional relationships with others, and showing their potential to become trusted leaders.

4.2.2 Leadership Behaviour

The second theme we have identified is *leadership behaviour*. This subchapter lists the categories that were touched upon most often by participants. In order to highlight perspectives of both followers and leaders, most categories within this theme follow quotations from one leader and one follower. However, for some aspects only leader perspectives or follower perspectives have been used.

4.2.2.1 Empowerment

"I empower as much as I can, try to spot the best in each individual and build on their strengths and be aware of their weaknesses but do not provoke them on it. If you are building a successful team you have to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and adapt giving tasks to who is better at it." (Leader)

As the above quote illustrates, the topic of empowerment is heavily touched upon by leaders. Empowerment is endorsed by four out of five participants in a management role. They argue that empowerment includes spotting the strengths and weaknesses of individual team members, which helps them in determining how and who you can best empower within your team. Moreover, they believe that empowerment revolves around giving space for opportunities, providing trust and enabling purpose.

4.2.2.2 Empathy

"Leaders need to hear what employees say, and in doing so be considerate. I feel like there are moments that people need to be more observative, and have the ability to understand the employees and make sure you can lead them well." (Follower)

"When we are working together, I am empathetic. I understand and I lead and I care about their career. I care about their future. I hope to get more loyalty than fear. I want people to work because they want to work for me, not because they feel like they should work for me." (Leader)

The quotes above cover the topic of empathy, which is touched upon by leaders and followers. According to three out of five participants in a management role, empathy is considered an important aspect of building relationships with employees with an emphasis on actively listening, being cordial and gaining a better understanding of their team members. Conversely, four out of five participants deem empathy as a skill that leaders should possess, as it exemplifies understanding of their team, gaining different perspectives, and showing consideration towards others.

4.2.2.3 Leading by Example

"Leading by example means doing what you think is right, it makes a huge difference" (Leader)

"Expecting a certain level of soft skills from another person is normal, but whatever you are expecting from the other person, first you need to follow it, and if you are talking in a certain way and showing how you are communicating then the other person will adapt to it." (Leader)

As illustrated by the quotes above, the topic of leading by example is heavily touched upon by leaders, and thus unanimously endorsed by all five participants working in a management role. They deem the quality as fundamental to leadership since it shows that you practise what you preach, gives you credibility and trustworthiness, and shows your capacity as a respected leader.

4.2.2.4 Openness to Feedback

"If there is a senior manager not performing well or they are not treating the team respectfully or whatever the case is, the person above that senior manager, no matter how long they have known each other, should still be open to feedback" (Leader)

"For good leadership, listening is rule number one. Listen to what people have to say and take it from there. You cannot let people not grow or think out of the box. So, I always take in the views and we learn from each other." (Leader)

These quotes illustrate the topic of openness to feedback of leaders, which was mostly touched upon by leaders. Four out of five participants in a management role emphasise on the importance of being open to feedback as a leader. What can be inferred from the quotes above is that leaders should always remain open to listening to feedback. It stressed that regardless of your position you should be open to embracing feedback, and then you can decide whether to act on it or not. Participants agree that it is a matter of respect, and that you can always learn from people who might have different viewing points and possibly valuable input.

4.2.2.5 Sensible to Team Needs

"I do not think you will be a good leader if you are not being sensitive to what your team needs. I am not saying you need to bend over. You have to have a vision, you need to be assertive, but you need to have the awareness of what your team needs. Otherwise no one is going to work for you. You will be a leader with no team. Culturally diverse teams are especially very sensitive." (Leader)

As illustrated at the quote above, the topic of sensibleness to team's needs has been addressed by leaders. Two out of five participants in a management role agree on being sensible to the needs of a team. They agree that you need to be aware of what your team needs, showing flexibility and being able to apply a common denominator when it comes to performance.

4.2.2.6 Transparent Communication

"My communications with the team are transparent and honest. I tell them everything that is happening, because if they do not know what is going on, then they can not contribute to their greater good. I say things even if I think it is going to be a political thing. Because I

do think my team members have the maturity to understand what is a communication which is clean and clear, and what is a communication surrounded by politics." (Leader)

As depicted in this quote, the topic of transparent communication has been addressed mainly by leaders. Two out of five participants in a management role cover the importance of transparent communication. They insinuate that leaders should incorporate transparent communication, as it provides clarity to all team members, demands respect, embodies open and honest communication, and shows that leaders understand that employees are mature enough to bear any negative news. Thus, not only romanticising positive performance and outlook but being real and open about business challenges.

4.2.2.7 Enabling Growth

"The ideal leadership environment is where the leader really picks up the sense of enabling his or her team to progress itself and become better and help them in solving or finding the best way of making sure that they can use their full potential." (Follower)

"I do not think you should be scared of people working for you getting smarter than you. The best thing you can have is people smarter than you working for you, because then they will constantly challenge you. Always give people who are working for you an ability to grow." (Leader)

As illustrated above, these quotes emphasise on the topic of enabling growth, which has been touched upon equally between leaders and followers. Two out of five participants in a management role and two out of five participants in a supporting role endorse that leadership should enable their team members with opportunities for growth. From a leader's perspective, enabling growth is an important aspect to acknowledge and notice employee progress and being able to challenge you as a leader, which in itself can result in amplifying your leadership capabilities. Leaders enabling growth from a followers perspective allow them to progress to reach their full potential, which gives them motivation, sense of engagement and thus a reason to remain involved with a business.

4.2.2.8 Partnership

"I think most leaders forget to partner with the people they are working with. Whether they are stakeholders or your subordinates or your employees, they are your partners who are helping you deliver a goal. I think that I partner with the team, because I do respect a lot from what people on the ground can bring to the table. So partnership is important, with your employees, that is where the trust comes from." (Leader)

"I do not believe in just delegating the work, I work along with the team. So I work and I show them how you deal with the situation or how you hit it from a certain perspective." (Leader)

As illustrated in these quotes, the topic of partnership has been addressed mainly from leaders. Three out of five participants in a management role and one participant in a supporting role stress the importance of partnership with different stakeholders. They agree that partnership is an essential task of leadership that encompasses collaboration, trust, vision realisation, and is an essential aspect that helps to deliver goals.

4.2.2.9 Realising a Vision

"I have a vision as a leader. I have written it down so many times and I have tried to explain it in so many different ways, but other stakeholders have their own agenda, and you have to cross all their agendas to get yours delivered." (Leader)

"You have to reign in your patience, to focus on what is really going to benefit the bigger picture versus what really you would like to focus on if you have the unlimited time and unlimited resources. It is always the compromises you deal with and then sometimes the things that you have to approach." (Leader)

As depicted in these quotes, the topic of realising a vision has been mentioned only by leaders. Four out of five participants in a management role stress the importance of having a vision as a leader and taking steps to realise that vision. They argue that a well functioning team is driven by common goals, and as a leader you have the responsibility to guide your team to realise goals and a common vision or purpose, which calls for a high

degree of flexibility and adaptability. This also entails that as a leader you should be aware of what you want to achieve personally, and what you want to achieve with your team in line with a company's vision.

4.2.3 Working in an Intercultural Context

The third theme we have identified is *working in an intercultural context*. This relates to factors that influence relationships in intercultural contexts. This subchapter lists the categories that were touched upon most often by participants. In order to highlight perspectives of both followers and leaders, most categories within this theme follow quotations from one leader and one follower. However, for some aspects only leader perspectives or follower perspectives have been used.

4.2.3.1 Cultural Awareness

"If something makes you feel uncomfortable, and if you are having a conversation with somebody and you notice that things are kind of starting to get a little bit tense or difficult, try to take a step back and just think 'why is this person reacting in this way?' It could be something on a personal level, maybe they are just having a bad day, but it could also be cultural, maybe this person has a different way of communicating. So keep an open mind when things start to go bad" (Leader)

"Most of the time when I realise it is a cultural thing, I just keep quiet, especially with the senior stakeholders. Because I cannot change what they think, I cannot change how they behave." (Leader)

As illustrated by these quotes, the topic of cultural awareness was touched upon by leaders. Three out of five participants in a management role expressed the ability to have cultural awareness. They deem it an important aspect in managing cultural differences and nuance, and remaining sensitive in their approach. Moreover, they shed light on being respectful to different perspectives, and revealing that in some instances it is better to keep quiet than trying to change someone's perspective.

4.2.3.2 Cultural Clash

"When people get into clashes in their teams, it is important to take into consideration the cultural backgrounds of the people, how they approach the clashes they got into. Is there a cultural reason why people have the problems and not like it is the person, the personality? But also take into consideration the cultural background when there are issues with the team itself and people do not get along. Do not blame it on the person, but maybe take the culture into consideration as well." (Follower)

"... because you are wasting your potential with someone who does not care. You might as well go somewhere else and use your potential to somebody else's benefit. And your own, obviously." (Leader)

As depicted above, these quotes focus on the topic of cultural clash, mainly addressed by leaders. Three out of five participants in a management role agree that in some instances it is best to walk away from a situation that seems helpless to resolve, where you can better refocus your energy and attention to people who express more openness to change. Although, they believe that you have to properly consider the use of language and behaviour, show sensitivity and respect for each other's culture, as it makes you not to be complacent. On the other hand, the participant with a supporting role stresses importance on being sensitive towards someone's cultural background and not placing any blame on that person, which can be a tough challenge.

4.2.3.3 Cultural Openness

"I would never change the way how open I am towards other people, how open I am towards other cultures, to new people, approaching them directly rather than staying very passive" (Follower)

"One of my manager's was a lot more direct than what I was used to. It was a little bit off putting at first. But, eventually I realised that the manager was not being rude, just intending to communicate and then I started actually appreciating this directness. So once

I was able to understand that this was just the manager's communication style, I was able to understand that and then just kind of be okay with it and work with it." (Follower)

As illustrated by these quotes, the topic of cultural openness is mentioned mainly by followers. Three out of five participants in a supporting role emphasise the importance of cultural openness in an intercultural environment. They deem it as an important aspect of an intercultural environment, which encompasses being open minded about other persons, and not being judgmental but rather being mindful.

4.2.3.4 Adaptability

"Working in a multicultural environment is actually a super positive aspect of any environment because it brings together so much diversity. Diversification and cultures, whether you like it or not, they come up with different ideas, different approaches. It is one of the most prolific environments you can work in." (Follower)

"Communication is the art of compromise and so I think we are in a position where as managers and leaders where it has to be bilateral flow, so we give and take, it is give and take dynamics always. So in order to achieve improvement, you need to ask people how they want to work with you, as in how they want to communicate and then you adapt." (Leader)

As illustrated above, the quotes above focus on the topic of adaptability, which was unanimously touched upon by followers and more than the majority of leaders touched upon as well. All participants in a supporting role agree that adaptability is an essential aspect of working in intercultural contexts, which is supplemented by three of five participants in a management role. What can be inferred from leaders regarding adaptability is that relationships with people and communicating can be very situational, and have divergent perceptions, and gauges a willingness to learn. They are willing to adapt to and incorporate changes as you have to be flexible and open to change, but take into account that it does not compromise their personal identity or core values. On the other hand, followers stress the importance of adapting to opportunities, broadening horizons, and keeping an open mind to new perspectives and ways of tackling matters.

4.2.3.5 Cultural Bias

"There are a lot of people out there who think that what they have been taught is the right thing. They are not flexible enough to move, to grow. So I think it is about looking past those biases and believing in who you are, because some people will put blocks in front of you. Some of them can be negotiated and manoeuvred across." (Leader)

As depicted above, this quote focuses on the topic of cultural bias, mainly addressed by leaders. Two out of five participants in a management role agree that cultural bias is still present and can clout judgement to some. They stress that in modern culture in this day and age most people know how to respect one another's culture, but that some people have such an innate bias towards other cultures that no matter how considerate, understanding or successful you are in what you do they will still judge on the basis of where you come from, your upbringings and your personal beliefs, which could make it challenging to work with some people.

4.2.3.6 Beyond National Culture

"Do not be afraid of a cultural clash because in the end everybody is trying to be really respectful. Try to respect other persons' backgrounds. Do not assume that people are like you, that everybody will be the same. Take the difference as an opportunity to broaden your horizon, and be open for change." (Participant 3, Germanic Europe, follower)

"We also have to think that from the same culture we have people coming from different mentalities. So you can not actually say that 'If I work with people from this particular culture, I am going to get the same output'. No, definitely not. So it is always about different individual people. Thus, I do not believe in borders to be honest." (Participant 6, Eastern Asia, leader)

As illustrated by these quotes, the topic of looking beyond national culture is mentioned mainly by leaders. Three out of five participants in a management role and one participant in a supporting role emphasise the importance of transcending national culture in an intercultural environment. They deem it as an important aspect of working in an

intercultural environment, which encompasses an unbiased approach towards people's cultural background, being open to all, and to emphasise on the input and output of an individual person.

4.2.3.7 Communication Challenges

"Communication is what I think is different between cultures. There will be a different way of communicating with certain regions and different with others because there are different expectations as to the clarity of the message, that sometimes can be diluted if you are not being completely direct." (Leader)

"When it comes to speaking to people, some people may come across as very abrupt, very direct, which is not necessarily a bad thing, but other people might find it rude." (Follower)

As these quotes illustrate, the topic of communication challenges is mentioned mainly by leaders. Two out of five participants in a management role and one out of five participants in a supporting role emphasise the importance of managing communication challenges in an intercultural environment. They deem it as an important aspect to consider while working in an intercultural environment. Moreover, adequately managing communication challenges call for understanding how to tailor your communication to different people, and making sure that your message is clear and communication nuances are understood by the sender and receiver of a message.

4.2.4 Leader-Follower Relationships

The next theme we have identified is *follower-leader relationships*. This subchapter lists the categories that were touched upon most often by participants. In order to highlight perspectives of both followers and leaders, most categories within this theme follow quotations from one leader and one follower. However, for some aspects only leader perspectives or follower perspectives have been used.

4.2.4.1 Feeling Unappreciated

Once you are in a leadership position for a number of years you know that there are a number of compromises me and all those other people make. I think as you grow this becomes less of a factor and your focus turns elsewhere, because sometimes the perception and optics is one thing but the actual outcomes achieved are there." (Leader)

As the quote above depicts, the topic of feeling unappreciated as a leader is mentioned by leaders only. Two out of five participants in a management role agree that when you are in a leadership role you can feel unappreciated for the effort and work that you deliver. They emphasise that being in a leadership position can feel ungrateful and challenging, as you put your employees and their needs at the forefront of your team and make sure that you serve them so that an establishment can reach their goals and objectives. They are hoping to receive more appreciation for the efforts they undertake in making sure that the team functions well every once in a while. Nonetheless, by time this will become less of a factor.

4.2.4.2 Comfortableness in a Relationship

"Ultimately you need to get to a place where you enjoy your manager or enjoy the people that you work with because it is you who has to get into a spot where either this is something that you can see yourself working with, or there are small enough things that you can kind of work out on your own or talk to your manager about." (Follower)

*"If there is an issue that the subordinate is experiencing, they need to let me know. Or, if there is something that I have said and I have offended them by accident, they need to let me know, they need to communicate that very clearly so we can just resolve it right away. Or, if they have an issue with another person on the team, they need to communicate it so we can resolve it" (*Leader)

The quotes above cover the topic of comfortableness in a relationship, which is touched upon equally by one leader and one follower. According to both the participant in a management role and the participant in a supporting role, being comfortable in a relationship revolves around openly expressing one's thoughts, needs and wants in a work

relationship, and opening a dialogue about your concerns so that leadership can help in resolving this.

4.2.4.3 Feeling Valued and Involved

"Realising that there are other people that count on the work that you do. Having somebody think of you in the moment where you know something needs to be solved is kind of the bigger reward because that is not results driven or performance driven. That is, does somebody trust you with things? Does somebody view you as somebody that they can depend on? Which is kind of the bigger portion of it for me. I find that to be a big motivator for me." (Follower)

As depicted from the quote above, the topic of feeling valued and involved is addressed solely by followers. Two out of five participants in a supporting role emphasise on the importance of feeling valued and involved in your place of work. What they deem essential in this is that they get a sense of engagement and being involved in the process. It stresses that they matter and know that people can count on them. The most motivating factor is being involved in the company, and they stress that being valued can be more rewarding than the outcome of such practice.

4.2.4.4 Resistance to Change

"If you want to build something, you have to be persistent, there will always be resistance but the world is evolving and you need to change. You can not do things the same way as thirty years ago" (Leader)

"I went back to the person and I said 'the resistance that you are getting is not because they want to be difficult, but because they are hungry for more'. So I am going to promote this person, not fire them. And then I am going to give them accountability and tell them 'you run the show'. So then they will be less resistant because now they have to drive the company's vision and they will take ownership. That person ended up being one of the best employees I had. " (Leader)

As illustrated by these quotes, the topic of resistance to change is addressed only by leaders. Three out of five participants in a management role stress that you need to be aware of how you handle change, especially the resistance to it. They argue that it can be a major challenge to get their employees to lay down barriers of resistance to doing something for whatever reason. According to the leaders, employees who are unwilling to change do not put sufficient time in improving themselves, but resistance can be misinterpreted so should be treated very carefully and considerately. Sometimes it infers that employees have a hunger to grow and take more responsibility, so you can promote them and give them the responsibility to 'run the show'.

4.2.4.5 Interpersonal Skills

"If you see that someone has an issue during any moment, you need to go there. You need to have a good relationship with them, to have a good team. Because if you do ask them anything and do things and provide help, then people are going to be more comfortable in the company. This will result in a more humane approach." (Follower)

"We may be looking for qualities that we possess or that we find most attractive, and we try to project them on others and not finding those qualities, may be frustrating or irritating. Therefore, we need good interpersonal skills and clear and good communication. In order for people to consume your communication, to act on them, to make it an actionable point for them, you really need to look at the person, at how they function, who they are, to craft appropriate communication." (Leader)

As illustrated above, the quotes above focus on the topic of adaptability, which was touched upon by leaders and followers. Three out of five participants in a supporting role agree that interpersonal skills are an essential aspect of healthy work relationships, which is supplemented by two out of five participants in a management role. What can be inferred from followers regarding interpersonal skills is the importance of building and maintaining relationships with your colleagues, being observant, hospitable towards others, and gaining understanding of how other people work and behave. On the other hand, leaders stress the importance of understanding how others consume communication, how they act and

function and trying to tailor communication that fits them best. Also, being able to get along with your team and sparking a willingness to work with you and cooperation comes from interpersonal skills. Both leaders and followers endorse that people would rather enjoy working with someone that they enjoy working with than someone who is only good at their job.

4.2.4.6 Hierarchy

"Even if you are trying to tell your manager that they have done something wrong, say it in a very respectful way, because at the end of the day, they have seniority over you within the organisation." (Follower)

"If we want to talk about proper leadership, it is an environment of equal individuals where everyone has his own role and sits on the same level. Whereas the leader is not pulling them from above but from the side in a certain sense." (Follower)

As depicted from the quotes above, the topic of hierarchy has been addressed solely by followers. On the one hand, two out of five participants in a supporting role agree that hierarchy in business provides clarity of assigning responsibility and it brings a certain amount of respect to leaders. It also considers that you should keep in mind that some people have seniority over you and therefore be able to stress your concerns in a respectful manner. On the other hand, two out of five participants in a supporting role emphasise on the importance of having an environment of equality and stress the advantage of employing horizontal business structures that revolve around working on an more or less equal level. This entails that leaders pull people from the side instead of from above, making sure that the team progresses and not simply follows orders.

4.2.4.7 Self-authority

"I have been in all sorts of scenarios where there is micro management, and I have been in this scenario where there is very little management and both are kind of extremes and I do not do well under either of those extremes. So, finding a balance between both is really key.

I do not mind the occasional micromanagement if I am able to have more self-authority the majority of the time." (Follower)

"It might be that you do things differently, but at the end of the day, even though maybe the way your manager would do it is a proven system, you maybe figure out a way of making things better and faster. It is very important that you leave the space to people to be autonomous." (Follower)

As illustrated in these quotes, the topic of self-authority has unanimously been touched upon by all followers. It stresses the balance between autonomy and control from above. On the one hand, five out of the five participants in a supporting role stress how essential it is for them to be autonomous in their work. This encompasses being trusted in what they do, having the flexibility and space to be autonomous in how you work best. However, they all agree that management still needs to be able to provide that extra help when they encounter any complex issues. That means that they still know that they can count on management, and do not mind the initial check-in for their work, as long as it enables them to improve.

4.2.4.8 Clarity of Tasks

"Managers really need to communicate what the role is as well, what their expectations are of me, because I have a pretty good idea of what I need to do, but if the manager has some other expectations and they are not communicating that effectively, then it just becomes very frustrating." (Follower)

As depicted by the quote above, the topic of clarity of tasks has been touched upon by followers. Two out of five participants in a supporting role stress the importance of task clarity from management. They argue that it enables them to better understand their role and responsibilities in a business context, and that clearly outlining their tasks provides a flowchart of how to approach work. Subsequently, they know what is expected from them, so that they can anticipate those needs.

4.2.4.9 Trust of Work

"I am definitely more of a fan of the free working style, not the direct management approach. I like a manager who trusts me with my work. That gives me the most free time or the most flexible possibility to do my work, like when it is done, it is done" (Follower)

"Part of being a leader also encompasses a huge part of giving trust to people. And micromanagement is exactly the opposite. Micromanagement just means nobody is putting trust in you and it does not allow you to grow and deal with something your way, it does not allow you to express your way of working." (Follower)

As depicted by the quotes above, the topic of trust of work has been addressed mainly by followers, and supplemented by leaders. Four out of five participants in a supporting role, and three out of five participants in a management role emphasise the importance of trusting the work of colleagues. According to followers, they emphasise that trusting their work sparks confidence in them, being able to grow and express themselves professionally, and being autonomous in their work. According to leaders, being a good leader encompasses giving trust to people, building partnerships, giving accountability, and enabling your team to grow. Both people in a management role and people in a supporting role unanimously perceive micromanagement as an antecedent of not trusting your colleagues. Although some followers do not mind the occasional check-up on their work, someone constantly looking over your shoulder and going over all your work does not give an impression of trust.

4.2.5 Co-construction of Leadership

The final theme we have identified is *co-construction of leadership*. The co-construction of leadership is an integral part of our research. This subchapter lists the categories that were touched upon most often by participants. In this part we will shed light on the aggregated respondent answer that comes closest to our research scope. In order to highlight perspectives of both followers and leaders, most categories within this theme follow quotations from one leader and one follower. However, for some aspects only leader perspectives or follower perspectives have been used.

4.2.5.1 Alleviating Workload

"I would say it is important to alleviate manager workload because it is a demonstration of value, obviously, to allow less work to flow upwards. But it is also just demonstrating that you know what is at stake and can accurately answer something and not have to turn around and make sure that it's cleared by somebody else." (Follower)

"If you look to the side of your team, you try to mitigate the volume and try to arrange the instance in a way that it is equally spread between the team." (Follower)

As depicted from the quotes above, the topic of alleviated workload has been touched upon by followers. Three out of five participants in a supporting role stress the importance of alleviating workload. They agree that being able to equally spread tasks and mitigating tasks is a demonstration of intercepting workload, thus an expression of added value to the team. Also, it entails that you are aware of the tasks of others and show that you can contribute to the whole by allowing less flow upwards.

4.2.5.2 Upward Communication

"If you think you can do something better, it is not just your urge bringing it to the point of spitting out the words, you need to back them up with certain facts. You have to show that there is a willingness to want to put in action and walk your talk by having already a little piece of action in your hand." (Follower)

"I think that being able to argue in a way that supports your thinking, is going to make a difference when you are in a junior position. And I listen and I want ideas from the people who are more junior in the organisation because they are not in the mould yet and they have a fresh perspective, they have not been moulded into the role. If I need to go higher up and evidence it, I can just present it. As an immediate effect, it creates good exposure for the person. So everyone's a winner." (Leader)

As illustrated by these quotes, the topic of upward communication has been addressed mainly by followers, supplemented by leaders. Four of out five participants in a supporting role and three out of five participants in a management role stress the importance of

upwards communication and being able to come up with ideas and improvements to a business. On the one hand, followers argue that upwards communication is an essential task of team members that can help their management in spotting points of improvement, and provide input to the business, which have to be reasonably communicated to them. On the other hand, leaders agree that it is very beneficial to receive feedback and points of improvement, but stress the importance of providing constructive feedback in communication upwards by means of not just complaining but by arguing for improvements by facts, figures and results.

4.2.5.3 Gaining Understanding

"From one side people love talking about themselves, and you can tap into that by asking more questions, but the other side is that you get a better understanding of what is needed, of what the business needs. Then as you continue to progress in a career, you have a better view of trying to problem solve and not suggesting something that will immediately get turned down because you did not understand what is at play." (Follower)

"It is a difficult job to manage a team and you give a lot of time and effort to the people on your team, but you do not always get good feedback or any feedback about how you are doing sometimes. I am trying to be a little bit more honest with them, obviously within a professional limit" (Leader)

As depicted by the quotes above, the topic of gaining understanding has been touched upon mostly by leaders, and supplemented by followers. Four out of five participants in a management role agree that you need to gain a proper understanding of the team they are working with. They mention that they are trying to involve their team and gain understanding of their personalities, their strengths and weaknesses, and hope to receive constructive feedback and input to help them in their line of business and provide tailored support for team members reaching their full potential. Two out of five participants in a supporting role agree that you need to gain understanding of the team you are working with. They deem it an essential task to understand how your team and the business function, and therefore know how to solve problems better.

4.2.5.4 Including the Team

"A big factor for motivation for me is getting pulled into meetings or situations where there needs to be either a quick reaction or like a quick action taken. For me that is just something that is exciting and kind of gives that value add of taking away the kind of robot task feeling that work can sometimes bring and realising that there are other people that count on the work that you do" (Follower)

"Brainstorming sessions are great, sessions between employees when we throw ideas and bounce off ideas between each other are the best way to get there or simply just for doing the job, when you think that what you do no longer make sense and then when they pitch it to me and they explain it, that we just go ahead with what they said." (Leader)

As depicted in the quotes above, the topic of including the team has been addressed mostly by leaders, and supplemented by followers. Four out of five participants in a management role stress the importance of including the team and being open to input. They endorse that listening is one of the most important tasks of a leader, and thus you should always consider the thoughts of your team members, which gauges new perspectives. When you employ a two-way communication stream you can bounce off ideas and try to come up with solutions together. On the other hand, two out of five participants in a supporting role agree that including the team is an important aspect of working with a team. They want to feel involved and heard by their colleagues, and contribute to the overall team.

4.2.5.5 Common Purpose

"The most important task of the leader is to figure out what it is you are trying to achieve for yourself and for the company. Most leaders will fail when they make it their personal agenda. So it is important for you to figure out what it is that you want to achieve for the company, because then you can help the people who are working for you." (Leader)

"At the end of the day it could be a mix of different people, but your common goal is always to deliver a quality product for the client. So you have to be driven by common goals. Unity in diversity." (Leader)

As depicted in the quote above, the topic of providing a common purpose has been touched upon by leaders. Three out of five participants in a management role argue that providing a common purpose is necessary, as it gets people engaged in and focused on reaching goals as a whole. They point out that it is important to understand that people have a personal purpose related to work and life and hope that they can help them achieve those by transmitting a common purpose in the company.

4.2.5.6 Guidance and Mentorship

"A manager should be a person who not only is your mentor, but also somebody who accompanies you on your journey in life and makes you strong and better." (Follower)

"I have a mentor who explained to me that leadership is not just about managing people. This person showed me what leadership entails and let me explore my own management skills and style, so I had an excellent manager when I started to become a leader." (Leader)

As depicted by the quotes above, the topic of guidance and mentorship has been touched upon mostly by leaders. Two out of five participants in a management role stress the role of guidance and mentorships in becoming a leader, supplemented by one out of five participants in a supporting role. The leaders argue that being able to provide guidance and mentorship to your employees is incredibly valuable, as leadership is not just about management but really taking the effort to bring the best out of people and empower them to grow personally and professionally. Also, followers appreciate getting advice every once in a while that accompanies your personal journey.

4.2.5.7 Management Support

"If you get to the point where something is unclear, you should have the ability or the channel to go back to that person and have a base of communication." (Follower)

"Once you establish your workflow that works for 90% of all situations, then going back and being able to rely on somebody for that 10% where you feel there could be a material difference in what this decision is. So, for check-ins for bigger issues that fall outside of the

normal scope of duties, management can help in making a judgment call on something that is outside of procedure." (Follower)

As illustrated by these quotes, the topic of management support has been touched upon solely by followers. Four out of five participants in a supporting role stress the importance of receiving management support. They argue that this entails that even though they want to be able to autonomously fulfil their own tasks, when they are stuck in their work they expect that when reaching out to their management they are supported and provided with feedback and advice on how to tackle any issue. Moreover, it is about being able to channel back when the heat turns up for a big challenge and you need a judgement call from someone with more experience or seniority.

5 Discussion

In this part of the research we will highlight the analysis and discussion of empirical data, based on our experience. This will be analysed by critically comparing and unifying leader-follower relationships in an intercultural context, and then connecting this to our theoretical background, which we have included earlier in our thesis. The discussion part will follow a similar structure as the findings, which is supplemented by our own conceptual theoretical model.

5.1 Follower Behaviour

Since our main focus of this thesis revolves around the perspective of followers in the co-construction of leadership, the outcomes of this part provide a strong foundation for answering our main research question.

Our findings reveal that *considerate communication* is the most significantly endorsed follower behaviour, with this topic being mentioned almost equally by leaders and followers. On the one hand, based on the findings we can ascertain that leaders perceive followers who employ considerate communication display signs of professionality, honesty, and respect, which can be invaluable to shaping leadership (Alvesson et al., 2017). On the other hand, our findings pinpoint that followers consider empathy, openness and understanding as important aspects of considerate communication. Providing constructive feedback and clarity of communication attributes to voicing one's opinion most effectively, as it shows signs of critical thinking and independence (Kelley, 1988). Subsequently, we can link this follower behaviour to the theoretical concept of effective followership (Kelley, 1988). We view considerate communication as a vital aspect of follower behaviour, and believe that with their competence and understanding they can be involved in decision-making processes. Moreover, they are able to back their feedback or constructive dissent with results, facts and figures and are smart and self-reliant in doing so, which we can link to the concept of courageous followership (Chaleff, 2009).

The second most endorsed follower behaviour is *self-sufficiency*. This topic was raised by the majority of the participants, most notably by leaders. The findings suggest that

followers desire to be autonomous. Subsequently, they can act as active co-constructors of leadership (Alvesson et al., 2017). Similarly, the leaders that participated in our study endorse that they desire their team members to be self-sufficient, meaning that they are responsible and take ownership of their work. This can result in committed and independent followers, which can be linked to the concept of courageous followership (Chaleff, 2009). This leads us to believe that self-sufficiency is an excellent follower behaviour that encompasses autonomy and self-reliance, and indicates that followers are able to take responsibility and ownership of their actions.

Thirdly, *curiosity and willingness to learn* was endorsed by the majority of participants, by leaders and followers. The findings show that leaders perceive followers who are curious and willing to learn as very valuable and desirable team members. They enjoy collaborating and working alongside them, and express their trust in those to contribute to establishing good work relationships, which is the foundation of organisations (Ferris et al., 2009). Moreover, leaders emphasise that curiosity brings in flexibility and being able to continuously develop themselves. On the other hand, the findings indicate that followers perceive curiosity and willingness to learn as crucial to progress, and being able to reflect on your own actions and learn from them to better yourself. These indicate that followers who possess such reflective abilities can be linked to the concept of reflexive followership (Alvesson et al., 2017)

Nonetheless, we find it quite compelling that *taking accountability* and *transparency* were topics touched upon by few leaders but not by any follower. What can be understood however is that followers actually are proactive and willing to take accountability for their actions, as expressed in the follower behaviour *self-sufficiency*. Also, the followers who are transparent in communicating can be linked to *considerate communication*, which can act as an overarching follower behaviour that encompasses transparency. On a final note, believe that we are able to pinpoint expectations that leaders have on follower behaviour and the underlying desirable traits.

5.2 Leadership Behaviour

While the main focus of this thesis is the behaviour of the followers rather than the leaders, we do want to say a few things about it, as it does influence the dyadic relationship between followers and leaders and pertains to the co-construction of leadership.

The most significantly endorsed leader behaviour is *empathy*. This topic was raised by the majority of participants, by followers and leaders. They both raised the importance of listening to employees and trying to understand their perspective. The leaders discussed the benefits of expressing care and empathy towards followers, such as loyalty, while the followers conveyed their desire to be understood and met with consideration. This leads us to believe that empathy is a vital skill for leaders that can positively influence their relationship with followers. Theoretically, the subject of empathy is not new in relational leadership theories. We can link the concept to transformational leadership as it pertains to recognising and exploiting the needs of followers (Burns, 1978). It can also be attributed to authentic leadership (Gavin, 2019), though in our understanding this paradigm focuses more on the self than others. Furthermore, empathy is discussed in a variety of other leadership theories, though with disparate levels of importance (Jian, 2022). Consequently, we view empathy as a vital aspect of leadership behaviour. On a side note, some participants also mentioned the importance of followers cultivating empathy and emotional intelligence, not just leaders.

Interestingly, there were three topics raised by the majority of leaders that were not touched upon by the followers: *leading by exampl*e, *empowerment* and *realising a vision*. These subjects were discussed by four or five of the participants in a leadership position, so we can conclude they are important activities in the mind of the leader. On the other hand, none of the followers explicitly expressed an interest in having this from their leaders. However, we cannot say that this means they do not want this type of leadership behaviour. The discussions with the leaders and examples given led us to believe that such actions are welcomed by their followers. Therefore, the lack of an explicit mention in our interviews with followers can be a result of the difference in questions asked, a dissimilarity in priorities between followers and leaders, or perhaps something else. Empowerment, for

example, can be loosely related to the category of *enabling growth* and *feeling valued and involved*, which were endorsed by the participants in a follower position. Nevertheless, because the subjects were raised consistently throughout the interviews, we recognise their importance.

Furthermore, the subject of leaders being open to feedback was raised multiple times, especially with leaders. Of course, this is partly due to the fact that we explicitly asked participants, specifically those in a leadership position, about their willingness to be open to feedback from followers. However, those participants did strongly emphasise the importance of listening and being open to followers' input, and learning from each other. This perspective was consistent in our participants and is both interesting and encouraging for the co-construction of leadership. This particular leadership behaviour is especially important for our research topic and the idea that followers can influence leaders' efforts.

As a final note, it is our perception as interviewers that participants have an easier time discussing desired leadership behaviour than that of followers. Questions about ideal employee behaviour and skills were met with more thought and confusion than those regarding managers. Whether this is due to a lack of general reflection on followership compared to leadership, the wording of our questions, or other underlying reasons, we cannot say with certainty.

5.3 Working in an Intercultural Context

Even though the main focus of this thesis relies upon the behaviour of followers in relation to leaders in the co-construction of leadership, this aspect of the report sheds light on the intercultural context of it, which is part of our scope of research.

Firstly, *adaptability* is the most significant quality related to working in an intercultural context, which is unanimously endorsed by followers and endorsed by more than the majority of leaders. Both leaders and followers expressed the imperativeness of adaptability in regards to working in an intercultural business environment. The leaders expressed the benefits of understanding the dynamics of communication in leader-follower relationships, are aware of situational contexts and some endorse the art of compromise

(Szkudlarek et al., 2020). What can be understood is that both leaders and followers have high intercultural competence or cultural intelligence, which is exemplified by their willingness to continuously evaluate and modify their current knowledge (Deardorff, 2006). Most followers on the other hand emphasise that they are very adaptive towards other people and their perceptions. Moreover, endorse incorporating an interplay between current and new perspectives as a new base of tackling problems, fostering an advantageous business climate (Okoro, 2019). Moreover, both leaders and followers expressed high amounts of ethno-relativism and cultural awareness. Thus, not showing any signs of ethnocentricity (Meyer, 2015).

The second most endorsed quality related to working in intercultural contexts is *looking beyond national culture*. This was mostly touched upon by leaders and followers, most notably by leaders. Key findings suggest that leaders should approach people without any cultural bias, keeping an open mind, and all endorse that you should consider the input and output of people on an individual basis. Transcending national culture can be related to the concept of intercultural communication, which focuses more on interpersonal communication rather than cross-cultural communication (Szkudlarek et al., 2020). Moreover, reshifting the focus to relationships between societal culture and organisational behaviour confirms the effectiveness of employing the GLOBE cultural clusters to associate participants of our study not by national culture, but rather by a cluster of shared cultural values (House et al., 2012). Additionally, being able to create and share knowledge across cultural boundaries adequately helps in codifying situational knowledge in social interactions (Glisby & Holder, 2011). Consequently, we believe that leaders and followers should be able to look at any current or potential colleague without any cultural bias, and judge people based on input and output.

Furthermore, another topic that was touched upon by leaders and followers is dealing with *cultural clashes*. This includes situations related to engaging with people who are culturally biassed, unwilling to change or difficult to interact with. The leaders endorse that you should always keep an open mind when approaching a sensitive situation with your behaviour and communication, making you not become complacent. However, there are

situations with people who are unwilling to change or work together with you due to a cultural bias or other underlying factors. The findings shows that when your efforts to try to make a relationship do not work or seem unresolvable, trying to look for alternatives and refocusing your energy and attention on people who are willing to change might be the best course of action (Spitzberg, 1997).

Interestingly, topics that we ought to come out more extensively with regards to intercultural communication were found less significant than expected. These are topics that revolve around *cultural awareness*, *cultural openness*, *cultural bias*, and *communication challenges*. Perhaps this can be accounted for by the way we had posed our questions to our participants both from a leader and follower perspective, explaining why they were not being able to directly mention these topics, or had found little difficulties in handling this. However, some of these topics are intertwined with the findings related to *adaptability* that point out that most of our participants actually are very aware that people are different, and they are very open to adjusting to and adopting diverging perspectives.

5.4 Leader-Follower Relationship

This topic emphasises what aspects contribute to the most ideal leader-follower relationship, which is key to understanding the dyadic relationship between leaders and followers.

First of all, *trust of work* is the most significant aspect of a good leader-follower relationship. This infers the impact that mutual trust has on leader-follower relationships. Very interesting to note is that followers have a very bad perception of micromanagement. Similarly, leaders argue that micromanagement works counterproductive to establishing trust, and should be avoided at all costs to ensure healthy work relationships. Since trust is the foundation of a good organisation, enabling relationships that increase well-being and employee comfortableness may result in profitable and rewarding relationships (Ferris et al., 2009; Okoro, 2019). Also, leaders who enable trust in their employees contribute to their progress, and in return you followers can become very engaged and proactive in their work relationships. Partnership and giving accountability further supplement the notion

that giving trust to employees enables them to progress further, and may lead to good organisational outcomes spanning from a dyadic influence (Alvesson et al., 2017). However, leaders have expressed that in their relationships

Secondly, *interpersonal skills* are seen as invaluable and display significance to establishing good leader-follower relationships, which is endorsed by leaders and followers. Within intercultural contexts it is quite imperative to establish interpersonal skills that accommodate interpersonal relationships (Ferris et al., 2009). Our findings point out that possessing interpersonal skills are evident contributors to having healthy and humane work relationships. This includes being open and hospitable towards others, being cooperative and helpful. Moreover, communication plays a pivotal role in establishing and maintaining relationships, so being able to tailor your communication to different people adds value (Spitzberg, 1997). There are always multiple stakeholders in any business-related context, where interpersonal skills can accommodate striving for the common good or purpose. Especially when followers possess these skills they can become more active in the co-creation of leadership, while leaders are becoming more servant to the needs of their employees so that they can contribute to the greater good (Kellerman, 2019). Organisational competency comes out of dynamic work relationships, further indicating the importance of establishing profitable interpersonal relationships by means of interpersonal skills such as clear and considerate communication (Ferris et al., 2009).

Finally, *self-authority* is an important antecedent of good leader-follower relationships. This category was touched upon unanimously by followers. Although no leaders have mentioned self-authority, they have all endorsed *self-sufficiency* which is related to self-authority as it encompasses aspects of autonomy and self-reliance. Similar to the findings related interpersonal skills and the mistrust micromanagement gives, self-authority came out when we asked followers what their ideal balance between autonomy and control from above was. They all endorsed the essentiality of being autonomous to do your work, with an individual approach to tailor your work style in line with your responsibilities. However, our research reveals that self-authority has its limits. Naturally, when followers encounter any barriers or complex issues in doing their work,

their instinct is to go higher up for guidance on how to tackle such issues. Thus, what we can infer from this research is that even though followers want to be autonomous in doing their work, management has to remain visible and support their team when they encounter any difficulties.

5.5 Co-construction of Leadership

As discussed in the literature review, the theoretical paradigm of the co-construction of leadership conceptualises the construction of leadership identity across three levels: individual internalisation, relational recognition and collective endorsement (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). The leader and follower identities are dependent on the relationship between them, which is a two-way street. The followers are regarded as active subjects that contribute to leadership and organisational outcomes (Alvesson et al., 2017). We recognised aspects of this concept in our interviews, and wish to expand on its practical implications with our findings.

We explicitly asked both types of participants about the ability for followers to influence leaders' efforts by use of *upward communication*. The vast majority expressed the need for constructive input or feedback. If someone merely complains about or resists a certain change or project without stating why, their opinion will likely not get them far. However, if that feedback is expressed in a constructive, respectful manner, it has a better chance of being received well. Our empirical data has showcased it is crucial for followers to elaborate on why they think it is a good or bad idea, and to express alternatives. Moreover, presenting something tangible such as figures or facts that support one's point of view or an action plan, increases their chances of success. Of course, this requires a certain level of *proactivity*, as well as a healthy dose of *curiosity and willingness* to learn, two types of follower behaviour we have concluded to be important. Additionally, the category *gaining understanding* suggests that followers must first get a better understanding of the business' needs, an endeavour that will likely assist their attempts at upward communication.

Furthermore, as the categories *including the team* and *openness to feedback* (leadership behaviour) suggest, leaders are, and should be, willing to listen to the followers' input.

Plus, followers seem to find it stimulating and motivating to be involved. Additionally, our participants in a follower position have expressed their willingness to *alleviate their manager's workload*, though they are at times unsure on how to proceed. This endorses the belief within the co-construction of leadership theory that followers are active and can be great contributions to both leaders and organisations (Alvesson et al., 2017). In fact, our research indicates that such behaviour is desirable to leaders. However, many participants voiced the importance of the way one communicates something. Constructive and transparent communication is vital. This also relates to the highly endorsed category of *considerate communication* in follower behaviour.

5.6 Constructive Followership Model

Following our research we have created a model that encompasses our most significant findings related to the role of follower behaviour in the co-construction of leadership in an intercultural context. This conceptual theoretical model sheds light on the dyadic relationships between both leaders and followers.
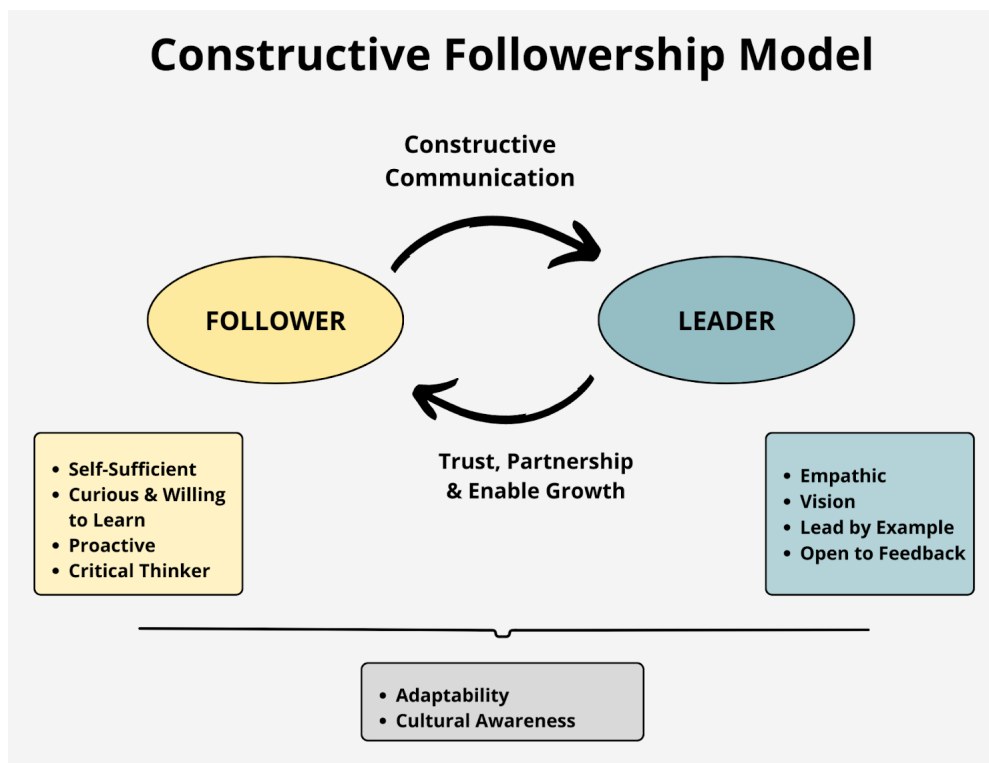

Figure 7: Constructive Followership Model (Own Construct)

First, we must note that this model represents an ideal, a reflection of what can be, based on the findings of our research. It is a practical suggestion to improve the dyadic relationship between followers and leaders, and facilitate the co-construction of leadership. This is the first step in creating a guideline for followers on how to constructively contribute to leadership. The model consists of four aspects: what followers and leaders offer each other, follower behaviour, leader behaviour, and behaviour in intercultural contexts.

The first aspect describes what leaders and followers offer each other. It elaborates on the back and forth within the co-construction of leadership. Followers contribute to the dyadic relationship by offering constructive communication. This includes ideas, input and feedback on an organisational and leadership level, communicated in a constructive manner as indicated in chapter 5.5. In return, followers require leaders to offer them trust and authority to do their work, partnership rather than control, and enable them to grow by offering learning opportunities.

The second aspect of the model is follower behaviour. This part summarises our findings of the most important types of behaviour for a follower to embody in order to facilitate the co-construction of leadership. These include self-sufficiency, curiosity and a willingness to learn, proactivity and critical thinking. Practising this behaviour will enable followers to constructively communicate to their leaders and positively influence their dyadic relationship.

The third aspect is leader behaviour. This showcases the important types of behaviour for leaders to practise to offer their followers what they need (trust, partnership and enabling growth), and handle the constructive communication they receive. These include empathy, realising a vision, leading by example and openness to feedback. The last one is especially important to receiving the input from followers and establishing the co-construction of leadership.

The fourth aspect encompasses both follower and leader, relating to the intercultural context in which these relationships take place. We have established adaptability and cultural awareness as the two main types of behaviour to facilitate followership and the

co-construction of leadership in an intercultural context. Of course we recognise there is a lot more to say about working in an intercultural environment. However, we included these two topics in our model to showcase that the dyadic relationship between follower and leader cannot be taken out of its social context. Therefore, we aim to encompass a variety of activities and practices related to intercultural communication within these two behaviours.

6 Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate the role of follower behaviour in the co-construction of leadership in an intercultural context. Therefore, we used an inductive, exploratory approach using the qualitative research method of semi-structured interviews in a single case study to gather empirical data. We analysed this data with a thematic analysis, looking for patterns and moulding them into categories and themes. This allowed us to generate valuable insights and findings. Reflecting upon these findings and comparing it to existing literature enabled us to build a conceptual theoretical model, come up with practical suggestions for our research problem, and provide an answer to our research question. This chapter concludes the thesis by answering the research questions, summarising the scientific contributions and discussing the limitations of the study. It also includes notes on future research and our learning journey.

6.1 Answer to Research Question and Reflections

Before we can properly answer the overarching main research question we need to dive deeper into the outcomes of the underlying sub questions. Since both questions are posed according to either a leader or follower perspective we need to balance both perspectives and unify the findings accordingly.

Sub Question 1: How do followers contribute to their leaders in co-constructing leadership practices in an intercultural context?

Followers can contribute to leadership's efforts by communicating upward in a constructive way. Our research concludes that leaders are often open to the input of their followers, but it depends on the way this input is communicated. Followers need to phrase their ideas and feedback in a considerate, respectful and constructive way. This includes argumentation on why they think this way, alternatives to consider, and tangible support such as figures and action plans. By using constructive communication, followers can establish a meaningful relationship with their leaders that is based on mutual trust and respect, enabling them to positively influence both leadership and the business.

This requires followers to be willing to learn and grow, to gain a better understanding of the business, and to cultivate better interpersonal and communication skills. They need to have both the knowledge to support their opinions and the ability to express them in a constructive manner which requires a certain level of emotional intelligence. However, leaders can also facilitate this process by enabling them to grow, trusting them to do the work and giving them self-authority.

Sub Question 2: *What behaviour and traits do leaders seek or expect from their followers to contribute to leadership in an intercultural context?*

Leaders expect followers to be transparent and honest in their work and their communication. They would like followers to be self-sufficient, handling tasks independently and being committed to their work. Moreover, leaders want them to be proactive, showcasing ambition and a certain level of assertiveness by doing more than the baseline of what is expected. This requires followers to also have a level of curiosity and a willingness to learn new skills and better understand the business. Furthermore, leaders seek followers that are able to express their ideas in a considerate and clear form of communication, giving constructive feedback. They would like followers to think critically and out of the box in order to tackle unique problems and provide different perspectives. Leaders expect followers to take ownership and accountability for their actions, a practice that makes their leadership role easier. Lastly, they seek a certain level of interpersonal skills in their followers, to facilitate the relationship between them.

On the other hand, we also found a number of undesirable behaviours and traits that hinder leadership rather than contributing to it. Leaders often feel underappreciated in their role and expect a modicum of respect from their followers, both in practice and communication. Furthermore, leaders frequently have to deal with resistance. If followers are unwilling to change or express their opinions in a constructive way, it makes it really hard for leaders to deal with this resistance, and it can lead to serious tensions in the leader-follower relationship.

Main research question: What is the role of follower behaviour in the co-construction of leadership in an intercultural context?

Followers play an active role in the co-construction of leadership. Therefore, their behaviour has an impact on leadership practices and the relationship between followers and leaders. By displaying certain desirable behaviour and traits, as well as communicating constructively, followers can positively influence leadership. Furthermore, leaders can facilitate this by providing followers with trust, partnership and enabling them to grow. Leadership behaviour such as empathy, realising a vision, leading by example and being open to feedback can help in this endeavour.

Additionally, the intercultural context in which this research was conducted adds another layer to the complexity of this concept. It introduces challenges such as communication barriers, cultural bias and culture clashes. However, interculturality also adds a variety of benefits, such as diversity, an increase in different ideas and approaches, and personal growth. Nevertheless, this added layer requires followers (and leaders) to be adaptable and cultivate cultural awareness and openness.

6.2 Scientific Contribution

6.2.1 For Research

This thesis started with the supposition that there is a lack of research regarding two interrelated aspects: follower-leader relationships and intercultural communication. Traditional leadership theories dominantly focus on the leader's perspective. Therefore, we investigated the leader-follower relationship in an intercultural context from a follower's perspective. This led to the creation of the Constructive Followership Model, a conceptual theory which describes the role of follower behaviour in the co-construction of leadership in intercultural contexts. We specifically discovered the importance of constructive communication for followers to influence leadership and positively impact the follower-leader relationship. Consequently, we contributed to both the area of the co-construction of leadership and followership theories. While we recognise this is but a minor step, we do hope this is a concept on which further research can be based.

6.2.2 For Practitioners

As behoves the pragmatist philosophy of this thesis, we also aimed to find valuable insights and suggestions that have a practical benefit. Therefore, we hope practitioners in follower and leader positions will find our Constructive Followership Model beneficial. It was created as both a theoretical model and a practical guideline. We encourage our readers to take inspiration out of our findings and discussion, and to reflect upon it themselves so it may serve them well in their practical application. If our research can benefit even one person in their role as a follower or leader, it would be the greatest acknowledgement we could receive.

6.3 Further Research

As mentioned in chapter 2.6, this thesis is limited in both time and scope. However, we do believe we managed to generate valuable insights that can be built on for further research. Supplementary studies in other case studies both within the financial services industry and outside of it can be very beneficial to gather more perspectives and insights on the research topic. We also suggest investigating other types of companies than MNCs, such as SMEs or start-ups. Additionally, people from other country clusters that were not included in our empirical research could have different perspectives, so those are worth investigating as well. Furthermore, deductive qualitative and quantitative studies can be used to develop the Constructive Followership Model more and increase generalisability. The research area of combining followership and an intercultural context is still relatively unexplored so any further studies in this field are very interesting. It can also be beneficial to research the impact of demographics such as gender and cultural background on this topic. Overall, there is much ground left to cover and we are excited to see leadership theories focus more and more on followers as an active and influential actor.

6.4 Our Journey of Learning

Writing this thesis together has been an intense but rewarding learning experience for both of us. We could never have imagined that our research would take so many twists and turns to shape this final outcome. Nevertheless, we were always very open minded in receiving

feedback from each other and peers, lecturers and other contributors, which we have continuously weighed against each other and modified accordingly to fit our scope of research. We have encountered many challenges throughout our journey, and we were able to overcome these obstacles together, seeing it as an opportunity for growth. We have learned so much from each other, our own distinct working and writing styles, strengths and weaknesses that complement each other, and most importantly, the trust and indepence we put in each other throughout the process. Writing this thesis also taught us a lot about the importance of alleviating and redistributing workload, and prioritising work.

At the beginning of our thesis we were exploring topics and areas of research that sparked our interest most, spanning from followership to cross-cultural management to effective communication. We decided to align our most preferred topics and constructed a thesis that was overarching on our areas of interest, focusing on leader-follower relationships in intercultural contexts, and adding the relational component of co-construction to it. We decided to compromise our interests and find a middle ground that best served our interests. We initially thought our topic was very interesting since it has not been explored that much, however, we were not too aware of the nuances and sensitivities that come alongside the concept of follower behaviour in the co-construction of leadership. We were very surprised to find out that people are far less willing to speak about leadership behaviour than follower behaviour. Perhaps we were a bit naive to think that because we take an academic stance and interest in this topic, we did not envision that we had to be very cautious and considerate in reaching out to potential participants for our study. Nonetheless, we believe that the gained insights from our conducted interviews alongside our prior knowledge contribute to our overall understanding of the topic. We can use our newfound knowledge in our personal life and professional life with the utmost consideration to the sensitivities and nuances of the topic, and being able to share our knowledge with others.

At the end of our research process, we want to express that we are very satisfied with the outcome of our study, and hope that our research presents valuable insights to everyone who takes their time to read through it. Also, being able to come up with our conceptual theoretical model with regards to the dyadic relationship between leaders and followers in

intercultural contexts certainly adds to that feeling. Our biggest learning outcome is that people can be very open minded, willing to adjust to others and are open for compromise, and relationships can evolve, both personally and professionally. We, therefore look forward to seeing how the co-construction of leadership becomes more apparent and experience this from a new perspective.

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Appendices

The main objective of this interview is to acquire a deeper understanding of the relationship between leaders and followers in an intercultural context from the perspectives of both leaders and followers. We hope to gather knowledge about how leaders and followers from different cultures contribute to the co-construction of leadership. The data that has been collected through these interviews will solely be used in this particular thesis, and the final material will be made available to the respondents as well.

Finally, we want to express our gratitude to all interview participants for taking part in this research.

Appendix I: Leader Interview Guide

Introducing the interviewee to our research:

Hello (name) …, welcome to our meeting. How are you doing? Thank you so much for taking the time to participate in our research study, this is highly appreciated.

So please allow us to give you an overview of this interview. The subject of our master's thesis is "the role of communication in the co-construction of leadership in an intercultural context". The goal of this research is to find out how (mainly) frontline/client facing employees or subordinates can contribute to accommodating the co-construction of leadership in an intercultural context (in MNCs). Also, we are looking to find out what leaders or managers seek in or expect from their subordinates to support them in effectively achieving business goals. The intention of this study is to find out the dyadic relationship between manager and subordinate. So, this would indicate how people from different teams collaborate and effectively communicate within different levels of a given business unit.

The interview is expected to take about 45-60 minutes, it can be shorter or longer depending on the flow of the interview. You are not obligated to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. If you want some information that you have mentioned during the interview to be taken out of this research, please kindly let us know and we will ensure that this will be excluded from our research.

At last, we will preserve the anonymity of you as a research participant. This means that your name, function, company of employment will not be mentioned. Furthermore, your nationality will not directly be mentioned (it will be clustered according to GLOBE

country clustering: i.e. Germanic Europe, Anglo, Latin Europe etc.). Basically, any information that could point to identifying you will not be mentioned.

Do you have any questions or concerns before we start the interview?

Do you mind if we record this interview? This is so that we can analyse the information of this interview which can be used in our report.

Introduction:

- Can you kindly start by describing your role in the company?
- How long have you been in a leadership role?
- How long have you worked in the company?
- In what (geographical) region is your office based? Is this the same area as you grew up in?
- Could you give us an indication of how many people you manage or lead (direct reports)? Do your subordinates have a different cultural background (nationality, education, social group, religion etc.)?

Culture:

- How would you define culture?
- How do you feel about working in a multicultural environment? Why (please elaborate)? What do you like and what do you dislike?
- **(If the participant is based in a geographical area other than where they grew up, ask them if they have encountered any difficulties in adjusting to a different culture)**
- What kind of cultural challenges have you encountered within your company in your managerial/leadership role (cross-cultural, misinterpretation, organisational culture etc.)?

(If not related to communication, ask them to give an example related to communicating with different cultures)

- When, how and where specifically did you experience these challenges?
- Were you able to tackle these challenges? If yes, how. If not, why?
- Can you give an example of a situation where you felt a cultural clash in your company?
  - How did you (attempt to) deal with that?
- Has your leadership style changed during your stay at your company? And if so, how and what are the reasons behind that?

Leadership:

- In your opinion, what do you consider to be the main tasks of a leader?
- How would you describe your own leadership style (i.e. flexibible, reactive, micro management, self-reliance)?
  - + your communication style towards your subordinates (i.e. direct vs. indirect, constructive, formal/informal)?
- How do you grow into this leadership role? Did you follow any external/internal programs (internal leadership development program, business schools etc.)?
- What has been your worst or upsetting experience in your leadership role?
  - What has disappointed you the most in your work experience? Were there any initiatives/actions you undertook and the outcome was not as expected?

Leadership expectations of followers:

- What do you consider as most challenging in your relationship with your subordinates (i.e. misalignment of expectations, resistance)?
- What kind of behaviour do you find ideal in a subordinate?
- Which soft skills (Emotional intelligence: adaptability, flexibility, consideration etc.) do you expect your subordinates to have?
- How can a subordinate make your role as a leader easier? Could you provide us with an example of a past experience?
- Are you open to the influence or perspectives of your subordinates? (Can a subordinate influence your leadership?)
- Upward communication: What would you consider to be the most effective way that a subordinate can influence your leadership efforts (from their own voluntary initiative)?

Concluding questions:

- Do you have any recommendations for anyone wishing to lead or manage multicultural teams?
- Finally, is there any other vital information that you have which we have not included in the interview?

Closing remarks:

These were all the questions of the interview. Thank you so much for your openness and participation in this interview.

We are expecting to submit the complete thesis in the first week of June. So, once our master's thesis is completed and ready for submission, would you be interested in receiving an abstract/summary or the full master's thesis?

Appendix II: Follower Interview Guide

Introducing the interviewee to our research:

Hello (name) …, welcome to our meeting. How are you doing? Thank you so much for taking the time to participate in our research study, this is highly appreciated.

So please allow us to give you an overview of this interview. The subject of our master's thesis is "the role of communication in the co-construction of leadership in an intercultural context". The goal of this research is to find out how (mainly) frontline/client facing employees or subordinates can contribute to accommodating the co-construction of leadership in an intercultural context (in MNCs). Also, we are looking to find out what leaders or managers seek in or expect from their subordinates to support them in effectively achieving business goals. The intention of this study is to find out the dyadic relationship between manager and subordinate. So, this would indicate how people from different teams collaborate and effectively communicate within different levels of a given business unit.

The interview is expected to take about 45-60 minutes, it can be shorter or longer depending on the flow of the interview. You are not obligated to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. If you want some information that you have mentioned during the interview to be taken out of this research, please kindly let us know and we will ensure that this will be excluded from our research.

At last, we will preserve the anonymity of you as a research participant. This means that your name, function, company of employment will not be mentioned. Furthermore, your nationality will not directly be mentioned (it will be clustered according to GLOBE country clustering: i.e. Germanic Europe, Anglo, Latin Europe etc.). Basically, any information that could point to identifying you will not be mentioned.

Do you have any questions or concerns before we start the interview?

Do you mind if we record this interview? This is so that we can analyse the information of this interview which can be used in our report.

Introduction:

- Can you kindly start by describing your role in the company?
- How long have you worked in the company?
- In what (geographical) region is your office based? Is this the same as you grew up in?
- Could you indicate how many people you report to (horizontal structure)? What is the reporting structure?

- Does your manager/superior have a different cultural background than you (nationality, education, social group, religion etc.)?

Culture:

- How would you define culture (i.e. national, organisational, work culture)?
- How do you feel about working in a multicultural environment? Why (please elaborate)? What do you like and what do you dislike?
- **(If the participant is based in a geographical area other than where they grew up, ask them if they have encountered any difficulties in adjusting to a different culture)**
- What kind of cultural challenges have you encountered within your company in your role (cross-cultural, misinterpretation, organisational culture etc.)?

(If not related to communication, ask them to give an example related to communicating with different cultures)

- When, how and where specifically did you experience these challenges?
- Were you able to tackle these challenges? If yes, how. If not, why?
- Can you give an example of a situation where you felt a cultural clash in your company?
  - How did you (attempt to) deal with that?
- Has your working style/approach changed during your stay at your company? And if so, how and what are the reasons behind that?

Follower-leader relationship:

- How would you describe your ideal manager-subordinate relationship (dynamics: boss, friend, colleague, equal, formal/informal etc.)?
  - Do you prefer a two-way communication stream or one-way? Do you want to feel heard? If yes, why? If no, why not?
  - Have you ever experienced this? If not, do you believe it to be realistic?
- Could you please describe what you seek from middle/upper management in terms of leadership (manager's leadership style: i.e. flexible, reactive, micro management, self-reliance)?
- What is your ideal balance between self-authority and control from above (micro-management)? How much, and for what, would you want to rely on your manager for guidance/interference?
- Has a different cultural background ever influenced your relationship with a manager? If yes, can you give an example?
- Have you ever experienced any challenges in communicating with a manager? (Did these relate to cultural differences?)

- Have you ever had a manager that uses a specific system to register your input regarding anything related to your area or business as a whole? If yes, how often do you provide feedback (weekly, monthly, quarterly, occasionally etc.)? If not, how valuable would it be for you to have such a system in place?
- Do you have any experience with a specific feedback loop or tool from a company or manager that registers your remarks/feedback regarding the manager? Did it make you feel like your feedback was being heard and considered? Please, elaborate :)

Follower behaviour:

- Do you think carefully about how you communicate to management? If yes, how?
- How do you try to improve your relationship with management?
    - Is this effective? Are you satisfied with the results of your efforts?
- Which of your (soft) skills do you think a manager values the most?
    - Which do you value the most?
    - Are there any social skills that you would like to develop (more)?
- Do you actively try to alleviate a manager's workload? If yes, how? If not, are there any barriers of resistance (e.g. time, perception that a leader doesn't need it, indifference/low organisational commitment)?
- Upward communication: What would you consider to be the most effective way that you, as a subordinate, can positively influence a manager's efforts (from their own voluntary initiative)?

Concluding questions:

- Do you have any recommendations for anyone wishing to work in multicultural teams?
- Finally, is there any other vital information that you have which we have not included in the interview?

Closing remarks:

These were all the questions of the interview. Thank you so much for your openness and participation in this interview.

We are expecting to submit the complete thesis in the first week of June. So, once our master's thesis is completed and ready for submission, would you be interested in receiving an abstract/summary or the full master's thesis?

Linnæus University
Sweden

Appendix III: Presentation of Interviewee Categories, Leaders

Follower behaviour	Leader frequency
Transparency	3
Proactivity	2
Curiosity	3
Self-sufficiency	4
Considerate communication	3
Critical thinking	2
Taking accountability	2
Leader behaviour	**Leader Frequency**
Empowerment	4
Empathy	3
Leading by example	5
Openness to feedback	4
Sensitive to team needs	2
Transparent communication	2
Enabling growth	2
Partnership	3
Realising a vision	4
Working in an intercultural environment	**Leader Frequency**
Cultural awareness	3
Cultural clash	3
Openness to culture	3

Adaptability	3
Cultural bias	2
Beyond national culture	3
Communication challenges	2
Leader-follower relationship	**Leader Frequency**
Feeling unappreciated	2
Comfortableness in a relationship	1
Feeling valued and involved	-
Resistance to change	3
Interpersonal skills	2
Hierarchy	-
Self-authority	-
Clarity of tasks	-
Trust of work	3
Co-construction of leadership	**Leader Frequency**
Alleviating workload	-
Upward communication	3
Gaining understanding	4
Including the team	4
Common purpose	3
Guidance and mentorship	2
Management support	-

Appendix IV: Presentation of Interviewee Categories, Followers

Follower behaviour	Follower frequency
Transparency	-
Proactivity	2
Curiosity	2
Self-sufficiency	2
Considerate communication	4
Critical thinking	1
Taking accountability	-
Leader behaviour	**Follower frequency**
Empowerment	-
Empathy	4
Leading by example	-
Openness to feedback	1
Sensitive to team needs	-
Transparent communication	-
Enabling growth	2
Partnership	1
Realising a vision	-
Working in an intercultural environment	**Follower frequency**
Cultural awareness	-
Cultural clash	1

Openness to culture	-
Adaptability	5
Cultural bias	1
Beyond national culture	1
Communication challenges	1
Leader-follower relationship	**Follower frequency**
Feeling unappreciated	-
Comfortableness in a relationship	1
Feeling valued and involved	2
Resistance to change	-
Interpersonal skills	3
Hierarchy	4
Self-authority	5
Clarity of tasks	2
Trust of work	4
Co-construction of leadership	**Follower frequency**
Alleviating workload	3
Upward communication	4
Gaining understanding	2
Including the team	2
Common purpose	2
Guidance and mentorship	1
Management support	4

Appendix V: Presentation of Aggregated Interviewee Categories, Leaders and Followers

Follower behaviour	Follower frequency	Leader frequency	Aggregated frequency
Transparency	-	3	3
Proactivity	2	2	4
Curiosity	2	3	5
Self-sufficiency	2	4	6
Considerate communication	4	3	7
Critical thinking	1	2	3
Taking accountability	-	2	2
Leader behaviour	**Follower frequency**	**Leader frequency**	**Aggregated frequency**
Empowerment	-	4	4
Empathy	4	3	7
Leading by example	-	5	5
Openness to feedback	1	4	5

Sensitive to team needs	-	2	2
Transparent communication	-	2	2
Enabling growth	2	2	4
Partnership	1	3	4
Realising a vision	-	4	4
Working in an intercultural environment	**Follower frequency**	**Leader frequency**	**Aggregated frequency**
Cultural awareness	-	3	3
Cultural clash	1	3	4
Openness to culture	-	3	3
Adaptability	5	3	8
Cultural bias	1	2	3
Beyond national culture	1	3	4
Communication challenges	1	2	3
Leader-follower relationship	**Follower frequency**	**Leader frequency**	**Aggregated frequency**
Feeling unappreciated	-	2	2

Comfortableness in a relationship	1	1	2
Feeling valued and involved	2	-	2
Resistance to change	-	3	3
Interpersonal skills	3	2	5
Hierarchy	4	-	4
Self-authority	5	-	5
Clarity of tasks	2	-	2
Trust of work	4	3	7
Co-construction of leadership	**Follower frequency**	**Leader frequency**	**Aggregated frequency**
Alleviating workload	3	-	3
Upward communication	4	3	7
Gaining understanding	2	4	6
Including the team	2	4	6
Common purpose	2	3	5
Guidance and mentorship	1	2	3

Management support	4	-	4

Appendix VI: Interview Participant Demographics

Interview respondent	Leader/follower?	GLOBE cultural cluster	Gender
Participant 1	Leader	Germanic Europe	Male
Participant 2	Follower	Anglo	Male
Participant 3	Follower	Germanic Europe	Male
Participant 4	Leader	Eastern Asia	Female
Participant 5	Follower	Latin Europe	Female
Participant 6	Leader	Eastern Asia	Female
Participant 7	Leader	Anglo	Female
Participant 8	Follower	Latin Europe	Male
Participant 9	Leader	Eastern Europe	Female