



**VILNIUS UNIVERSITY
BUSINESS SCHOOL**

INTERNATIONAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

Vaida Garbauskė

THE FINAL MASTER'S THESIS

<p>PROJEKTŲ VADOVAS KAIP KOMANDOS KOUČERIS: KOMPETENCIJOS IR PRAKTIKOS UGDANT PSICHOLOGINĮ SAUGUMĄ VIRTUALIOJE PROJEKTO KOMANDOJE</p>	<p>PROJECT MANAGER AS A TEAM COACH: COMPETENCIES AND PRACTICES TO FOSTER PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IN A VIRTUAL PROJECT TEAM</p>
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Supervisor Assoc. Prof. Eglė Dauniene

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SUMMARY

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STUDENT VAIDA GARBAUSKĖ

PROJECT MANAGER AS A TEAM COACH: COMPETENCIES AND
PRACTICES TO FOSTER PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IN A VIRTUAL PROJECT
TEAM

Supervisor – Assoc. Prof. Eglė Daunienė

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Short description of the master's thesis: virtual teams are still very much thriving, even after the crisis of COVID-19; nowadays, the teams are becoming more and more project-based. Coaching is one of the team interventions which could support such teams in sustaining healthy team dynamics and even performing better. In order to achieve this, team psychological safety is first and foremost prerequisite. However, besides abstract theoretical ideas, there have been no specific and easy-to-follow guidelines on how project managers could implement coaching to help virtual project teams feel more psychologically safe. Therefore, the study seeks to fill this knowledge gap.

Aim and objectives: the aim is to classify project managers' coaching practices which help foster psychological safety in virtual project teams according to the coaching competencies developed by International Coaching Federation (ICF). The objectives, on the other hand, are four: firstly, to critically review academic research on team coaching, psychological safety and virtual teams. Secondly, using a semi-structured interview method, to distinguish which competencies are prevailing, implemented by project managers as team coaches in virtual

project teams. Thirdly, using a semi-structured interview method, to provide the classification of prevailing coaching practices related to the aforementioned ICF competencies which help build psychological safety within virtual teams. Finally, the research is finalized by providing conclusions, recommendations and insights for future research on coaching virtual teams to promote psychological safety.

Research methods and results: to conduct a study in a yet quite unexplored area, a qualitative methodology was selected; in particular, semi-structured interviews with 12 experienced project managers were executed. After collecting the data, thematic analysis and, sparingly, content analysis was implemented to distinguish prevailing coaching practices throughout seven psychological safety-related scenarios. The results from the empirical research were added into classification tables of team coaching practices, in accordance with coaching competencies and seven psychological safety-related scenarios.

Conclusions: In short, the most frequently used practices by project managers in virtual project teams are associated with facilitation and moderation, ensuring a safe, inclusive, and welcoming space. Moreover, project managers would often show emotional support, and empathize with the feelings of their team members. Also, they would utilize their active listening and observation skills, in order to understand team dynamics better. Project managers prioritize empowerment, so they use thought-provoking open-ended questions and help to reframe perspectives or create an action plan. Finally, they recognize team members, show trust, acknowledge their autonomy and encourage their professional growth.

Keywords: psychological safety, virtual team, project manager, coaching competencies, coaching practices, team coach.

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Trumpas darbo aprašymas: virtualios komandos vis dar klesti, net ir pasibaigus COVID-19 krizei. Šių laikų pasaulyje atsiranda vis daugiau projektinių komandų. Koučingas – viena iš intervencijų, galinti padėti tokioms projektinėms ir virtualioms komandoms palaikyti sveiką komandos dinamiką bei siekti geresnių rezultatų. Tačiau tam įgyvendinti būtina užtikrinti komandos psichologinį saugumą. Deja, be abstrakčių teoretinių idėjų, vis dar nesama jokių konkrečių ir praktinių gairių, kaip projektų vadovai galėtų įgyvendinti koučingą ir padėti virtualioms projektų komandoms jaustis psichologiškai saugiai. Taigi, tyrimu siekiama užpildyti šios srities žinių trūkumą.

Darbo tikslas ir uždaviniai: darbo tikslas – suklasifikuoti projektų vadovų koučingo praktikas, padedančias puoselėti psichologinį saugumą virtualiose projektų komandose pagal Tarptautinės koučingo federacijos apibrėžtas koučingo kompetencijas. Iškelti keturi darbo uždaviniai: pirma, apžvelgti ir kritiškai įvertinti esamą mokslinę literatūrą apie komandos koučingą, psichologinį saugumą ir virtualias komandas. Antra, naudojantis dalinai struktūruoto interviu metodu, siekiama įvardyti virtualiose projektų komandose vyraujančias projektų vadovų, kaip komandų koučeriu, kompetencijas. Trečia, naudojantis dalinai struktūruoto interviu metodu, siekiama sukurti vyraujančių koučingo praktikų klasifikaciją

pagal minėtas Tarptautinės koučingo federacijos apibrėžtas koučingo kompetencijas, kurios padeda puoselėti psichologinį saugumą virtualiose projektų komandose. Ketvirta, darbo gale siekiama pateikti darbo išvadas bei teorines rekomendacijas ir praktinius pasiūlymus.

Tyrimo metodologija: kadangi darbo tema plačiai netyrinėta, pasirinkta atlikti kokybinį tyrimą; tiksliau, buvo atlikta 12 dalinai struktūruotų interviu, kalbinant patyrusius projektų vadovus. Surinkus tyrimui reikalingą informaciją, buvo atliktos dviejų tipų analizės – teminė ir turinio. Teminė analizė tyrime buvo pagrindinė, o turinio analizė buvo atliekama minimaliai. Analizė padėjo išvelgti, kurios koučingo praktikos vyrauja psichologinio saugumo kontekste, septyniose skirtingose situacijose. Tyrimo rezultatai susisteminti klasifikuojant projektų vadovų, kaip komandos koučerių, koučingo praktikas pagal koučingo kompetencijas ir septynias situacijas, susijusias su psichologiniu saugumu.

Pagrindinės darbo išvados: apibendrinant, dažniausiai projektų vadovų virtualiose projektų komandose naudojamos koučingo praktikos susijusios su fasilitavimu ir moderavimu bei saugios, svetingos ir įtraukiančios erdvės kūrimu. Be to, projektų vadovai dažnai komandos nariams rodo emocinį palaikymą ir empatiją. Jie naudoja ir aktyvaus klausymosi įgūdžius, kad galėtų efektyviau stebėti komandos dinamiką bei jos pokyčius. Projektų vadovai taip pat didelę reikšmę skiria įgalinti komandos narius, ir tam naudoja mąstymą skatinančius atvirus klausimus bei padeda žmonėms performuoti požiūrį ar sukurti veiksmų planą. Galiausiai projektų vadovai pastebi komandos narių talentus ir pastangas, rodo pasitikėjimą jais bei pripažįsta jų autonomiją ir skatina profesinį augimą.

Raktiniai žodžiai: psichologinis saugumas, virtuali komanda, projektų vadovas, koučingo kompetencijos, koučingo praktikos, komandos koučeris.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

COVID-19

Coronavirus disease of 2019

ICF

International Coaching Federation

ROI

Return on Investment

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Relevance of the topic:

In the challenging flux of today, teams have been the driving force for business growth, showing more capability than individuals to rise to the occasion and bring higher value. Therefore, the interest in team effectiveness has been steadily growing (Widdowson et al., 2020). This focus shift has generated notable attention towards project teams – today’s primary way of working. In their essence, project teams are time-bound. Besides the temporality, the growing popularity of project-based work imposes other challenges, such as a fast delivery pace and a high level of uncertainty (Karlsen & Berg, 2020). A project manager is expected to form a team from a group of people who may not be at all familiar, and ensure successful collaboration to bring significant value to the company.

To work effectively as a team, people should feel psychologically safe. Indeed, according to one of the most famous tech giants Google and their Project Aristotle study, it was found that psychological safety is the first and foremost prerequisite for a successful team (Duhigg, 2016). Further research elaborates that psychological safety not only improves learning in the team but also increases overall team performance (Harvey et al., 2019; Liu & Keller, 2021).

Another important attribute of this research is still relevant and thriving virtual teams. Throughout the COVID-19 times, such flexibility became the new normal, and the number of teams which transcended office time and space limits had grown exponentially (*Optimizing Performance of Remote Teams*, 2023). Although more and more companies are claiming that the “return to the office” era is already accelerating, the lessons learned from remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic have shown plentiful positive aspects of dispersed working. Interestingly, the tendency to work remotely is expected not to change drastically even now, already after the global health crisis became manageable. According to the recent forecasts for 2024-2025, remote work will keep its popularity, and, by 2025, around 22% of the USA workforce will be fully virtual (Hann, 2023; Verasai, 2023). Choosing the latter mode of working can save significant company costs and provide more flexibility for workers. Naturally, the workplace is becoming increasingly global. However, prevailing virtuality creates different conditions compared to office work and requires knowledge on team psychological safety in such conditions. It is already known that, when working remotely, teams' collaboration and communication often get impacted negatively (Kuruppuarachchi, 2009; Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). Consequently, it is of high importance to investigate

how to help virtual teams sustain high performance and a healthy climate. This is where the project manager's coaching skillset on psychological safety may be indispensable (Niever et al., 2021).

Lastly, it can be also said that this study is relevant business-wise, for organizational leadership. For example, it is known that a leader's coaching skills may improve the turnover rate (Romão et al., 2022). Although project managers are not exactly managing people, they are leading a team of specialists, thus their soft skills may also have quite a strong effect on people's motivation and happiness at work. Moreover, coaching can help improve team's productivity (Mosca et al., 2010). Given the overall distracting everyday world and often busy environment of working from home, businesses are likely highly interested in sustained focus and productivity of their employees. Interestingly, even the return on investment (ROI) can be positively affected due to the impact of coaching (Wiginton & Cartwright, 2020). All in all, the study is purposefully focused on current trends of working, such as a project-based way of working, virtuality and coaching, in order to hold relevance.

1.2 Novelty:

Researchers have noticed that coaching practice has seemingly outgrown the academic research of the field. It is still missing an elaborate and empirically validated theory on team coaching (Jones et al., 2019). According to Widdowson et al. (2020), team coaching research is still in the pre-theory phase. Graves (2021) complements the aforementioned paper by noting that studies in team coaching are very much lagging behind compared to the research of dyadic, i.e. individual, coaching. Therefore, it is expected that this master's thesis could contribute to the still quite unexplored area.

Interestingly, Cripe and Burleigh's study has already identified a toolkit for project managers working with virtual teams (Cripe & Burleigh, 2022). However, the research mentioned coaching only as an alternative but did not center the study around the coaching activity, which is the kernel of this master's thesis. With regards to project manager's coaching practices to foster psychological safety in virtual teams, the knowledge gap is clear. There is yet no classification of coaching practices constructed for project managers to follow.

1.3 Thesis problem:

The problem this thesis aims to explore is addressing the gap in the knowledge of project managers acting as virtual project team coaches; specifically, how can project managers promote psychological safety in virtual teams?

1.4 Aim of the thesis:

The thesis aims to develop a classification of project manager's coaching practices to address the nurture of psychological safety in virtual teams, in accordance with the coaching competencies of International Coaching Federation (ICF).

1.5 Objectives of the thesis:

- 1) To review and critically evaluate academic research on team coaching, virtual teams and psychological safety; the knowledge gap of which will be used as a basis for the research.
- 2) Using a semi-structured interview method, to distinguish which competencies are prevailing in virtual project team coaching according to ICF-defined coaching competencies.
- 3) Using a semi-structured interview method, to provide the classification of coaching practices related to the aforementioned competencies on fostering psychological safety within virtual teams.
- 4) To provide conclusions and theoretical and practical recommendations for future research and practice of coaching virtual teams to promote psychological safety.

1.6 Methods of the thesis:

Systematic critical analysis of academic literature and empirical research were implemented. For the empirical research, a qualitative methodology was selected. To collect the data, semi-structured interviews were implemented. To analyze the data, a triangulation methodology with thematic analysis as the primary and content analysis as the secondary method was used.

1.7 Structure and scope of the thesis:

The master's thesis includes five main parts: Introduction, Literature Review, Research Methodology, Results and Conclusions. Introduction describes the relevance and novelty of the research, describes the problem more in-depth and presents the aim and the

objectives of the research. Literature Review is comprised of a systematic and critical review of existing academic papers on psychological safety, virtual project teams and project managers as coaches; the knowledge gaps are identified which act as a foundation for the empirical study. The third part – Research Methodology – describes all steps implemented to design and execute a qualitative study in meticulous detail to ensure the reliability and validity of the research. The Results section is the most extensive, denoting all prevailing coaching practices and competencies in seven defined scenarios; where applicable, the current results are interpreted in the light of already existing studies. Finally, in the Conclusions part, the results of the study are summarized and both theoretical and practical recommendations are presented.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Modalities of professional help: coaching vs mentoring vs consulting

According to the worldwide leading coaching organization International Coaching Federation (ICF), coaching is an activity of "partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential" (*ICF, the Gold Standard in Coaching | Read About ICF*, n.d.). Scholars who have studied this intervention throughout the years agree: coaching is concerned with the future; it is focused on a mindful change that fosters personal, learning and adaptation skills (Lai & Palmer, 2019; Redshaw, 2000). Partnering in a coaching relationship means an equal, i.e. non-hierarchical, relationship between a client (coachee) and a coach. The coachee is believed to own all the necessary internal resources to tackle their challenges, and the coaching specialist is there to unleash those resources and empower the client via various means, from such simple as open questions and active listening to more complex frameworks and models of psychology and andragogy. The coach does not take an expert's or a teacher's role and, thus, does not give advice (Hussey & Campbell-Meier, 2021). To add, coaching is thought-provoking, as it is directed towards personal growth and may help with disruptive challenges. Such a mindful activity oriented towards action and future often takes place in the work environment, but it is definitely not the only intervention there.

There are quite a few different forms of professional help in the business world, and the most common ones are coaching, mentoring and consulting (Hawkins & Smith, 2006). As this research paper addresses coaching only, the boundaries of all these three interventions must be set for a clearer scope of the paper. Firstly, both mentorship and coaching are considered as important development activities and may be performed in parallel; however, mentorship is associated more with teaching, sharing advice, feedback and guidance from an expert in the field. According to Hussey & Campbell-Meier (2021), the utmost goal of mentorship is for the mentee to reach long-term professional goals; to sum up, it mostly covers career-oriented objectives. A mentor – usually a more senior specialist in the field of interest – is thus quite active and vocal in the sessions with the mentee. However, both coaching and mentoring imply that the client (mentee/coachee) is solely responsible for achieving their goals. Coaching, as already explained above, includes an equal, i.e. non-hierarchical, relationship. The coach is responsible for a smooth coaching process, using thought-provoking questions and other tools which are suitable for the coachee, and does not act as more senior – meaning, never consults or advises. The coach is less vocal, provides the

space for the coachee's expression and only interferes to productively move through the conversation by using different coaching techniques. The utmost goal of coaching is that the clients discover insights about themselves, draw conclusions and plan how to move further all by themselves, without any influence from the coach. What else is interesting, is that Hussey & Campbell-Meier (2021) drew a line between long-term goals (mentoring) and short-term goals (coaching). The author of the thesis agrees with the aforementioned statement, as the situations investigated in the paper are innately short-term. However, as mentioned at the very beginning of this section, coaching helps with internal transformations. Therefore, it can often require a longer coaching period to implement important life changes. Yet the master's thesis is concerned with workplace situations which are most often short-term; thus, here, coaching may be associated more with short-term goals. The workplace coaching will be overviewed in the sub-section below.

Before concluding, it is also necessary to distinguish consulting from coaching. Consultants usually offer technical domain knowledge and advice, and they do so as they generally bridge some knowledge gaps for the clients. Therefore, they save clients' time in return for paid services (Hawkins & Smith, 2006). The clients of consulting are thus generally more passive, as they receive a favor rather than create a solution to a problem themselves. On the other hand, to reiterate what has already been presented above, the coach does not fix the coachee's problems. Coaching is a highly engaging and demanding practice in terms of the client's participation. While consultants give advice, directions and thus carry responsibility, coaches seek to empower clients to take that responsibility for themselves.

Table 1 below encapsulates the differences between the three main modalities of professional help in business. It is important to note that the table is simplified for the clearer scope of the paper, yet hereby defined boundaries may not reflect the reality in all cases. For example, mentors may naturally implement some coaching activities, like open-ended questions or a thought reframing technique, in the mentorship process.

Table 1. *Differences between coaching, mentoring and consulting*

Modality Characteristics	Coaching	Mentoring	Consulting
Relationship	Coach-Coachee (non-hierarchical)	Mentor-Mentee (hierarchical)	Consultant-Client (client relationship)
Type of help	Empowerment; Reflection; Mindfulness	Teaching; Expert advice; Guidance	Problem solution; Expert advice; Time saving

Source: compiled by the author

2.2 Workplace coaching: from a dyadic activity to a team intervention

The general definition of coaching was presented in the sub-section above. In this sub-section, research on workplace coaching as a learning and development intervention will be overviewed; also, individual (dyadic) and team coaching will be distinguished.

In a working environment, a coach seeks to help an employee achieve higher professional capabilities, which is advantageous for both the employee and the employer (Bozer & Delegach, 2019; Edsall & Conrad, 2021). It may enable the worker to learn by understanding oneself better, reflecting on work situations, analyzing one's own assumptions, and experimenting with new work-related practices. Coaching has also been theorized as an instrument for helping to cope with more challenging situations at work and improve self-regulation and overall well-being (Theeboom et al., 2013). Therefore, coaching can bring two-fold benefits for workers: enhance their performance and positive feelings at work. The employer, on the other hand, does also benefit from the improved employees' performance (Peláez et al., 2020). Not only can they reap the benefits of employees' higher performance, but they may also use this learning and development benefit for the company's branding – to attract more potential workers who are interested in personal and professional growth. Overall, the author of this thesis strongly agrees with Grant & O'Connor (2018): the researchers have noted that coaching should not only be implemented to feel good at work, although it is an important part of the outcomes. Actually, this intervention should be goal-directed and solution-oriented, as, in its nature, coaching usually entails change.

Due to the fact that this research focuses on team coaching, it is essential to distinguish it from individual coaching. Studies show that one-on-one coaching is significantly more often analyzed compared to team coaching; this reveals the fact that

individual coaching is more widespread and thus there is more data to investigate (Maseko et al., 2019). However, the thesis' author supports Niever et al. (2021), claiming that the value of team coaching is indisputable, and the importance of such a team activity keeps growing. Hence, the author of this paper seeks to contribute to this expanding field of study.

ICF defines team coaching as an intervention which "empowers teams to work toward continued high performance and ongoing development, requiring innovation, flexibility, adaptability and goal alignment" (*ICF Team Coaching Competencies*, n.d.). Thus, the team coaching activity seems to be a complex multi-layered process directed towards both team performance and team rapport development. Recent academic investigations acknowledge the ICF-provided definition and highlight the importance that coaching helps to improve team performance and work on shared goals. Jones et al. (2019) study focused on defining the term "team coaching": the researchers reviewed 15 definitions from different articles and implemented more than 400 interviews to build a definition. Moreover, researchers additionally explained how coaching is usually done: by actively observing the dynamic interactions within the team, asking open-ended questions and reflecting different opinions, the coach provides a safe space to raise team awareness and improve both trust and communication (Jones et al., 2019). It is significant to note that team coaching may be implemented in a hybrid model, i.e. combining individual and team coaching (Carr & Peters, 2013). In this research, the focus is on team coaching practices and the project manager as a team coach. However, if any individual coaching techniques are identified, they will be explained as well, as individual coaching may likely influence and contribute to the overall team psychological safety – the kernel of the study. Individual coaching rather than team coaching can be expected especially when dealing with highly discreet moments, such as failures, mistakes and other sensitive topics, inseparable from psychological safety topics.

Before moving further, the author of the paper would like to introduce a distinction between a group and a team, in order to delineate the scope even more clearly. Although it is possible to coach both, this study is focused only on the latter – team. While in team coaching, the joined purpose of team members is an overarching component, in group coaching all participants have personal goals to reach rather than any uniting purpose to strive for (Britton, 2015). Thus, the terms "team" and "group" cannot and will not be used interchangeably throughout the paper.

In summary, there is a clear demand for more elaborate team coaching studies and their practical implications, especially knowing the aforementioned demand for high team performance in today's workplace. Even though prominent team coaching researchers, such

as Wageman, investigated this phenomenon already at the very beginning of the 21st century, team coaching theory is still in the state of emergence (Jones et al., 2019; Wageman, 2001). Before diving deeper into the realms of team coaching, it is worthwhile to separate this intervention from other similar team activities and define the scope of the paper even more acutely.

2.3 Differences between team interventions: team training, team building and team coaching

Before moving further with the literature analysis, it is crucial to distinguish team coaching from other usual team learning and development interventions. Team training and team building are casual and well-known team interventions. To begin with team training, its aim is to enhance the knowledge and skills of individual team members, and the overall performance of the team. On the other hand, team building is associated with strengthening interpersonal relationships (Jones et al., 2019). Consequently, a clear distinction between the two processes can be defined: the former one is more technical, connected to individual skills and team effectiveness, while the latter – with team rapport.

Team coaching, on the other hand, seems to cover both domains – it is concerned with team's “high performance” but also “dynamics and relationships” (*ICF Team Coaching Competencies*, n.d.). It is focused on personal traits which are highly-appreciated in today's demanding workplace, such as being adaptive, autonomous and flexible (*ICF Team Coaching Competencies*, n.d.). Therefore, team coaching entails relationships in its definition, but also aims for better performance as a team.

It is known that team buildings may also help the team members feel safer (O'Donovan & McAuliffe, 2020). However, due to the fact that team coaching covers both team performance and relationships, this intervention may help significantly more with building psychological safety – which is the focus of this study. Interestingly, one of the first theories on team coaching rejected the importance of team relationships in the process of coaching. It stated that team coaching can only be implemented if it focuses solely on “task performance processes rather than on members' interpersonal relationships” (Hackman & Wageman, 2005, p. 283). All in all, the authors believed that team coaching is only possible by completely ignoring the team rapport. The master's thesis challenges this idea and supports another, more recent, study which argues that improving team communication is an inherent part of team coaching goals (Jones et al., 2019). Hence, the author of this paper will

seek an overarching analysis and include interview questions on both pillars – the team's work processes and relationships.

Table 2 below summarizes the differences between team training, team building and team coaching activities. It is noteworthy to mention that the table is simplified in order to clearly define the scope of this research. In general, however, team buildings may incorporate performance-related activities, while team trainings can include agenda on interpersonal relationships as well.

Table 2. *Differences between team training, team building and team coaching*

Team intervention Focus	Team training	Team building	Team coaching
Individual technical skills	Yes	No	No
Team performance	Yes	No	Yes
Team relationships	No	Yes	Yes

Source: compiled by the author

2.4 Project manager as a coach

The coach's role can be taken both by an external specialist and by an internal employee. Therefore, as the empirical research below will show, project managers may also act as coaches in their project teams. This activity is not only significant for the coached teams, but also indicates the professionalism and seniority of a project manager himself or herself (Savelsbergh et al., 2016).

Firstly, the project manager can assist the team in improving their interactions, and coach them on conversing more productively to solve work issues smoother (Rezania & Lingham (2009). As the literature review above showed that one of the cornerstones of coaching is task-related processes, this intervention can help people become more efficient as a team. Secondly, the project manager, as a coach and a leader, is expected to help maintain a healthy and engaging team climate (Mulec & Roth, 2005; Shen et al., 2015). As it was presented previously, the second of the two cornerstones in coaching is team rapport; if abandoned, it could most likely deteriorate team performance. Coaching is viewed as one of the means to promote an environment of psychological safety – a foundation for successful teamwork, both performance-wise and rapport-wise. Interestingly, there are still substantial

investigations lacking in the field of project managers who coach teams to foster psychological safety. This is where the gap for this master's thesis was identified. Still, the available research has shown that the project manager can significantly impact team's motivation, especially at the start of the project (Schmid & Adams, 2008). These findings could lay heavy responsibility on the project manager's shoulders. As it all may sound quite overwhelming, the starting point for project managers as coaches is to gain the trust of team members. Research has already indicated the correlation between trust, team effectiveness and collaboration (Choi & Cho, 2019). Therefore, if trust in the team is ensured, project managers may reap the benefits of higher collaboration and performance of the team.

There are also quite a few investigations available about coaching advantages for project managers themselves. Still in 2006, Skipper & Bell (2006) stated the importance for project managers to coach others in order to become better leaders themselves. This study is supported by a more recent dissertation on coaching: for a project manager, acting as a coach can improve one's confidence, raise awareness, reduce stress in the workplace and improve one's leadership and communication skills (Thompson, 2019). Even more, project managers notice their improvements in overall cognitive abilities (Ballesteros-Sánchez et al., 2019). In pressing situations, methods such as clear setting of aims, visualization or self-talk could be utilized for smoother day-to-day work (Berg & Karlsen, 2013).

It is highlighted that project manager's education, leadership traits and skillset heavily impact the success of the coaching process and, overall, the success of the whole team (Ahiaga-Dagbui et al., 2020; Cripe & Burleigh, 2022). The changes influenced by coaching may be quite transformational: with time, average performers can become more mindful and autonomous high-performing specialists (Berg & Karlsen, 2016). Thus, the value of this team intervention is indisputable. Besides such positive findings in the area, it is still missing elaborate theory and practical implications on project managers as coaches for team psychological safety. Neither prominent theoretical frameworks nor systematized practical guidelines are present yet. Thus, this gap offered an opportunity for the master's thesis, and the author seeks to contribute to the area by the empirical research discussed in the section of Research Methodology below.

2.5 Team psychological safety: what we know so far

The master's thesis is focused on promoting psychological safety within a team by means of coaching. First and foremost, it is important to define the term "team psychological safety". Amy C. Edmondson, prominent pioneering researcher of psychological safety, coined

the phrase “team psychological safety”: it is a "shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking" (Edmondson, 1999, p. 350). By interpersonal risk taking, the researcher means making mistakes, asking for help, approaching significant problems in the team, or facing strong differentiation between opinions, and other situations. In other words, if people feel comfortable asking questions, being wrong, and stepping up to voice out a different opinion – such a team is most likely psychologically safe, allowing people's vulnerability to flourish. Interestingly, still in the 20th century, the author already saw the team leader's role as a coach: it was viewed as an important influence for building team psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999). The author of the master's thesis will analyze seven topics from the latter research that define team psychological safety; they are presented at the end of the Literature Review section.

In her following works, Edmondson elaborates more on the topic by defining the conditions in which psychological safety is a must have for a team: it is uncertainty, complexity and interdependence within the team (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Indeed, in such a challenging environment, people are in a higher need for risk taking, raising tough questions and, overall, experiencing more challenges. These conditions also show how immensely important psychological safety becomes in the encounter of crises, such as COVID-19, which demand totally new ways of working. Also, Edmondson, together with fellow colleagues, emphasized the positive impact of psychological safety towards team learning (Harvey et al., 2019).

Other researchers agree with the above findings and broaden the horizon of this field even more: for example, Clark (2020) elaborated psychological safety topic by delineating four stages of the phenomenon: Inclusion safety, Learner safety, Contributor safety, and Challenger safety. This was a new – time-oriented – view on this topic; in order to build psychological safety fully, each team member should transition through these four stages. Clark's approach is in line with the ICF coaching competencies and practices, as the latter also include focus not only on building trust and emotional safety but also encouraging innovation, autonomy and reframing people's perspectives (*ICF Team Coaching Competencies*, n.d.). However, Clark's study does not focus on virtual teams, which is the focal criterion for the master's thesis research. Finally, other researchers discovered the relationship between psychological safety and team performance: it is found that the presence of psychological safety not only supports team learning, but also increases team performance (Liu & Keller, 2021).

However, no prominent research in psychological safety coaching is present; only simple guidelines around what a team coach could help the team members with can be found. For example, coach's facilitation skills are appreciated in guiding the team towards a shared understanding about its vision, mission and main goals (Graen et al., 2020). The help of a moderator can most probably help with ensuring a welcoming and inclusive environment; however, this short overview of the researchers lacks a systematized view on concrete coaching practices for building psychological safety.

Overall, psychological safety seems to work as an accelerator to sustain a team of learning, high-performance and healthy dynamics. Yet, there is a clear lack of research on how coaching could help promote psychological safety, especially in virtual teams. The missing research in this area could also pose a question whether there is an actual need to coach for psychological safety; however, the literature review above on team coaching shows the overall advantages towards implementing this intervention in one's team. According to the latest research in the field, psychological safety plays a more vital role than ever in today's organizations (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023, p. 74). As a virtual workplace is today's new reality, the demand for such research is even more significant.

2.6 Virtual teams: boundaryless global workplace as the new normal

Before diving deeper into the subject of virtual teams, it should be clearly delineated what this term means. Virtual teams are usually defined as "work teams that are geographically dispersed and that rely on technology as a primary tool of communication" (Liao, 2017, p. 651). Not to mix with a hybrid team: in this research, the author uses Gartner's approach, stating that the hybrid team meets face-to-face at least once per week. (*Gartner Forecasts 39% of Global Knowledge Workers Will Work Hybrid by the End of 2023*, 2023). To clarify, the author uses the terms "virtual team" and "remote team" as synonyms.

As the paper is concerned with virtual teams, it is necessary to review what has been investigated in this area. Interestingly, still at the crossroads of the 20th and 21st centuries, remote collaboration and virtual team dynamics were already analyzed. Maznevski & Chudoba (2000) built a theory on global remote collaboration and its effectiveness. They claimed that virtual teams learn different communication patterns which fit work tasks, but they still emphasized the significance of face-to-face collaboration. Bell & Kozlowski (2002), not much later, shared a prophecy that "remote teams are here, and they are here to stay" (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002, p. 45). More than 20 years later, it is no doubt that the authors were more than accurate.

Recent research has indicated the necessity for psychological safety for a distributed team to become high-performing (Glikson & Erez, 2020). Clearly, as was mentioned above, it is crucial for traditional face-to-face teams as well. Other new investigations on virtual team psychological safety also reiterate the positive relationship between the feeling of psychological safety and higher performance (Radu et al., 2023). Moreover, it is known that virtual teams thrive on knowledge sharing and strong autonomy, and these phenomena are supported by the pillars of collaboration and trust (Choi & Cho, 2019). Overall, the importance of trust is reiterated in a notable number of research papers throughout decades (Fan et al., 2011; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999; Turesky et al., 2020); such significance suggests that this is a foundation for successful distributed teams. Seemingly, the skillset of a project manager to coach a remote team would be highly similar to the one for coaching traditional teams. However, as stated by Kupa (2022), "the biggest difference between traditional teams and virtual teams is the "how" and not the "what", when it comes to tools and techniques" (Kupa, 2022, p. 88). Thus, this research will seek to investigate the "how" dimension, by focusing on project managers as coaches.

The growing popularity of virtual teams received some criticism and questioning as well. It is noted that fully remote teams experience lower performance and more communication pitfalls compared to non-remote counterparts. Also, it is significantly more difficult to build trust within the team (Lee-Kelley et al., 2004). Due to the fact this reference is around 20 years old, the author of this master's thesis would like to challenge the negative view towards virtual teams. Even more, living in the post COVID-19 times, businesses have seemingly learned how to adapt. However, more recent research also indicates significant difficulties for remote teams. Liao (2017) notes that managing conflicts and building trust requires more effort compared to face-to-face teams. Besides positive cross-learning opportunities, Florea & Stoica (2019) identify hindrances such as social loafing, or reduced efforts when working in a group, and lower motivation. Having already mentioned that project managers may heavily impact team's motivation, especially at the start of the project, these concerns about the virtual team's motivation emphasize the criticality of coaching even more. In addition, as the 2022 Global Remote Work Survey states, the most common challenges in distributed teams lie within the realms of interpersonal relationships and communication (*Global Virtual Teams Survey Report 2022*, 2022). This master's thesis will shed more light on how project managers can use coaching to help with the aforementioned issues and challenges in the remote workplace environment and thus reap the benefits of virtual teams.

The problem of virtual team's psychological safety has indeed been investigated, and quite densely recently. On the other hand, coaching as a solution to this problem is noted only sparingly, or very abstractly (Feitosa & Salas, 2021; Reyes et al., 2021). One significant recent finding acts as an impetus for this research: it was learned that virtual work hinders psychological safety within the team (Tkalich et al., 2022). The next sub-section will cover just that; it will present the instrument of the research which will be used to analyze the competencies and practices of project managers as coaches that help foster virtual team psychological safety.

2.7 Project managers coaching virtual teams: a novel approach towards fostering psychological safety

The very first studies of the 21st century already viewed the project manager as an empowering coach instead of a controller (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001, as cited in Clarke, 2012). Even more, their emotional intelligence correlates significantly with the overall project success (El Khatib et al., 2021). As the Introduction and the Literature Review sections above concluded, there is a knowledge gap on how project managers can coach virtual teams to foster psychological safety. The instrument of the research to cover the knowledge gap will be presented below.

First of all, it is important to note that the main questions for the interview were built according to the prominent Edmondson's research scale, specifically the "Team psychological safety" segment (Edmondson, 1999, p. 382). Although Edmondson's paper is already more than a few decades old, the master's thesis author's experience of interviewing project managers showed that the topics discussed are still very much relevant. Here are short descriptions of all seven topics and their literature review:

1. **Mistakes:** in a psychologically safe team, one should not be held against if they make a mistake. The topic of mistakes has been studied for quite some time already: Berg & Karlsen (2014) investigated on-site teams, but the results may be valuable for this paper as well. They explored how project managers can include more positive emotions in their everyday work with the teams. The researchers found that allowing mistakes is much more encouraging and motivating, as it shows people's efforts; if mistakes are frowned upon, teams would likely be more passive, fearing any wrongdoings. To add, one of the most recent studies highlighted the importance of project managers' emotional intelligence. It was found that it can positively affect the success of a project. If the project manager is skillful in self-regulation and can show empathy towards their team members, such emotional intelligence

aspects contribute to more effective project execution (El Khatib et al., 2021). The author of the thesis would like to add that such soft skills may also help team members feel safer when facing mistakes; the analysis in the Results section will disclose more on the topic.

2. **Problems:** when feeling psychologically safe, team members bring tough issues to light. Project manager's problem-solving skills are usually one of the most discussed; project managers are expected to act proactively and either prevent problems or react fast when they appear. Research shows that team members expect problem-solving to be a joint effort, with the project manager sincerely trying to understand the essence of the problem (Medina & Francis, 2015). Therefore, coaching may be seen as a means to foster such collaboration between the project manager and the team, and the Results section will show how exactly. Finally, Karlsen & Berg (2020) shared insights on how crucial the autonomy of team members to solve their problems is, providing psychological ownership for the team. It is more empowering to allow and encourage team members to bring creative solutions by themselves rather than for the project manager to solely resolve their team's problems.

3. **Conflicts:** team members may have different opinions, and no one in the team should be rejected for that. In conflict management, project managers may firstly help by observing and actively listening. Researchers have identified the importance of active listening skills as a crucial asset of a project manager's skillset (Fisher, 2011; Liikamaa, 2015). In terms of an active role of project managers, they usually interfere only if the conflict has escalated significantly and thus the team atmosphere has been impacted heavily; otherwise, the team members are given the opportunity to manage the conflict themselves (Karlsen & Berg, 2020). Burrows (2020), on the other hand, describes a more active project manager's role in conflicts. They may act as mediators as soon as the conflict arises in order to manage it, help create an action plan and ensure it does not impact the project's future.

4. **Risks:** Edmondson explains "risk" in her article (Edmondson, 1999); she is focused on a more abstract notion of "risk" as interpersonal risk. It includes any behavior which may elicit negativity and judgment (making mistakes, bringing up issues, asking for help, etc.). However, as the other six situations are more precise and already cover the topics of mistakes, issues, etc., the author of the thesis narrowed this topic down to understanding risks as experimenting, challenging others, and innovating. Interestingly, one of the main responsibilities of project managers is to implement risk management plans. Risks should be reduced as much as possible, not to have any impact on the project's health. On the other hand, risks such as innovation, experimentation and challenging the status quo may bring opportunities. Indeed, though, the risks should be acceptable and reasonable, nearly or

completely unlikely to jeopardize the project. Research shows that it is crucial to encourage risk-taking by acknowledging team members' efforts no matter if they succeed or fail. To add, when risk-taking is acknowledged publicly, it works as an encouragement for other team members (Stone, 2006).

5. **Help:** it should be easy to ask others in the team for help. There are quite a few studies on team collaboration and team members helping each other. One of which, done by Bond-Barnard et al. (2018), reveals an insightful finding that proximity is highly connected to team collaboration; meaning that working together in a co-located place increases collaboration and knowledge sharing. The thesis results will show whether remote teams experience any significant challenges helping each other. Burrows (2020) also found that team building can be crucial for team cooperation. However, Burrows studied on-site teams; therefore, it will be interesting to overview whether virtual teams implement remote or on-site team buildings. Finally, Verburg et al. (2013) explained how important it is, specifically for distributed teams, to create and maintain clear team communication rules together; these agreements increase collaboration.

6. **Respect:** all team members should be treated equally, and their efforts should be valued, never undermining others. Respect is an inherent part of feeling psychologically safe; people then can feel included, and no less important than others in the team. It is interesting to review that mutual respect within the team can not only improve team's atmosphere but even accelerate team's performance (Moura et al., 2019). To add, it was found that project managers who are more relationship-oriented rather than task-oriented often concentrate on building respect within the team (Rajbhandar et al., 2016, as cited in Henkel et al., 2019). In remote and highly multicultural teams, inclusive communication means setting communication norms, being adaptive to different people's cultural and personal communication preferences, and ensuring clarity (Seshadri & Elangovan N, 2019).

7. **Recognition:** in the team, everyone's skills and talents are utilized and recognized. Research has identified the project manager's role in acknowledging team members and recognizing their skills. For example, Fisher (2011) explained that both recognizing individuals privately and acknowledging their efforts publicly are important. According to him, "this refuels and sustains people's commitments and unites the team behind its mission" (Fisher, 2011, p. 995). Even more, team members' recognition was found to be directly and positively connected to team effectiveness (Unger-Aviram et al., 2013).

The top of Table 3 below encompasses five ICF-developed coaching competencies. It is significant to comment that, overall, ICF defined eight competencies; three of them,

although crucial for the coaching process, are not relevant to this research. These three competencies cover the preparations for the process and other background rules: the mental health of the coach, agreements between the coach and coachee before starting the process, and ethics. The author of the thesis would like to briefly introduce the five included competencies in order to distinguish them from each other; however, more information can be found in the official document on coaching competencies (*ICF Team Coaching Competencies*, n.d.). Here is how the competencies could be interpreted in light of this research:

1. **Cultivates trust and safety:** the project manager nurtures a safe and trustful environment for the virtual project team to share openly; the project manager shows support and empathy towards team members and seeks to understand them in their context.
2. **Maintains presence:** the project manager is completely focused on the present moment with the virtual project team; the project manager manages one's own and other people's emotions well.
3. **Listens actively:** the project manager listens to what is said and what is left out by employing active listening skills; the project manager observes team dynamics.
4. **Evokes awareness:** the project manager facilitates the process of formulating virtual project team's insights; the project manager promotes awareness and learning by using various techniques: from open-ended questions, to reframing and challenging.
5. **Facilitates growth:** the project manager helps the virtual project team to transform insights into action points and encourages the team's autonomy.

Table 3 below is a research instrument for this study. It is compiled of two components: team psychological safety topics from Edmondson's paper (1999) and five official ICF coaching competencies (*ICF Team Coaching Competencies*, n.d.) The competencies can be found at the top of Table 3 below, whilst the topics – on the left side. Such an approach allows to systematize specific examples of coaching practices in different situations related to the focus of the study – team psychological safety. As the result of the research, the table will be completed in a structured manner, covering specific examples, i.e. coaching practices, which align with the definitions of the competencies and the topics of psychological safety.

Table 3. *Instrument for research data analysis*

Competency Topic	No. 4: Cultivates trust and safety	No. 5: Maintains presence	No. 6: Listens actively	No. 7: Evokes awareness	No. 8: Facilitates growth
1. Mistakes					
2. Problems					
3. Conflicts					
4. Risks					
5. Help					
6. Respect					
7. Recognition					

Source: compiled by the author

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Following interpretivism as the research philosophy, qualitative methodology was selected. This study is focused on a yet scarcely investigated area, and qualitative research is usually implemented when the research topic is exploratory and in-depth insights of meaning are sought (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.1 Data collection method

Semi-structured interview as a data collection method was chosen due to a few reasons. First, the interview allows a safe space for building a human connection and rapport, very much necessary for an in-depth conversation and sensitive topics, such as psychological safety; even more, as interviews happen in real time, interviewees' answers are expected to be more sincere. Furthermore, the choice for semi-structure is supported by the fact that the author of the thesis already had a framework to start from, i.e. situational statements about psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999, p. 382). However, the semi-structured interview allows participants to freely express themselves and does not disrupt the flow of the conversation. Even more, it helps to explore the yet quite unknown field, by allowing the interviewee to lead the conversation to possibly discover unexpected but highly valuable findings (Yin, 2016).

Twelve interviews were held in October and November of 2023. They lasted from approximately 45 to 60 minutes. All interviews were conducted in an online Microsoft Teams environment in English, as it was the language most comfortable to converse in for all participants. No on-site interviews were held, as all interviewees are dispersed internationally; there was only one Lithuania-based interviewee who also chose a remote conversation and the English language to speak in as it is their working language. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees, and then each transcribed into separate Microsoft Word documents with the help of Tactiq – a real-time transcription tool. However, the researcher meticulously reviewed the transcripts and corrected any errors.

To explain the interview process, every interviewee would receive the structure and guideline questions a day before the interview. Some of the interviewees had themselves asked to provide the question guidelines. At the start of the interview, the researcher would begin building rapport by thanking the interviewee for their participation and using small talk. Then, the author of the research would present herself, reiterate on the confidentiality of the research, explain how the interview findings will be utilized and go through the structure

of the interview; this information can be found in the Interview Protocol (Annex 1). The interview would continue with 3 introductory questions and 7 main questions on the topics denoting psychological safety, which are going to be explained later. At the end of the interview, each interviewee was asked if they had any additional remarks around the topic. They would be thanked for their time and informed about further collaboration: just after the analysis of each transcription, a summary of findings would be communicated to every interviewee through a LinkedIn message, and they would be asked if they could confirm it as truthful and valid. This part was included into the interview process intentionally to support research validity.

The sub-section below provides more thorough information about the research instrument – the semi-structured interview – by diving deeper into the interview questions.

3.2 Research instrument

The semi-structured interview as a research instrument was chosen after a theory-based matrix table was compiled, which was presented in the Literature Review section (sub-section 1.7). The intention of the researcher was to conduct enough interviews to complete the aforementioned matrix table, i.e. create a classification table of recurring coaching practices in different situations associated with psychological safety within the team. Due to the lack of investigations in the area, the semi-structured interview method was deemed most appropriate. The following paragraph will explain each part of the interview more in-depth.

Firstly, after welcoming the interviewee and presenting the author of the thesis herself, the interviewed people would be asked three introductory questions; it was intentional for the researcher to understand the context of the project manager and continue building rapport. However, the author would like to emphasize that these questions, just like the main interview questions, serve more as guidelines for the researcher to structure the interview; thus, these questions would not always be asked precisely in the words written below:

1. Could you please briefly share about your career as a project manager, year-wise and industry-wise?
2. How familiar are you with coaching? To be more precise, how did you learn about coaching practices and how does it integrate in your everyday work?
3. Just to align, before we move to the main interview questions, in your opinion, what is team psychological safety?

After these questions, the sequence of seven topics from the matrix would be presented (Literature Review, sub-section 1.7). The interviewees would always be assured there is no right or wrong answer, that they may skip some questions, and encouraged that they can share how they act and react in different scenarios without trying to theorize if their actions are coaching, teaching or something else; the author of the thesis emphasized she is seeking to observe and listen to the overall experience of the interviewees.

The list of the main and mostly open-ended questions only works as a guide; these interview guidelines can be found in Annex 1. Whenever the author would begin explaining any topic (i.e. read the statement from Edmondson's article on psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999)), the questions about that topic would be asked one-by-one to ensure clarity and simplicity. Additional questions may have been asked that are not in these guiding questions below but were rather relevant while conversing. Also, some questions may have been skipped if the participant had already covered them. Sometimes the questions would be rephrased, if asked by the interviewed people. What is also important to note, is that interviewing probes, such as non-verbal language or phrases like “Would you like to add anything to this?”, would help with eliciting even more comprehensive answers. With the interview being semi-structured, the participants were encouraged to direct the way of the conversation, speak in examples as much as possible, and allow for insightful topics to emerge. All questions center around virtual project teams, so the words “virtual” and “project” are omitted in the questions to be more concise.

The following sub-section will cover the research sampling justification and process.

3.3 Research sample

It was reiterated in the Literature Review section that team coaching in virtual project teams is an emerging research area. Therefore, the author of the master's thesis chose non-probability, specifically, criterion sampling, as the main sampling method. It means that specific criteria were set in advance, which all research candidates must have adhered to, in order to be invited for the interview (Palinkas et al., 2015). Each interviewee must have fulfilled all the criteria below:

- 1) Currently working as a project manager with at least 2 years of experience in project management.
- 2) Currently practicing coaching. The researcher either looked for information about candidates' coaching experience on their LinkedIn profiles or relied on their verbal confirmations. It is significant to note that coaching certifications were not expected,

as long as the candidate would explain the source of knowledge in coaching (self-learning was also accepted) and describe how they implement coaching practices in their everyday work.

- 3) Currently working with a virtual team. The confirmation about remote work would as well be obtained either from the candidate's LinkedIn profile or by asking the candidate directly.

Besides the criterion sampling, snowball sampling was also used. It means that referrals in search of candidates were utilized: participants, usually when asked, would provide recommendations to the researcher (Palinkas et al., 2015). Yet this sampling method was utilized sparingly, mostly due to time pressure or proactive referrals from already interviewed people. Overall, three interviewees out of twelve were selected according to snowball sampling, but they also must have fulfilled the three criteria above.

The research follows qualitative methodology and requires in-depth conversations and highly detailed analysis. After the first five interviews, the author would start observing when the data saturation point was achieved. Reaching the data saturation point would mean that the information heard in the interviews would start repeating significantly and no fresh insights would be found (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The final number of participants was 12 – it was the moment when the information started to repeat significantly, the author of the thesis noted no new crucial findings, and the main themes and trends became clearer.

Before explaining the analysis part, it is important to explain the process of the interviewee selection. The researcher utilized LinkedIn to select and approach candidates for the interview. To niche down candidates of an enormous pool of LinkedIn users, a Boolean string would be used in a search bar: “(project manager) AND coaching AND remote”. If the LinkedIn profile of a candidate would not disclose enough information, they would be asked to clarify: for example, if they work fully remote with virtual teams or if they practice coaching in everyday work. Out of around 150 approached project managers, 12 agreed to participate; they could choose the most suitable time for a Microsoft Teams meeting in the Calendly timetable set by the researcher. Different factors may have influenced such a difference between the number of the approached and the participated: firstly, the researcher received many refusals as people would not fulfill all three criteria. This only confirms that the area of the research is highly new and thus significant to be investigated. Secondly, quite a few candidates did not reply to the message even after one additional invite after a few weeks from the first invitation. This could be most likely explained by the fact that candidates

were unavailable at the time and may have replied already after the research was finished, showed no interest, or are inactive users of LinkedIn.

The final paragraph of this sub-section will present anonymized contextual information of all 12 interviewed professionals, being coded from I-1 to I-12:

Table 4. *Contextual information of interviewees*

No.	Interviewee description
I-1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) 15 years of experience in project management. b) Has managed projects in various industries; now works in a company of e-commerce, continuing with IT project management for the seventh year. c) Has finished an ICF-accredited coaching course, a few other trainings, and is actively using coaching inside and outside of the current company, with the focus on building trust within the virtual team.
I-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) 13-14 years of experience in project management. b) Has mainly worked with IT project virtual teams, and right now is employed in a software consulting company. c) Had a formal coaching training 10 years ago; views coaching as a mindset towards everyday work with people and focuses on empowering team members rather than managing them.
I-3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) More than 10 years of experience in project management. b) Has worked with various projects, from process improvement or business development to digital and process transformation; now is employed in a telecommunications company. c) Had numerous formal coaching trainings throughout their career, and is actively implementing coaching in everyday work, by focusing on emotional intelligence and the growth of the virtual team members’.
I-4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) 2 years of experience in project management. b) Has experience mostly with NGO projects; now is employed in an educational technology company to work with project management. c) Self-learner of coaching who is using coaching as a mindset and practices it in everyday work, focusing mainly on challenging the virtual team and fostering their growth.

I-5	<p>a) 7 years of experience in project management.</p> <p>b) Has mostly worked with IT projects, and right now is an employee of a software consulting company.</p> <p>c) Has learnt coaching in formal trainings and is practicing it in everyday work, with a special focus on emotionally supporting the virtual team and showing empathy.</p>
I-6	<p>a) 5-6 years of experience in project management.</p> <p>b) Has led projects in different industries, from e-commerce to logistics, and right now works at an e-commerce company.</p> <p>c) Has learnt coaching by practice throughout their work career and is mostly focused on empowering their virtual team members.</p>
I-7	<p>a) 5-6 years of experience in project management.</p> <p>b) Has mainly worked in the educational technology industry companies, and now is employed by one.</p> <p>c) Self-learner of coaching and has practiced it actively throughout their career, especially focusing on the emotional wellbeing of the virtual team.</p>
I-8	<p>a) 2-3 years of experience in project management.</p> <p>b) Has mainly worked with IT-related projects; now is an employee of a software development company.</p> <p>c) At the moment of the interview, I-8 was attending an ICF-accredited coaching course; I-8 is practicing coaching in everyday work, especially by using mindful presence and active listening skills in virtual team conversations.</p>
I-9	<p>a) Around 20 years of experience in project management.</p> <p>b) Has worked mostly with IT projects; now is employed at a consulting company, working with IT projects.</p> <p>c) Has learnt coaching throughout their career and is implementing some coaching techniques in everyday work, especially focusing on building a safe space for the virtual team and facilitating the virtual team's conversations.</p>
I-10	<p>a) Around 20 years of experience in project management.</p> <p>b) Has worked with many learning and development projects in the human resources department, and for the last few years shifted to IT projects.</p> <p>c) Learnt coaching whilst working in the human resources department and by practicing; now implements coaching in their everyday work, focusing on</p>

	emotionally supporting and empowering their virtual team.
I-11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) More than 10 years of experience in project management. b) Has worked in various industries, has significant experience in construction, telecommunications and IT project management; now works with IT project virtual teams. c) Certified in business coaching and has been actively practicing coaching throughout their career.
I-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) 9 years of experience in project management. b) Has always worked solely with IT projects. c) Learnt coaching through various Agile certification programs and by actively practicing peer-to-peer coaching; now is continuously self-learning and practicing coaching in everyday work with their virtual team.

Source: compiled by the author

3.4 Analysis of research data

To analyze the data set, a methodological triangulation was applied to this research, because both thematic analysis and, sparingly, content analysis were deemed useful. This slightly more complex approach allows the author to enrich the study and expect more insightful results. Thematic analysis is the first and foremost method utilized in the study; it seeks to find patterns of meaning in a data set (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Such an approach assists in identifying different perspectives of project managers as team coaches and classify project managers' coaching practices in the matrix table. The researcher recognized it as most suitable to fulfill the research aim and objectives of the yet quite unexplored area. Also, the researcher already had means to build the carcass for classification from two frameworks: firstly, Edmondson's seven statements about team's psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999); secondly, ICF coaching competencies with predefined coaching practices under each (*ICF Team Coaching Competencies*, n.d.). The end result of this research is a classification of team coaching practices, and thematic analysis deemed most convenient when working with such a model.

Content analysis, although still being a qualitative method, focuses on the frequency of certain words, phrases and concepts repeated (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). It emerged as an additional approach already during the data analysis phase, when the researcher noticed specific trends of words, such as a pronoun "we", being used in the project manager's

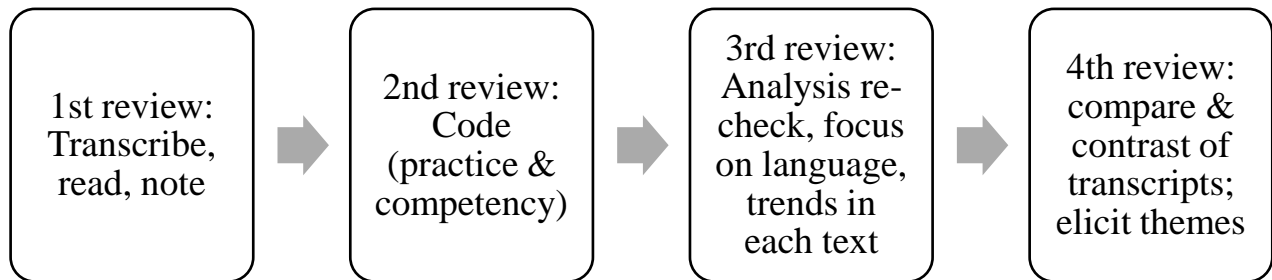
communication within the team to view it as one unit. Although this obviously cannot be categorized as some coaching practice itself, it does complement it. Content analysis was a very minor part of the analysis, yet it helped understand the participants' view about their role as the team coach.

To label different findings, systematize them and thus support validity of the research, coding of data was used; a hybrid (mainly deductive) coding structure was implemented for the thematic analysis. Deductive thematic analysis means that a predetermined coding structure was applied. It is due to the existing theory, i.e. ICF-defined competencies, with specific coaching practices under them. However, the researcher was critical towards a strictly deductive approach, as it may provide a narrow outlook towards the research topic. Thus, to maintain the critical view, the researcher chose a hybrid approach and allowed codes to emerge from the actual process of data analysis. This does not only enrich the study, but also, in the end, provides more detailed insights, compared to often more abstract and high-level predetermined coaching practices of ICF. Overall, there are 56 pre-defined codes within 5 competencies that can be found in the official ICF document (*ICF Team Coaching Competencies, n.d.*). As the codes are pre-determined, not all of them necessarily were found in transcriptions (for example, in Competency No. 6., there is a coaching practice defined as: "Models confident, effective communication and collaboration when working with a co-coach or other experts", as no collaboration with other experts was found in all 12 interviews).

This sub-section will end with an overview of the description of iterative thematic analysis. Overall, four rounds of iterations were implemented: first, transcribing would be done, the text would be read, and primary insights noted. Second, an in-depth analysis would be implemented where a phrase would be highlighted in a particular color to identify a specific coaching competency; then, still looking at the same highlighted phrase, a comment would be added next to it with a code to distinguish a specific coaching practice (or technique – in the thesis, both words are used interchangeably) under that competency. The third review iteration would include reading the same transcript, and checking and questioning the first in-depth analysis; also, the researcher would look more meticulously into the interviewee's language, both verbal and non-verbal. The author would note each participant's overall outlook towards coaching and trends how they work with the team. The fourth iteration was only implemented after finalizing all 12 interviews: during this iteration, main themes and patterns were analyzed in terms of all interviews; the interview transcripts were compared and contrasted with the help of drawing mind maps in Miro, and main similarities and

differences were distinguished. All in all, both individual readings and multiple text reviews were used to obtain important insights for the research aim and objectives.

Figure. *Iterations of empirical data analysis*



Source: compiled by the author

3.5 Research ethics

The author of the thesis followed research ethics in a few ways. Firstly, people's consent to participate in the study and record it was received by LinkedIn messages. It was of utmost importance for the researcher to ensure the safety and confidentiality of each interviewee. Before asking any interview-related questions, every participant would be reminded that they may not answer some questions, if they were not feeling comfortable; however, no such case was recorded. Anonymity was guaranteed by coding interviewees' names. Also, if any other names or sensitive information were disclosed throughout the conversation, it would be coded as well. Even more, every participant would be assured that the interview recording would be deleted immediately after finalizing the transcription. It was guaranteed that the research data (recordings, transcripts, interview notes) would be accessible only to the author of the thesis and not shared, except obligatory anonymized transcriptions, which are added as Annex 2 to the final paper. The researcher would not ask leading questions or influence interviewees to answer in any way that would be beneficial for the researcher. After the interview, each participant would receive a summary of interview insights to check and confirm; this not only helps with the validity of the research, but also serves as a means to show respect towards the participant.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

The following section covers the systematized results of interview data analysis. All seven psychological safety-related topics, presented in the Research Methodology section, were found to have at least two or more defined coaching themes. Those themes include coaching practices implemented by project managers to foster psychological safety within a virtual project team. Each theme is explained in-depth, and examples from interview transcripts are provided to support the findings. The results are also interpreted according to existing theory, if applicable. The research according to which this empirical study is based (Edmondson, 1999) is more than 20 years old; therefore, the interviewees were encouraged to share any additional situations, besides the seven defined topics, where coaching helps to foster psychological safety; however, the interviewees distinguished no additional situations. Finally, at the end of the Results section, a classification of coaching practices is built to fulfill the aim of the thesis.

4.1 Mistakes: *If you make a mistake on this team, it is not held against you.*

Although the interview participants mostly focused on the situations where mistakes are already made, and how they act and react in those situations, two themes could be raised around creating a safe space for the team to even make mistakes.

a) **Encourage mistakes as a way of learning:**

The interviewees showed the importance of shifting team members' mindsets around mistakes. Project managers seek that their teams view mistakes as positive events which accelerate learning, especially when working with new joiners' onboarding. The project managers shared they tend to vocalize this encouragement in a very straightforward manner:

I-5: *“Let's say a person who just got their degree, just joined the company, short time working together and so on. So I would, I would really really expect and encourage all kind of mistakes here...”*

I-11: *“I encourage my team members to make mistakes, because if they make mistakes that means they are trying; if they are trying, they are learning. (...) I say to my team: “Making a mistake is a matter of expertise”.”*

Nevertheless, learning is understood as an inherent part of making mistakes, thus such encouragement does not mean project managers allow mistakes without any responsibility. With practice, naturally, fewer mistakes are expected.

Overall, in terms of team coaching practices, project managers show support and empathy (Competency 4), and they help team members reframe their perspectives around mistakes towards a more positive outlook (Competency 7). In terms of already existing theory, these current findings adhere to Berg & Karlsen (2014) research results. Their interviews with project managers also showed that they support teams making mistakes and view them as a crucial part of people's efforts. It could be concluded that allowing mistakes contributes to more active team members and insightful learning in the team.

b) Express one's own vulnerability:

Another tendency to create a safe space for mistakes is related to the project manager's vulnerability and openness. A few interviewees mentioned they usually share their own weaknesses and failures with the team. Working remotely, it is naturally more difficult to get to know people, their strengths and weaknesses; thus, it becomes even more important to proactively vocalize vulnerability and become more relatable to the team:

I-1: *"I myself admit that I can make a mistake. And I admit this and it's normal, because you live in real life where you can't predict anything."*

I-12: *"I tend to do this first step of showing vulnerability and showing the example that I am kinda... I'm not perfect."*

The team coaching practice used here is about building trust with others by being open and addressing one's own vulnerability (Competency 4). There is no previous significant theory around project manager's vulnerability; therefore, this finding contributes to the novelty of the research in the area and encourages to discuss other angles of project manager's soft skills. Indeed, besides the general soft skills like communication, proactivity and leadership, project managers are expected to share their imperfections and weaknesses. This may help the project team feel safer, more relatable and maybe even more empowered.

Before moving on to situations where project managers act and react to already made mistakes, it can be summarized that project managers create a safe space by encouraging mistakes and learning, and by being vulnerable with the team.

If the practices mentioned above – expressing encouragement and vulnerability – are usually done in public, with the whole team present, there is a very clear tendency to talk in a private virtual environment when a mistake has just happened. It is done to ensure the person feels safe and respected. Therefore, more individual coaching is implemented in more discreet cases. Overall, the most emphasized theme for the Mistakes topic is showing empathy and emotional support towards the team members.

c) Show empathy, support and concern:

The narrative which repeats in almost all interviews is that project managers are emotionally supportive. They are comforting, and choose not to dramatize the situation or play a blame game:

I-2: *“So it's nobody's hurt. (...) So I really try to encourage the person to not to stress about that, not to think that “Ohh, I'm the bad guy, that it's something wrong”.”*

I-9: *“It's very important that you do everything that the people do not feel ashamed if they make mistakes.”*

I-12: *“I never push the person to think about the mistake right away. (...) My first reaction is: “That's OK. Do you have a plan? (...) Do you need help? (...) And sometimes it can be that help is needed, but the person is too stressed to address the other person, and now I would be this facilitator, I would be like: “There is no worries. It's OK. It happens with everyone”.”*

Here, differently from the two themes analyzed above, the focus of project managers is individual coaching. Project managers, as coaches, tend to show support, empathy and concern for individual team members right after the mistake has been made by them (Competency 4); also, project managers seem to detect emotional shifts due to active listening skills (Competency 6) and then deal with strong people's emotions well (Competency 5). They firstly choose to help manage emotions rather than address the mistake itself. These results support previous research on the importance of project manager's emotional intelligence, empathy being one of its components (El Khatib et al., 2021). Although the latter research was not focused on psychological safety, emotional intelligence seems to have twofold benefits: help the team feel safer and overall execute a project more successfully.

It was explained in the Research Methodology section, that, besides the primary thematic analysis, content analysis is used throughout the paper, although sparingly. Regarding content analysis of the Mistakes topic, there was one phrase repeating in almost every participant's answer. The project managers would usually emphasize – at the very beginning or when finishing their answer – that they “never blame” their team members for mistakes. Other variants of the phrase would be “not blaming”, “do not feel ashamed”, etc.:

I-5: *Well, first of all, I'm... I **never blame**. So well, it's too late – the mistake is there already.*

I-4: *First of all solution, then analyzing why it happened, **not blaming** anyone...*

I-9: *It's very important that you do everything that the people **do not feel ashamed** if they make mistakes.*

Such findings do not require a separate theme as they support the theme of **Show empathy, support and concern**. It endorses the already existing findings from the thematic analysis – project managers indeed provide comfort and support to their team members.

However, although emotional support, especially avoiding blame, usually comes first, further steps to tackle mistakes are important as well, and they are more action-oriented.

d) Help create improvement action points:

Project managers described their way of tackling mistakes as a forward-looking approach. They ask various open-ended questions, especially when the team member is ready to reflect on the mistake. It is important to note that this is mostly done in private rather than with the whole team. The person is invited to think about possible improvements to avoid future mistakes. Even more, they are expected to own these action points themselves:

I-1: *“What would you do differently if this would happen again? To your perspective, was it OK or not? What can be done in the future in order to mitigate this? That this won't happen again.”*

I-9: *“It's not like more of a saying what did you, what did you do wrong... (...) So that the feedback is more forward-looking, not like blaming for the mistakes. (...) What went well, what needs to be improved and what action items you can bring.”*

The individual coaching technique used here is about encouraging the person himself/herself to think of improvement ideas, by using open-ended questions and sometimes challenging the person to evoke insights (Competency 7). Also, project managers help to integrate new learnings in colleague's future behaviors, they assist in designing improvement points and encourage their autonomy in implementing these action points (Competency 8). Such a tendency of project managers to focus on future actions rather than the past is very much the nature of coaching, as it was mentioned in the Literature Review section.

e) Summarize lessons learned as a team:

Some interviewees explained that they also involve the whole team later to review lessons learned, because the mistakes may be relatable to others. This also helps to save time, because sometimes the aforementioned private reflective sessions may not be possible with pressing deadlines:

I-3: *“And then you sort of reflect on it towards the end of the project when we are doing project closure. And we have sort of, you know, noting down all the different lessons learned. So because in a project there is often not enough time to do this, like in one-on-ones.”*

I-4: *“I facilitate it. Uh finding out what happened so that to not repeat it afterwards, after some time in this project.”*

Collecting lessons learned is a usual project management activity. However, for this research, it is important how project managers implement it. The interviewees shared that they use a few team coaching practices to facilitate reflections within the whole team. Besides creating and moderating a safe space for honest interaction (Competency 4), project managers partner with team members to summarize learnings from mistakes and thus improve for the future (Competency 8).

f) Use humor to release stress and build relationships:

Even though humor was not identified as a coaching practice in the pre-determined codes of the study, at least a few interviewees mentioned it as a helpful tool to deal with the emotional pressure of mistakes:

I-2: *“Umm, I mean mostly with the humor or like, just making everybody like feel that, OK, nothing bad happened.”*

I-7: *“You know, if I can be joking little bit (...) Did you see the movie “Hangover”? I found this meme some time ago on Instagram. It’s about the one of the persons saying: “I had a bad day” and this other man is saying: “Yes, but did you die?”. If you don’t die, it’s... It’s OK, it’s just a bad day. (...) I just thought it to cheer up my team, I’m sometimes sharing some memes... I’m always a meme person and my team knows that.”*

According to the latest research, this team coaching practice of using humor is helpful in stressful situations; it also supports building interpersonal relationships. It may be used lightly in coaching to help the team members feel more comfortable (Greif et al., 2022). Thus, it can be perceived as an emerged code in the thematic analysis.

To finalize the first topic – Mistakes – the defined practices can be grouped into team coaching and individual coaching practices, as per below:

- 1) Team coaching practices:
 - a) Encourage mistakes as learning; show emotional support, especially empathy (Competency 4); help reframe perspectives around mistakes (Competency 7).
 - b) Address one’s own vulnerability; be open (Competency 4).
 - c) Moderate a safe space for discussion (Competency 4); partner with the team to summarize learnings to improve for the future (Competency 8).
 - d) Use humor to ease the pressure.
- 2) Individual coaching practices:
 - a) Show support once a mistake is made; be empathetic (Competency 4); utilize active listening skills and detect emotional shifts (Competency 6); manage strong people’s emotions well (Competency 5).
 - b) Help create an improvement action plan (use open-ended questions and challenge to evoke insights) (Competency 7); assist in designing the action plan but ensure the individual’s autonomy over it (Competency 8).

4.2 Problems: *Members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues.*

The interview data disclosed how project managers prepare an environment that is safe for the team to bring up tough problems. With that safe and welcoming space present, communication on problems is easier and more effective.

a) Proactively build relationships with team members:

First and foremost, the data suggests that project managers create a safe environment by proactively building personal rapport with the team members. The informal communication, as the interviewees said, supports building trust, and thus people are more open to share their challenges:

I-10: *“I did a lot of things right, if, umm, people are not, you know, afraid of talking openly on issues they have (...). It means to me that I made this rapport with them (...). Like I got to know them a bit. I do it when I just start to work with them.”*

I-9: *“I think one thing is sort of to talk about people without tackling job-related questions, like more overall interests. What interests they are having? And then sort of, you know, later you can try to drill down to the more important questions to get to capture their feeling, whether they feel comfortable raising some issues.”*

Building relationships here means mostly individual coaching techniques, essential for psychological safety: by relationships, it does not mean necessarily friendships and strong emotional bonds. As the project manager shows they are interested in a person’s identity, their way of thinking, values and interests, he/she may feel significantly safer. Project managers create relationships with their team members by getting to know them: asking open-ended questions on what is important for them (Competency 7); also, by understanding and accepting them within their personal context as they are (Competency 4). Finally, if it is a common meeting with the team rather than a personal talk, they act as a team coach to moderate informal team meetings and foster team members’ expression (Competency 4).

Indeed, project manager’s soft skills or, to be more precise, interpersonal relationship skills are considered one of the most crucial traits of a successful project manager (Alvarenga et al., 2019). Understanding that the remote environment poses another challenge for project managers, building rapport is undoubtedly a core asset to a psychologically safe space where one can raise issues.

b) Maintain communication rules to discuss problems:

The aforementioned point is connected to informal discussions that are not related to work. However, it is also significant to learn to work with each other as a team, so that people could share their problems more openly. Overall, people are more likely to bring their

challenges when there are distinct forums for that. Working remotely, it is highly necessary to purposefully dedicate time for such forums and overall have communication agreements. Interviewees explained that recurring internal meetings they facilitate and questions they raise work effectively to elicit productive communication between colleagues on problems:

I-1: *“So we're having our daily syncs, and I am asking if we have any blockers. Do we have any issues, if anything in particular? Where the engineer is not able to fix or solve by him or herself. Then I'm asking, please raise this up as a red flag to me or colleagues or other teams.”*

I-12: *“On Tuesday we (...) only share the problems that you have, so if you don't have any problems, that's good. You're just there to listen, but if you have some issues, this is the safest place to bring them, because that's like basically the agenda why we are on this call.”*

All in all, such behavior can be evaluated as a team coach's practices to partner with the team to maintain set communication agreements; also, they create and hold a safe space for open interaction, encourage everyone's participation and promote effective communication within the team (Competency 4). These findings reiterate Jiang's study on the key project manager's skillset: open and honest team member interaction is inseparable from great project manager's communication skills (Jiang, 2002).

Before moving on to situations where project managers act and react to already raised issues, it can be summarized that project managers create psychological safety by proactively building rapport and ensuring safe and effective communication within the team.

c) Show curiosity to dig to the root cause:

The majority of participants expressed that they demonstrate curiosity at the moment the issue is brought to the table. It is important for them to understand the essence, before moving any further, and this is usually done in private:

I-3: *“So these are the different sort of coaching techniques which I kind of use in this situation, is that the first is to listen to the other person and then after that I would ask questions. The different sort of questions that would be related to understanding the issue.”*

I-12: *“Then I will try to understand why the person is coming from that perspective (...). Maybe the person is not getting enough recognition, maybe not enough responsibility.”*

Maybe something else, you know... And I'm trying to understand... Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? I use that 5 Whys technique (...).”

Curiosity is an inherent part of coaching. As an individual coaching practice, project managers show interest in the situation and the other person’s experience; therefore, they allow the colleague to share more and accelerate the solving of the issue (Competency 5). By using active listening skills, project managers can broaden their understanding of the problem as well (Competency 6). These findings adhere to the study done by Medina & Francis (2015), which confirms that team members value project manager’s involvement and collaboration into problem-solving, or at least showing interest and effort to understand the issue.

d) Empower the person to generate an action plan:

Unless the issue the team member is facing is concerned with the project’s scope, budget or timeline, the interviewees shared they tend to empower their colleague to generate an action plan around the issue, rather than taking this responsibility from them:

I-6: “Normally like umm, I'm asking them to think like what we can do to resolve it. So like what options person can have. If this situation occurred that he is the first person who is dealing with this... Like we can all brainstorm these questions... “Because if you need more attendees for this issue, so we umm request a meeting and we can have a conversation with others on that. But this is on you to decide”.”

I-8: “I try to go through the problem and not try actively solving it, but try to question the person what have they done previously to solve it. Uh, and what are the possibilities of them right now that they see what can help to solve that? Like am I the person? Because that's mainly the core issue usually.... Am I really the person to solve it?”

Project managers promote a sense of ownership over issues by utilizing these individual coaching practices: rather than solving a problem for the team member, they guide the person with some open-ended and closed questions; they invite them to generate possible solutions, challenge them to think critically (for example, when determining the appropriate owner of the issue) (Competency 7). According to Karlsen & Berg (2020), project managers are encouraged to involve the team in solving problems. It may bring a sense of

psychological ownership which is usually very motivating for team members; this also supports team member inclusion.

e) Promote autonomy by acknowledging person's skills:

Although project managers do often help team members elicit ideas on how to move forward, the most significant theme around tackling issues is acknowledging people's autonomy. Almost all interviewees explained that, if the issue does not relate to usual project manager's responsibilities and are associated more with the everyday work of the team member, they would not interfere in solving it. From a coaching perspective, project managers show trust in their team members. They view them as professionals and ensure full control over the issue:

I-10: *"I say: "You should work on it (...), because this is your area of responsibility." I know they are the professionals in their field. "I can help you, I can guide you with some coaching questions. But this is your field and I'm sure you can take care of it"."*

I-11: *"I enforce him that he has the result on his own. I'm supporting him and I normally tell him that this is a technical matter: "You are the owner of the technical matter. I am not, so I can help you and guide you, but you have to deal with technical issues."*

Working in a virtual team, trust in the team as a group of professionals is crucial. Coaching here works as an antidote for micromanagement. Two individual coaching practices can be noticed in such behavior of project managers: they recognize and respect people's skills and talents (Competency 4) and acknowledge their autonomy around their actions (Competency 8). Choi & Cho (2019) research supports these current findings by addressing the importance of autonomy in the team: it does not only show trust, but it is usually also related to higher motivation and better performance. However, it is worthwhile for the author of this thesis to highlight that the interviewees of this study explained they help, support and teach newcomers and junior-level employees significantly more, and they expect less autonomy from them in the beginning. Thus, the theme of coaching for autonomy is more appropriate for experienced team members.

Content analysis helped to confirm how important team members' autonomy for project managers is. Throughout the interviewees, project managers would repeat the words like "independence" and "ownership" frequently when speaking about problems:

I-1: “Giving them this... **Independence** possibilities, so that they can act independently. They can be trusted, and they can feel that.”

I-11: “So giving him like the **ownership**, and I enforce him that he has the result on his own.

This finding supports the theme of **Promote autonomy by acknowledging person’s skills**. The participants share such a view not only to help draw boundaries around roles, but also to make the team members feel more in control, accountable and contributing. According to Clark (2020) and his four stages on psychological safety, contribution with autonomy is one of the more mature stages of psychological safety.

In conclusion, the practices of the second topic – Problem – can be grouped into team coaching and individual coaching practices, as per below:

- 1) Team coaching:
 - a) Moderate informal team meetings and foster team members’ expression (Competency 4).
 - b) Create and maintain a safe space for open team interaction; encourage participation and promote effective communication (Competency 4).
- 2) Individual coaching:
 - a) Ask open-ended questions on what is important for team members (Competency 7); understand and accept them within their personal context (Competency 4).
 - b) Show curiosity to understand the essence of the problem (Competency 5); utilize active listening skills (Competency 6).
 - c) Guide individuals with open-ended and closed questions to create and own an action plan; challenge to think critically (Competency 7).
 - d) Recognize and respect people’s skills and talents (Competency 4); acknowledge their autonomy (Competency 8).

4.3 Conflicts: *People on this team do not reject others for being different.*

Differing opinions in the team, or even conflicts, are a natural part of healthy team dynamics. However, to help the team navigate miscommunication or other disagreements, project managers often implement various coaching techniques. Overall, active listening and observation skills are the first and foremost ones.

a) Listen actively and observe team dynamics:

Before any conflict develops and the team needs moderation, project managers prioritize active listening skills. To be more precise, the majority of participants shared they attentively observe team dynamics to notice whether there are any changes to the atmosphere:

I-3: *“If I sense that there is a need for those two persons to first talk to each other and if I sense that the overall team environment is getting a bit impacted by that conflict, then (...) I would intervene.”*

I-2: *“I mean, one person, she really had some very specific personality. So, I mean, she is not, let's say, average person in terms of emotional dimensions and so on. And her reactions are typically unexpected for most of the people. Other people's reactions on her behavior mostly are like negative or like frustrated and so on.”*

The examples of team coaching above show that it is crucial to use active listening skills to notice team members' impact on each other, and how the collective energy changes (Competency 6); potential conflicts then can be identified and moderated, when necessary. As non-verbal cues are especially difficult to grasp in a remote setting, project managers need to be very much focused on developing and maintaining active listening skills. Other studies, such as Fisher (2011) and (Liikamaa, 2015), also noted the significance of active listening in project manager's skillset. Although listening may seem like a passive activity, listening skillset helps immensely to ensure healthy team dynamics which project managers safeguard. Even more, the results of this study agree with Karlsen & Berg (2020) insights on project manager's interference into the conflict: if the conflict is manageable by the conflict parties and does not impact the team atmosphere heavily, project managers empower their team members with autonomy to manage the conflict themselves.

b) Create a safe space for difficult team interactions:

The moderation of conflicts starts with building a safe space for disagreeing parties. In a remote setting, it usually means private online calls. The project managers shared they usually even have individual online meetings with each person involved, before moving onto a joined call. Such a preparation helps to understand each party of the conflict and makes the facilitation of the conflict easier. Throughout these meetings, all parties are invited to share openly:

I-5: *“So I tried talking to both of them... Like: “Let's see what's your position.” So I talked with each of them individually. Then we sat together. To try to solve situation... It turned out they completely miscommunicated.”*

I-9: *“You bring together those people and then you try to sort of agree on what would be the best way for both parties. But it's very important to do some homework separately with those people, hear their stories. So that during the meeting with all parties, there is no like surprises and nobody's escalating something and so on.”*

All in all, participants highlighted a few aspects of coaching practices. The importance of holding a safe space for both private and common meetings, encouraging each party's participation and facilitating their expression of thoughts and feelings (Competency 4). Finally, they show concern for involved team members (Competency 4). All these coaching practices help to build a safe space for a conflict. Burrows' (2020) paper agrees with the findings: the researcher also signifies the importance of project manager ensuring all parties feel safe and participate actively in discussions on the conflict.

c) Understand each party in the conflict, never taking sides:

Another very noteworthy theme around conflicts is staying neutral. To be more precise, almost all project managers vocalized they would show interest in helping the team manage the conflict but would never take sides. This would be done by leading the conversation, allowing equal space for everyone to present one's position, and to see benefits in each other's position:

I-6: *“I don't like to take one or another position. Like if I take one position that means that like another one is wrong. So I like to see that all the points matter, like... Showing both advantages and disadvantages of both sides.”*

I-8: *“What I did first was to sit down individually with them. And I think I did two rounds of that, if I remember correctly. At first I sat down with both of them individually just to understand the story. What happened. Not trying to explain one another to one another, but just tell their part, and for me to listen.”*

Project managers, as team coaches, prioritize understanding the context of each party in the conflict (Competency 6) and accepting each position as worthwhile (Competency 4). According to the interviewees, acting differently would undermine one team member's

efforts and feelings and promote bias, which would work counter-productively when resolving conflicts. Even more, project managers work well with sometimes strong team members' emotions and reactions, especially when the conflict is interpersonal rather than task-related (Competency 5).

d) Encourage the team to share and communicate more effectively:

As virtual communication format may interfere with team members being present in the meetings, the interviewees emphasized they often help the team to ensure effective communication. When not needed, though, they would step out from discussion and allow the team members to own the dialogue:

I-4: *“So the people felt free to say what is important for them. Like: “For me, it is important that other teammates do that and that...” So we said it loud, so that all teammates know what's important for us. I told them: “Because if you don't tell, I don't know... I assume. I use my own experience of how I act in the situation, I assume about you”.*”

I-11: *“They open that discussion for 5 to 10 minutes. I give them the chance to show their position for each other and, at the end, they say: “OK, let's discuss that tomorrow, because we need more information”.*”

There are also various coaching practices project managers utilize to facilitate conflicts – from insightful open-ended questions to reframing perspectives:

I-12: *“And if I come to this that this is like personal – someone doesn't like someone. Then I'll try to with this person to look at this other person. Like: “What do you think this person brings to our team? What do you value? What is hard for you to work with?” And maybe we can identify a few things that are super triggering.”*

I-11: *“Because if you handle properly you will have the psychological safety. I talk with them so they know that we are discussing a topic – then we are not discussing people. So they feel safer. It's not because you are taking something personally with me; it is about the topic, not the people.”*

The coaching practices implemented to facilitate team communication during conflicts are quite varied. To start with, as team coaches, project managers promote effective communication within the team (Competency 4), moving in and out of the team's dialogue as

appropriate (Competency 5). Also, as individual coaches, project managers show interest in the way team members are thinking and feeling (Competency 7), and they ask questions to explore beyond team members' current thinking (Competency 7). Project managers also support team members in reframing their perspectives (Competency 7). The findings of this study complement Burrows' (2020) paper about crucial project manager's role in team conflicts. Project manager's intervention into the team dialogue can significantly support and strengthen team dynamics, as long as it is done in a timely manner and each party of the conflict is respected. On the other hand, the paper of Karlsen & Berg (2020) agrees with the finding on project manager's interference: if the conflict is manageable, and the whole team is not significantly impacted, project managers would not move into the dialogue and empower the conflict parties to manage it themselves.

e) **Involve the team to resolve and close the conflict:**

Project managers seem to be highly present and active in team conflicts. However, they only lead and guide through it but do not take the responsibility to resolve and close – similarly to the Problems topic. The action points and lessons learned from the disagreement are most often elicited from the team, for them to feel sense of accomplishment and accountability:

I-3: *“And if it's a small thing, if we wanna go from A to C, should we go via B or should we go via, you know, another route? So in those kind of situations, (...) I would tell them why don't they discuss this and, you know, come back to me by day X... And that day I'd ask what they decided.”*

I-10: *“Just saying: “Hey, uh, I know that your opinion on that is this and your opinion is this, but OK, for now, for this task or for this project, for project safety... What can be a... The combined opinion on the point?”*

Although the project manager partners with the team to resolve internal conflicts (Competency 4), they usually invite the team to generate ideas of how to move forward and close it by themselves (Competency 7). They acknowledge the ownership of the team, so that resolving the conflict is their achievement (Competency 8). Just like Fisher explained, project managers should ensure there is a “collaborative approach” (Fisher, 2011, p. 996) towards team conflicts.

In summary, the practices of the third topic – Conflicts – can be grouped into team coaching and individual coaching practices, as per below:

1) Team coaching:

- a) Use active listening skills to notice team members' impact on each other and observe collective energy changes (Competency 6).
- b) Create a safe space for difficult team interaction and show concern to each involved party (Competency 4); encourage each party's participation and facilitate their expression of thoughts and feelings (Competency 4).
- c) Seek to understand the context of each party (Competency 6); accept each position as valuable (Competency 4); manage strong team members' emotions well (Competency 5).
- d) Promote effective communication within the team (Competency 4); move in and out of the team's dialogue as appropriate (Competency 5).
- e) Partner with the team to resolve an internal conflict (Competency 4); invite the team to generate ideas of how to move forward (Competency 7); acknowledge the ownership of the team, so that resolving the conflict is their achievement (Competency 8).

2) Individual coaching:

- a) Show interest in how team members are thinking and feeling (Competency 7); ask questions to explore beyond team members' current thinking (Competency 7); support them in reframing their perspectives (Competency 7).
- b) At the start, listen and seek to understand each conflict party's side (Competency 6).

4.4. Risks: *It is safe to take a risk on this team.*

Risks in this study mean being innovative and experimenting, as it was explained in the Literature Review section. The interviewees shared they have quite an important and, mostly, supportive role in this case.

a) Show trust and acknowledge skills:

One of the most important aspects when a team member is taking a risk is to vocalize the acknowledgment of their skills and talents. Project managers mentioned numerous times that it is of utmost importance to show the team member's value and recognize their

strengths. Then, they seem to be more confident and more likely to experiment and challenge some status quo. Even more, praising innovators in the team works as an encouragement to other team members, and project managers tend to find creative ways to do that in the remote setting:

I-11: *“I say: “You have to (...) own what you do and what you know, because you have very good knowledge. You are smart. You are wise and you know what to do”.*”

I-9: *“Once in quarter I usually sort of create some (...) like titles for the employees like... Let's say “Innovator” or “Hidden Star” for extra mile they took.”*

In terms of coaching practices, project managers, as team coaches, show confidence when dealing with uncertainty that risks inherently bring (Competency 5). Even more, they build a safe environment for experimenting as they respect and acknowledge team member's skills, talents and abilities – they do it both publicly and privately (Competency 4). This demonstrated trust acts as an accelerator, motivating team members to strive for innovation. The findings support the research of Garro-Abarca et al. (2021) on virtual teams, as it also signifies trust as one of the main assets for better performance. Even more, Stone (2006) highlights how crucial can public acknowledgment of skills be: it works as encouragement for other team members to be creative, maintain critical thinking and bring new innovations into the team.

b) Provide emotional support:

According to the research participants, they understand taking risks may be difficult or even scary. When working remotely, it can become an even more isolating and demanding experience. Thus, project managers provide support both privately and publicly in virtual meetings:

I-7: *“I always encourage the person and emphasize that it is just a new experience. And it is OK to not know exactly and make mistakes. I say that they have my back whenever.”*

I-3: *“I would then (...) have that pep talk with the team members. Uh. Especially when I sense that, uh, the pressure is mounting up, especially with regards to delivery timelines and all of that.”*

I-4: *“I facilitate the conversation in order to get them feel better (...), and to get the feeling that we will overcome this together.”*

Project managers tend to show concern, empathy and overall emotional support within the whole team or individually (Competency 4). The results follow already existing research on risks: in order to encourage people take risks, they should be supported and their efforts should be noticed, even if they fail or do not succeed exactly as planned (Stone, 2006).

To conclude, the practices of the fourth topic – Risks – can be grouped into team coaching and individual coaching practices, as per below:

- 1) Team coaching:
 - a) Show confidence when dealing with uncertainty (Competency 5).
 - b) Build a safe environment for experimenting; respect and acknowledge team members' skills, talents and abilities (Competency 4).
 - c) Show concern and empathy (Competency 4).
- 2) Individual coaching:
 - a) Build a safe environment for experimenting; respect and acknowledge team member's skills, talents and abilities (Competency 4).
 - b) Show concern and empathy (Competency 4).

4.5 Help: *It is not difficult to ask other members of this team for help.*

The fifth topic covers help and collaboration within the team. The results show great similarity to the Problems topic, yet the focus is more on building a collaborative team, and the project manager's role in it.

a) Support building relationships and collaboration:

Just like in the Problems section, creating interpersonal relationships fosters a helpful atmosphere in the team. Project managers usually set the scene to ensure collaboration between team members. The participants shared that they support building relationships by organizing informal virtual meetings, setting the scene for them, and sometimes facilitating the conversations, especially in the very beginning of the project. It helps to get everyone familiar with each other, find similar interests and thus even increase the likelihood of collaboration:

I-2: *“What I normally see in the beginning of every project, is that people are... They want to collaborate... But they have to be facilitated. So basically, they will not talk to each*

other and will not set up a call or a meeting. So yeah, in this case, I mostly do it myself, but only in the very beginning of that project.”

I-8: “We sometimes also would have online meetings that are for developers. So it's not about specific problems in the project or processes in the project, but more about like for them to talk about their interests. (...) And then of course, during these meetings, specifically in the beginning of the project, I would do like this ice breaker or (...) game where they just can a little bit relax, maybe say something about themselves, we can discuss someone else's hobbies; just to have more context of themselves.”

I-9: “These informal social meetings we have are helping when people get to know each other. And they can talk. Not like on job-related topics. There are two people who like playing basketball. (...) Two people playing the same computer games or table games and they basically... It's also motivating for them to cooperate with each other.”

Project managers, as team coaches, ask the team open-ended questions to understand what is important for them and what they truly care about (Competency 7). They also seek to understand and accept their colleagues within their personal context (Competency 4). Finally, they encourage everyone to actively participate in informal discussion (Competency 4). However, although the practices utilized here are very similar to the Problems topic, here the project manager is a bit more passive, i.e. allowing the space for team members to get to know each other, creating an environment for their familiarization and new connections which may accelerate cooperation. Thus, there are no individual coaching practices identified for this theme. With regards to existing research, positive emotions may help individuals build better connections, stay optimistic and even become more resilient (Karlsen & Berg, 2020).

It is highly important to note that most of the interviewees mentioned the importance of meeting live at least rarely; for example, during the kick-off of the project. Although they are used to working with remote teams, they viewed the benefits of team buildings as significant. The on-site team building was evaluated as more worthwhile than online team building activities:

I-5: “So we usually try to get at least the core part of the team, if not the whole team, into one place and do the initiation phase. Talk about the requirements and so on. Then go for dinner, that keeps us all together in one room. Or at least in one office, for a week or two, especially if it's an absolutely new team where people don't know about each other. And so

on. If all that is not possible, I know there are practices of like having online games. I'm not a big fan of it.”

I-8: “Of course, we do team buildings. So, in my opinion, it's mandatory for people, if it's possible, to meet in-person. At least once every half a year, especially if it's like in the beginning of the project, because people tend to not use cameras.”

Overall, this shows that team collaboration may be impacted negatively by complete team virtuality, if there are no live meetings whatsoever. Bond-Barnard et al. (2018) studied the importance of physical proximity of the team members, and drew a conclusion that there is a positive relationship between being close to each other and collaboration.

b) Create and maintain team communication rules and norms:

Besides building interpersonal relationships outside of work topics, it is crucial that the team builds a unified vision on how the team communicates. In other words, it is important to create agreements or team communication rules. Quite a few project managers shared their teams have recurring meetings to share any requests for help, ask questions, or they plan such sessions at specific project stages, especially in the very beginning. Already having such forums, and setting cadence for them, brings more clarity and safety for the team. Here, project managers act as facilitators, moderating the meetings and allowing to engage in a safe and honest team member interaction:

I-12: “I believe, on Thursday or Friday, we have agreed to have meeting like... I have like in Jira the plan, like basically the whole scope for the sprint¹, and we are going item by item. So on one item, usually it's not just one person working, but a lot of people working, you know. (...) We go from the most important to the least important, and, as we move, if someone is not doing something within time, which is OK, because things happen, the other people that know that they are not that, umm, (...) occupied at the moment, they would offer help.”

I-6: “So like when it's a new project, I am making sure the team has specific meetings, so that the product manager can go into depths with description to answer all the questions; like then we can see like if everyone understands what's going on, like what we will be building. If the team says (...) “we need to consult something that we don't understand”, so like they have enough opportunities to voice out their questions.”

¹ Sprint is usually a one- or a few-week iteration according to one of the most popular agile frameworks called “Scrum”; during it, a particular delivery goal is set for the team.

Project managers follow a few team coaching practices here: they create and maintain a safe space for team member interaction, and they also encourage everyone's participation to ensure transparent and effective communication within the team. Even more, they partner with the team to create and maintain team rules and norms (Competency 4). In accordance with the paper of Verburg et al. (2013), having clear team communication rules makes it easier to ensure the team collaborates and people are helping each other.

To conclude, in the fifth – Help – topic the focus is on the team and thus the project manager is more in the background, moderating and facilitating communication. The practices of the Help topic are only team coaching practices, with no individual coaching techniques distinguished:

- a) Ask open-ended questions to understand what is important and what the team cares about outside work (Competency 7); seek to understand and accept them within their personal context (Competency 4); encourage everyone to participate in informal discussions (Competency 4).
- b) Create and maintain a safe space for team member interaction; encourage everyone's participation to ensure effective communication within the team; partner with the team to create and maintain team rules and norms (Competency 4).

4.6 Respect: *No one on this team would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts.*

One of the last topics in the empirical research focuses on ensuring respect within the team. Although most of the interviewees explained it usually comes naturally and there are no significant challenges with establishing and maintaining a respectful environment in the team, they still have a few coaching tools used to build and ensure respect.

a) Ensure inclusion:

One of the important findings in this theme is for the project managers to always provide space for each team member to vocalize their opinion. Everyone's ideas are to be taken into account. To ensure that in a virtual work environment, project managers use particular meeting formats, set inclusive agenda and adhere to people's communication preferences:

I-4: *“And I try to make agenda for the meeting, such that I know that each of the teammates will have an opportunity to say something... Like providing the space for them or kind of asking, even asking them to participate so that they see their place in this.”*

I-3: *“Especially when I see that somebody would have said something about it, but they haven't, then I would just call for their opinion in the meeting. And if that was not possible, then I would just call them back later. Ohh and talk to them about it and see if they had to say anything about it.”*

Besides ensuring effective and inclusive communication within the team and allowing everyone to contribute to the meeting (Competency 4), project managers, as team coaches, tend to observe team dynamics very well. They notice emotions, non-verbal cues such as willingness but inability to speak up, thus they adapt to team members' communication preferences (Competency 6). As per research, to ensure inclusivity, it is significant to adapt to people's communication preferences (Seshadri & Elangovan, 2019).

b) Assist in creating team rules:

A few project managers also highlighted that they help their project teams define internal communication agreements. The purpose of such agreements is not only to work more effectively together as a team, but also to consider how team members could feel safer and respected. Project managers observe when there is a need to create some rules or update them:

I-5: *“So I remember the case when we were talking and then somebody tried to talk about the person who was not there. I stopped them immediately because that's not what we do. (...) So if you can say that same thing face-to-face to the person, OK, that's fine. Then we can argue about it. But if we're sitting here and just speaking behind someone's back, that's not what we want to do, and, uhh, we agree all together with the team about it.”*

Project managers here utilize a few different team coaching techniques. It is again the active listening and, specifically, observation skills of the collective team energy that are crucial for project managers (Competency 6). They encourage the team to reflect on their interaction (Competency 5). Also, they partner together with the team to set and maintain team rules (Competency 4).

c) Promote team identity:

Project managers, acting as leaders, tend to remind the team what their north star is, i.e. what they are striving for as a team. Team identity topic was highlighted by most of the interviewees: they claimed to repeat the importance of it throughout the project, and especially once their team members would start veering away from a team mentality, diminish each other's effort or act in any way that poses a threat to healthy team dynamics:

I-11: *“So the way you just spoke with him on the last conversation, I don't think that it's creating bridges – that's breaking bridges, and that's not the way that we work. We are a small team. We need to be cohesive and we need to be a team work. We are not just people working together. We are team work.”*

I-8: *“For everyone to remember that they're working on the same thing. They're not in any way working against each other and they're working for the same goal. (...) There are varieties of goals that can be set, but for everyone to understand that they're in the same boat. (...) When you're in the same boat, well... Of course, one can be a captain, but if that captain is the only one rowing or just, you know, shouting, the boat is still not moving.”*

Project managers here act as team coaches: they seek to help team members view the team as a single entity with a common identity (Competency 4).

To conclude the sixth – Respect – topic, overall, as per the literature review, most project managers in the research showed that they are more relationship-oriented and not task-oriented specialists. They focus on ensuring respect within the team (Rajbhandar et al., 2016, as cited in Henkel et al., 2019). Only team coaching practices, no individual, were distinguished under this topic:

- a) Ensure effective communication within the team; allow everyone to contribute to the meeting (Competency 4); observe team dynamic and notice emotions and other non-verbal cues (Competency 6).
- b) Utilize observation skills of the collective team energy (Competency 6); encourage the team to reflect on their interaction (Competency 5); partner together with the team to set and maintain team rules (Competency 4).
- c) Help team members view the team as a single entity with a common identity (Competency 4).

4.7 Recognition: *Working with members of this team, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilized.*

The final topic explored in the interviews covers recognition and team members' acknowledgment. It was already mentioned throughout different topics – Problems and Risks – as an important part of sustaining team psychological safety. However, as it stands as a separate topic, it was analyzed more in-depth how project managers actually show recognition of their team members, while working remotely.

a) Celebrate with the team:

Official coaching practices indeed include celebrating as a coaching practice. As the research results show, it is of high importance not only to notice success but also vocalize it, reflect on it and overall make the achievement a milestone rather than another day at work. Project managers shared they not only celebrate the closing of the project with the team, as usual, but also tend to honor and recognize smaller milestones, like managing complex situations within the team:

I-4: *“It’s usually my intuition which helps me to provide the best questions. And it’s again also asking for help in the team. So they also provide their questions and together we dive in that together. So that we have found yeah, the solution together, it’s not like my research and I found out, but we did it together. (...) It’s time consuming, yes, but it’s usually very good result and... So we can celebrate in the team, like dedicate some time to really see how good work we did together..”*

I-3: *“If somebody has done well and all of that, so uh I try to, you know, do the small celebrations of small milestones during the course of the project, which kind of helps keep the team motivated and engaged.”*

The team coaching technique used here is celebrating team members' progress and success (Competency 8). El Khatib et al. (2021) reiterates the importance that project managers as leaders notice and proactively celebrate team progress; it is crucial for the team to experience the milestones, recharge and motivate themselves for further challenges.

b) Regularly acknowledge team members' efforts, even failures:

The author of the thesis already shared quite a few examples of how recognition and acknowledgement are expressed by project managers within remote teams, specifically in the Problems and Risks sections. Under this theme, though, the researcher would like to focus on a trend project managers follow quite often. It was found that they tend recognize efforts even when a team member has failed or not succeeded as expected:

I-10: *“So even if the person failed, the project failed and someone failed with the specific task... Still, there is something that I can find good. Maybe he's a good communicator and or he helped the colleague to solve another thing.”*

I-12: *“No person can be perfect 100% every day. So sometimes we do have bad days and sometimes you know that someone is struggling or something like that. And in that case I also would go to the person and recognize the effort, because I think it's important. I would say: “You are doing great job despite the result, you are putting all of the efforts. I see it and I value it. I'm thankful for it”.”*

According to the interviewees, making failures or challenges meaningful shows empathy and understanding. Even more, it confirms the importance of overall efforts, and reminds the team members of their value. Project managers seek to shift the focus from the difficulties to sincere endeavors and recognize their importance. All in all, project managers frequently utilize the individual coaching practice of acknowledging team member's skills, efforts and talents, which also acts as support (Competency 4).

To conclude the last topic – Recognition – it is quite difficult to analyze it in isolation from other topics. As the results showed, acknowledgement is usually integrated in various work-related situations as a means to foster psychological safety within the team:

- 1) Team coaching:
 - a) Celebrate team members' progress and success (Competency 8).
- 2) Individual coaching:
 - a) Acknowledge team member's skills, efforts and talents (Competency 4).

The majority of defined coaching practices adhere to the study of Clark (2020) on the four psychological safety stages. This analysis showed that psychological safety by no means should not only ensure people's inclusion in the team; it should also ascertain the possibilities to learn, contribute to the team's results and, finally, even challenge others. The sequence, of

course, is important – when there is a safe space to communicate and the person feels included and important, only then they can learn, contribute and challenge the status quo.

One of the major content analysis findings does not adhere to any particular topic above but rather encompasses most of them. Almost all participants heavily used the pronoun “we” whenever quoting how they speak to their project teams. Although the exact numbers of the pronoun “we” used in all interviews was not counted, because the content analysis was not the main focus of the study, the researcher thought it could be described as another interesting means to promote team identity. Here are a few examples:

I-6: “But like normally we need to know like, OK, what happened, what we can do to resolve it and like how we can prevent it in the future.”

I-11: “OK what we have to do – we have to try to get the best of each other. That means if you have the knowledge, let's bring to the every other meeting we have on the week ...”

I-3: “I keep sort of repeating of why we are doing this project, what is the end goal for us, what is the, you know, strategic impact.”

Using the pronoun “we”, rather than the isolating two – “I” and “you” – confirms the project manager’s view on a team as a unified asset. Not only do they themselves feel part of the team, but they seek to encourage and motivate the team to work more collaboratively and feel more confident when facing challenges (Competency 4).

Classification of coaching practices can be found below. The results show there was a substantial number of team coaching practices described, but there were a few individual coaching techniques as well. The focus of this study is team coaching. As explained, the choice of the type of coaching depends on the sensitivity of the situation and discretion the situation requires. Therefore, in the tables below, the practices are distinguished: starting with the main results – team coaching – and, later, individual coaching practices. Both results on team coaching and individual coaching practices are split into two tables (overall – four tables) to organize information better due to a high volume of information.

Table 5a. *Completed research instrument – team coaching practices (1)*

Competency Topic	No. 4: Cultivates trust and safety	No. 5: Maintains presence
1. Mistakes²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Encourage the team to make mistakes and learn; show support and empathy. b) Be open about one's own vulnerability. c) Moderate a safe space to discuss lessons learned. 	
2. Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Moderate informal team meetings to get to know each other. b) Foster team members' expression. c) Partner with the team to maintain set communication agreements. d) Moderate a safe space for discussions on problems. e) Encourage everyone's participation. f) Promote effective communication within the team. 	
3. Conflicts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Create a safe space for difficult team interaction. b) Show concern to each involved party. c) Encourage each party's participation. d) Facilitate the expression of their thoughts and feelings. e) Accept each position as valuable. f) Promote effective communication within the team. g) Partner with the team to resolve an internal conflict. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Manage strong team members' emotions well. b) Move in and out of the team's dialogue as appropriate.
4. Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Respect and acknowledge team member's skills, talents and abilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Show confidence when dealing with uncertainty.

² Additionally, one code emerged during analysis of the Mistakes topic: it is usage of light **humor** as a team coaching technique to calm the atmosphere.

	b) Show concern and empathy.	
5. Help	<p>a) Seek to understand and accept them within their personal context.</p> <p>b) Encourage everyone to actively participate in informal discussions getting to know each other.</p> <p>c) Create and maintain a safe space for team member interaction.</p> <p>d) Encourage everyone's participation.</p> <p>e) Partner with the team to create and maintain team rules and norms.</p>	
6. Respect	<p>a) Ensure inclusive communication within the team.</p> <p>b) Allow everyone to contribute to the meeting.</p> <p>c) Help team members view the team as a single entity with a common identity.</p>	a) Encourage the team to reflect on their interaction.
7. Recognition		

Source: compiled by the author

Table 5b. Completed research instrument – *team coaching practices* (2)

Competency Topic	No. 6: Listens actively	No. 7: Evokes awareness	No. 8: Facilitates growth
1. Mistakes		a) Help reframe team's perspective around mistakes.	a) Help summarize learnings as an improvement plan for the future.
2. Problems			
3. Conflicts	<p>a) Actively listen to notice collective energy changes.</p> <p>b) Seek to understand the context of each party in the conflict.</p>	a) Invite the team to generate ideas of how to move forward.	a) Acknowledge the ownership of the team (resolving the conflict is their achievement).
4. Risks			

5. Help		a) Ask open-ended questions to understand what is important and what the team cares about outside work.	
6. Respect	a) Notice emotions and other non-verbal cues. b) Utilize observation skills of the collective team energy. c) Partner together with the team to set and maintain team rules.		
7. Recognition			a) Celebrate team members' progress and success.

Source: compiled by the author

As the study focuses on a sensitive topic – psychological safety – quite a few coaching practices implemented by project managers are individual. Due to sensitive or more discreet situations, project managers may choose private conversation. The author decided to separate them from the main – team coaching – results. Compared to team coaching, more individual coaching practices were implemented under Competency 7, meaning that project managers would choose to apply techniques to evoke awareness, work with the mindset and shifting perspectives more in private than in a group:

Table 6a. Completed research instrument – *individual coaching practices* (1)

Competency Topic	No. 4: Cultivates trust and safety	No. 5: Maintains presence
1. Mistakes	a) Show support, empathy and concern for an individual right after the mistake has been made.	a) Deal with strong people's emotions well.

2. Problems	a) Understand and accept them within their personal context as they are. b) Recognize and respect people's skills and talents.	a) Show interest in the situation and person's experience; allow to share more and accelerate the solving of the issue.
3. Conflicts		
4. Risks	a) Build a safe environment for experimenting: respect and acknowledge team member's skills, talents and abilities. b) Show concern and empathy.	
5. Help		
6. Respect		
7. Recognition	a) Acknowledge team member's skills, efforts and talents.	

Source: compiled by the author

Table 6b. Completed research instrument – *individual coaching practices* (2)

Competency Topic	No. 6: Listens actively	No. 7: Evokes awareness	No. 8: Facilitates growth
1. Mistakes	a) Detect emotional shifts due to active listening skills.	a) Use open-ended questions and challenge the person to evoke insights about improvement.	a) Help integrate new learnings in colleague's future behaviors; assist in designing improvement action points and encourage their autonomy in implementing them.
2. Problems	a) Use active listening skills to broaden understanding of the problem.	a) Create relationships with team members by getting to know them: ask open-ended questions about what is important for them. b) Rather than solving a problem for the team member, guide the person with open-ended and closed questions; invite to generate	a) Acknowledge their autonomy around their actions.

		possible solutions, challenge to think critically.	
3. Conflicts	a) Listen in and understand each conflict party's side; hold a safe private space with individuals.	a) Show interest in the way team members are thinking and feeling. b) Ask questions to explore beyond team members' current thinking. c) Support team members in reframing their perspectives.	
4. Risks			
5. Help			
6. Respect			
7. Recognition			

Source: compiled by the author

5. CONCLUSIONS

The aim of the thesis was to explore and develop a classification of project managers' coaching practices; the aim addresses the nurture of psychological safety in virtual teams according to the coaching competencies developed by International Coaching Federation (ICF). The research question sought to identify how project managers can promote psychological safety in virtual teams. Following this aim and research questions, four objectives were raised; the results of the objectives will be described below:

- 1) Critical literature review helped to clarify the scope of the paper, i.e. distinguish coaching from other professional help modalities and other team interventions. Moreover, the literature overview revealed there is a significant gap in team coaching research, compared to individual coaching. Although there has already been a clear understanding that psychological safety is a crucial asset in any team, the research was lacking insights from the virtual team's perspective. Existing research identified project managers as highly influential leaders in the team, whose skillset may impact both team motivation and overall success in the team. The identified knowledge gap – missing classification of coaching practices for project managers in virtual teams – acted as a basis for the qualitative research in this paper. This question was investigated by utilizing seven psychological safety related topics, defined by Edmondson (1999).
- 2) The semi-structured interview method was used to distinguish which competencies are prevailing in virtual project team coaching according to ICF-defined coaching competencies. It was found that Competency 4 – Cultivates trust and safety – was the most prevailing in the study, but this competency alone was deemed insufficient to foster psychological safety. Moreover, active listening and observation skills (Competency 6) help project managers understand team dynamics better. It is important to note that, as the research showed, fostering psychological safety is not only about showing support, empathy and trust, but also very much about empowering people, helping them reframe their perspectives, challenging them and ensuring their autonomy (Competency 7 and Competency 8).
- 3) Investigation of coaching practices, rather than competencies, was the main aim of the study, in order to prepare guidelines how project managers could foster psychological safety in virtual teams. At the end of the Results section, the researcher provided the classification of coaching practices related to the aforementioned competencies:

- a) In terms of the Mistakes topic, it was found that project managers usually seek to reframe people's outlook towards mistakes into making it more positive and associated with learning. However, when mistakes do happen, individual coaching rather than team coaching is implemented due to the sensitivity of the situation. Project managers show empathy, concern and help to create an action plan for improvements.
- b) The second topic – Problems – revealed that project managers, firstly, prioritize building rapport with the team members, so they feel more comfortable to openly share tough issues. When implementing individual coaching, they also convey curiosity and try to understand the context of the issue. However, project managers seek not to solve the problem for the team members but rather partner with team to build an action plan and acknowledge their autonomy.
- c) In terms of the Conflicts topic, project managers utilize their active listening skills and attentively observe team dynamics, if any changes in the collective energy appear. They never take sides and seek to understand each party in the conflict. Finally, they actively involve the team to close and resolve the conflict.
- d) The fourth topic – Risks – disclosed that project managers feel confident in the environment of uncertainty, acknowledge team members' skills and show support to encourage risk-taking.
- e) The Help topic revealed the importance of a safe space held by project managers for team members to get to know each other outside of work topics; similar interests may light the spark for collaborative work. However, a very clear tendency showed that remote teams require some on-site team buildings to foster the culture of help and collaboration, and completely remote work may hinder it.
- f) With regards to the sixth topic – Respect – project managers ensure inclusion by encouraging everyone to contribute, and they also promote team identity and team agreements to maintain or improve equality and respect within the team.
- g) Finally, the last – Recognition – topic disclosed that project managers tend to regularly acknowledge people's skills, talents and effort. Interestingly, they recognize team members especially when they have failed, to help with their well-being and improve their self-confidence.
- h) In terms of additional, not primary results, content analysis confirmed the results of thematic analysis and helped interpret the project manager's coaching outlook through their language. For example, it was found that project managers focus on

emotional support once mistakes are made, not to blame anyone, and they are highly driven to acknowledge team member's autonomy.

- 4) The final objective was to provide conclusions and recommendations for future research on coaching virtual teams to promote psychological safety. The recommendations will follow below.

Recommendations:

- a) **Theoretical recommendations:** there are at least a few directions on how the research could be elaborated further. Although this paper focused on remote teams, building psychological safety in cultural diversity was not included in the scope of the paper. For example, it was mentioned by a few project managers that they work with highly multicultural teams and thus have to recognize their team members and show respect to them differently. Besides the aforementioned cultural factor, the later studies may focus on different sectors or industries. The differences in terms of external and internal coaches could be also explored, focusing on what benefits and drawbacks each role may have in building psychological safety. Finally, it could be insightful to study both virtual and on-site team coaching to understand similarities and differences better.
- b) **Practical recommendations:**
 - 1) **Project managers:** the study shows that one does not have to be a professional certified coaching specialist to implement coaching in the team. Therefore, the results of the study with the easy-to-follow guidelines on both individual and team coaching may help project managers kick-off coaching in their teams or improve their coaching skillset. Even more, junior project managers could refer to the list of coaching practices as an inspiration and accelerate their career with additional worthwhile skills.
 - 2) **Organizational leadership:** the support from the organizational management could most likely help to spread the word about coaching faster than individual practitioners could. It is important that the management is aware of coaching costs and benefits, and consider including it into the program of other learning and development activities, such as trainings and mentorship. As mentioned in the previous recommendation, it does not have to be necessarily costly to learn coaching practices as an additional tool in their daily work.

Limitations:

Regarding research design, the author used non-probability sampling, so the study is not representative of the whole population. Moreover, recall flaws should be mentioned as a limitation. Although the participants had some time to prepare for the interview, it must be taken into account that some of the recalled examples may not have been described exactly due to being old or complex. Speaking about the accuracy of examples, all interviewees were not native English speakers; the language barrier may have impacted how in-depth and precise the participants' explanations were. All in all, although there are naturally some limitations in the study, its strength is that the paper contributes to the yet unexplored area – project managers acting as team coaches and fostering psychological safety in virtual teams. Hopefully the study can contribute to building coaching cultures across organizations.

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ANNEXES

Annex 1 – Interview Protocol

No.: _____

Date: _____

Duration (min): _____

Experience as PM (years): _____

Name of industry/industries: _____

Experience with coaching: _____

Most important insights: _____

Other topics discussed: _____

I would like to thank you once again for participating in this research. Please confirm if I can record this meeting. The recording will be used purely for transcription purposes, and then immediately deleted. All personal and sensitive information will be anonymized and coded. To introduce myself briefly once again, my name is Vaida Garbauskė, and I'm writing a Master's thesis at Vilnius University Business School, Lithuania. The purpose of this research is to classify the coaching practices of project managers who work with virtual teams; specifically those coaching practices which help to foster psychological safety in the virtual project team. The information in the transcriptions will be analyzed in accordance to International Coaching Federation coaching competencies and practices.

Just as I mentioned in the LinkedIn message, we will start with three introductory questions and then move to the seven topics defined by Harvard University researcher Amy Edmondson about team psychological safety. I have described them briefly already to you, but will go more in-depth as we come to those topics.

Introductory questions:

1) Could you please briefly tell me about your experience as a project manager – year-wise and industry-wise?

- 2) How familiar are you with coaching? How did you learn it and how do you use it?
- 3) Just to align before we jump into the questions on team psychological safety – what does the term “team psychological safety” mean to you?

Table 7. *Semi-structured interview guidelines*

No.	Topic	Adapted statement from Edmondson (1999)	Question guidelines
1.	Mistakes	If you make a mistake on this team, it is not held against you.	How do you ensure that it is safe for your team members to make mistakes? How do you act and react when the team members actually make mistakes? Besides what you have already mentioned, is there anything else you would like to share about your team making mistakes and your role in this?
2.	Problems	Members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues.	How do you ensure that it is safe for your team members to speak about challenging problems? How do you act when your team members actually face problems? Besides what you have already mentioned, is there anything else you would like to share about your team experiencing problems and your role in this?
3.	Conflicts	People on this team do not reject others for being different.	How do you ensure that your team members are open to different opinions in the team? How do you act when your team members actually have different opinions or experience conflicts? Besides what you have already mentioned, is there anything else you would like to share about your team

			having different opinions and/or conflicts and your role in this?
4.	Risks	It is safe to take a risk on this team.	How do you ensure that it is safe for your team members to take risks in the team? By risks, it is meant challenging status quo, being innovative, experimenting. Besides what you have already mentioned, is there anything else you would like to share about your team taking risks and your role in this?
5.	Help	It is not difficult to ask other members of this team for help.	How do you ensure that is safe for your team members to ask other team members for help? In other words, do you do anything to encourage collaboration? Besides what you have already mentioned, is there anything else you would like to share about your team helping each other and collaborating and your role in this?
6.	Respect	No one on this team would deliberately act in a way that undermines team member's efforts.	How do you ensure respect between your team members? How do you make sure that everyone in the team is treated equally? Besides what you have already mentioned, is there anything else you would like to share about your team respecting each other and your role in this?
7.	Recognition	Working with members of this team, everyone's unique skills and talents are valued and utilized.	How do you ensure the recognition of your team members? How do you make sure that everyone feels they are a valued part of the team? Besides what you have already mentioned, is there anything else you would like to share

			about the team members' recognition and your role in this?
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Source: compiled by the author

It is time to close the interview. Thank you very much for your time today. This is not the end of our communication: for research validity, I will send you a summary of the main highlights in the upcoming weeks. Please reply to that LinkedIn message whether you confirm that this summary is valid – this will help to ensure research validity. Thank you.

Annex 2 – Interview Transcripts

Academic research interview with I-1

Transcript

06:05 Vaida Garbauskė: Hi, as the recording is started, please let me know if I may record.

06:15 I-1: Hello, nice to meet you. Yes, sure. No problem.

06:20 Vaida Garbauskė: Uh, OK, so this will be used for transcription purposes. In order to do the qualitative analysis more in-depth, and then it will be of course deleted, it won't be used anywhere else. Your name or data of the company won't be written down anywhere in the paper. Any personal information, if pops up, will be coded; so it's totally anonymous

07:39 I-1: Alright. Yeah, sure. No problem.

07:43 Vaida Garbauskė: So good to meet you. And I'm quickly to introduce myself. I'm Vaida. I'm studying project management, Master's of Project Management in Lithuania, Vilnius University. As you know, I'm working on my thesis that's connected to coaching. Basically, I'm analyzing whether and how project managers who work with remote teams use coaching to foster psychological safety within the team.

08:27 Vaida Garbauskė: Although it may sound kind of abstract, the psychological safety, but I'm using a methodology of researcher Edmondson at Harvard University, who is very well known for her research on psychological safety. And I have 7 questions for the main part of interview; I wrote them to you yesterday as well. I will just ask you to, from your experience, to share examples how you deal with those situations in the team, and this shouldn't take more than like 40 minutes from now because we're already here for a couple. I am going to analyze interview results in terms of International Coaching Federation competencies and practices. Do you have any questions beforehand?

09:02 I-1: Umm, right now I don't have any. I guess when we will move on I will, I might have.

09:08 Vaida Garbauskė: OK, OK. Feel free to shout out any time. Also, it's completely fine to say that you don't do coaching in certain situations and share what else you do. It's also an answer, so there's no wrong or right answers here. I'm not expecting anything specific, you know.

09:52 Vaida G.: But before we start, could you briefly, like in a couple of sentences, or so, just tell me your context of working as a project manager lately.

10:02 I-1: Yeah, sure, I've been working as a project manager for quite some time. I have about 15 years of experience in project management, about six years working in software companies and about 3-4 years coaching experience that I'm using right now at work.

10:35 Vaida G.: Thanks for already mentioning coaching. Uh, how? How did it get into your life? How did you bring it into your life three or four years ago?

10:48 I-1: Uh, I guess when COVID started, something switched in my mind... So I don't know exactly how this happened, but I just signed up for two coaching courses. Both of those courses were conducted in Ukraine, but one of which was certified by ICF, so it was a certified program. But I have two different schools with different approaches, which I'm using based on the situation. What is the main difference? If we're talking about ICF, you are not allowed to give any kind of recommendations, so you are helping that person to find out his or her own path, right? Like for the raised concern or request. The second one allows that at the very end. After you discuss all of the possible solutions and this person is just stuck right here, she/he doesn't know what to do next. So you are allowed to provide the recommendations. You can always ask like can I help you? So since I've got two schools in my experience, it's great I can use different approaches based on the difference.

12:56 Vaida G.: OK, OK. So I see you have quite in-depth experience both as a project manager and a coach, and I see you're quite enjoying it and using it in your life. Thanks a lot. This is a semi-structured interview so it means that if you think that you could add something, some additional situations, besides these seven ones... So it's kind of free space for you. Before we start, I wanted to mention and maybe confirm that we both understand psychological safety similarly. What does it mean for you in your professional life?

13:45 Well... It's probably the feeling in the team, the agreement of the team that they can voice any issues, concerns and they can feel safe to be different. Like, have different opinions, say what they want to... So yes... Hmm. And it's very important to have it – both in life and work.

14:46 Vaida G.: Mm-hmm. OK, OK. Thank you. So I think let's get going. So it's 7 main questions, or topics, we will cover. I will present these topics now. We'll be talking about, firstly, issues or, we can say synonyms - problems, impediments, and it's very kind of generalistic. The researcher doesn't talk about very specific situations that require some kind of criteria that you need to agree upon...

15:43 Vaida G.: 2nd is mistakes made in the team, and 3rd is different opinions or conflicts in the team. How do we work with differing opinions and conflicts? 4th is risks. The remaining three are help, or collaboration, then respect and recognition. Again, the researcher does not define these situations and doesn't put any criteria to them, so feel free to think broadly, and share examples from your professional life. So yep, I think let's start with problems. So in a psychologically safe team, people feel safe to bring up tough issues. How do you, as a project manager, act to ensure that safety?

18:30 I-1: Umm alright, I guess I shall start from the very beginning. I guess it's very good that you mentioned this safety approach that, umm... From my perspective, the very most important thing in the team is trust, and this is what I'm building inside the team. Meaning that since we I'm working with the remote teams right, I have scheduled the 1 on 1 sessions which occur on monthly basis.

19:05 I-1: So I'm having with each of my team member and my colleagues managers with whom I work directly.. Ohh once per month a short session where we discuss various topics: it might be work, it might be something beyond work. I know like how many children do they have? Maybe names? Some how are they doing? Is everything is alright? So building this relationship like beyond the work; and the tricky thing is that as my current job, it's not my main responsibility because those people are not direct subordinates of mine, so they have their own like engineer manager to whom they report as they as the engineers.

20:01 I-1: But since for me it's very important to build this relationship, to build this trust, umm, this is what I'm willing to commit to... Because it's a lot of meetings.

20:14 I-1: It's about, I don't know, about 20 meetings per month, extra meetings I mean, and sometimes can be very tiring because our type of work requires lots of meetings and coaching. So it's extra 20, but this is where I'm happy to commit to, because if we would compare to the office work right where you can pop into someone right near the coffee machine or near the corridor, I can ask them how they are doing.

20:47 I-1: How is everything... Or just can come by their desk and talk like small talk right? In remote life, you don't have such access. You are limited to the business meetings, to the very structured events, because this has its own purpose and it's normally team meetings. So therefore it was like my personal initiative to hold those one on ones. So this is the number one, right? Building the trust, building the relationship between the people. So when you have this then relationship built, you have the normal way of communication. I would say that only one person denies to have such meetings, because he's quite difficult in communication: not only with me, but with everyone.

21:51 I-1: I would say, he's been quite, as everyone loves to say, like toxic person and... I was told by one of my mentors and directors to use this approach like three times failures; like I'm giving 3 attempts to each team member. I don't facilitate or escalate to the top managers if they have such small errors; I would say not like huge drastic something bad had happened right? So... I'm not being intolerant for mistakes.

22:33 I-1: It's OK to do the mistakes, right? And I myself admit that I can make an a mistake. And I admit this and it's normal, because you are live in real life where you can't predict anything But... We are having like a we using this Scrum methodology. So we're having our daily syncs, and I am asking if we have any blockers. Do we have any issues, if anything in particular? Where the engineer is not able to fix or solve by him or herself. Then I'm asking, please raise this up as a red flag to me or colleagues or other teams.

23:21 I-1: So I I'm picking up this up, but this person needs to like call it out right? I can't guess what is happening, so they should come and say: "Hey, we have blockers here, here or impediments here." And I'm asking them to raise that umm, as soon as possible and very in advance because... Even right now... I would say, we did have some of the deadlines, and I mentioned to my like to the executive team that we are not able to complete it on time because of this and that. So I'm giving like an advanced notice, not like on the very last day.

24:13 I-1: So that everyone can make the necessary changes, right? So we are living in this agile world. Lots of uncertainties and you have to be prepared. And I'm teaching my kids as well. You have to be agile, mobile and flexible, right? So you have to change quite fast and rapidly based on the situation. So even if we are talking about like product development, because I'm working in the products company right now... Even the product requirements change a lot and fast and... You have to make the necessary changes into your development plan into the release, but again, if it has dependencies on other teams, you have to communicate in advance. You have to solve these impediments and agree upon that.

25:14 I-1: Of course, if you're not able to do that on your like level, my like PMO level, I have to raise it on the higher levels of the executives where they help with the prioritization.

25:28 Vaida G.: OK, So what I heard from I know you already touched upon mistakes and and not only issues, impediments in the team, but what I heard is that first of all and by building the relationships the trust within the team, you are more confident that people will come to you if anything and will shout out.

25:50 I-1: Yes, yes. So, umm again, it depends. And I told them uh, I'm not the almighty. Like I can't do all and everything, but if I don't know something I can go and ask, right? So of course, there are some technical questions or issues that they might face, but what I'm like... I would say helping them to be independent, and this is what helps me to manage teams easily, meaning that like simpler decisions can be made by themselves, right.

26:36 I-1: So if there is a straightforward decision and like quite clear and visible for them, so they are able to take it, also meaning that they are and taking the full responsibility upon it, right... So what I would say there's... I want them to be independent professional engineers, and I trust those decisions. So this is, as as I would say, from coaching, right? The person did something like particular in a particular situation, meaning that it was the best possible solution in this particular case. And you said previously about risks we will cover, so here as well – when I show I believe and trust them they can do something, they then do more of uh risk taking... I would say umm...

27:27 I-1: That's why we have to trust those people, to believe in them, right? Giving them this.. independence possibilities, so that they can act independently. They can be trusted and they can feel that – this means that... I'm not saying that they're not making mistakes and that we don't have issues. It's it's normal, right? But. Uh. Doing micro, uh, management uh doesn't work well for anyone... I know personally lots of managers, even project managers or people who were promoted to such roles as a manager... Who are simply not able to.. work in this mode as not micromanaging people, teams, and they're burning out and those people are not satisfied because they can feel the pressure. They can feel the control that someone is watching. Uh, you know, like under their shoulder.

28:38 I-1: So I guess it brings even more stress rather than helping.

28:47 Vaida G.: Thank you. As we are already 30 minutes in, I think we will move to other topics as well. But maybe... You mentioned just to finish up, we finished with the issue part, then the second was mistakes...

29:00 Vaida G.: You talked that kinda you see it as a normal thing, but how do you also... What do you do when the mistakes happen, how do you act and react?

29:24 I-1: Yeah, just one point before I forget, I would like to mention the teams health check in, and we can come back just if you're OK. So of course umm, if something happens umm and normally, even even if not, based on our like, uhh, Scrum methodology, we have the retrospective meetings which we hold once per like... Per each Sprint. So it depends. Some teams might have, uhm... I didn't know, like once per week, twice per month – depends on the pace. But on those retrospectives, we always divide and split into what was good and what was bad, and we, when we have the issues, we normally do the action plan.

30:16 I-1: Like what needs to be done? What needs to be done differently and what lessons we learned from that situations? It might be a change in the procedures, creating instructions, communication with other teams, or bringing in something like new approaches, right? So we found that we had some issues and we tried to fix it, so that this won't occur like in the future. This is how it works... When we do such thing as as a team, right? If we are talking about the individuals, based on the coaching, again, you have to... Umm, send kudos to every person directly, as as loud as possible, and to the team, so everyone knows, but if you have any type of issues with that person, you should

go directly, right? You should talk in person. And also this helps later when you said with taking risks like in team in projects. My team members would feel more comfortable when they feel seen and recognized and valued. You should use this approach which normally no one is using it. Unfortunately, even when sometimes my managers communicate with me...

31:38 I-1: Like 70% of communication should be appraisal right? Saying what did you do? Good. What was good to their perspective. Like 20% from my perspective what can be improved right from this person who did something wrong, and only 10% should be... Yeah, what should be done differently and do this sort of like, uh, criticizing approach right? Only 10%. So very little, very little times spent for this like particular case. So you're always trying to find what was good, but if you have some issues, and know what was bad, you would ask them first how they would perceive this.

32:30 I-1: What would you do differently if this would happen again? To your perspective, was it OK or not? What can be done in the future in order to mitigate this? That this won't happen again. So this way you have the person to think about this situation, the perspective how to prevent it. So yeah, the best way would be to use the prevention approach rather than looking back and trying to to fix something. But from my experience, unfortunately... Most of the managers are not using this approach, because I guess they're not familiar with with coaching, so most of the time, I guess, I would say, there's even this appraisal is missing, like uh, shouting all.

33:32 I-1: That's how how good you've been like performing, right? How great you are. I'm always trying like to mention particular like person if he or she was doing something great and... He helped a lot. And we have even the system. It's called bonus. So when you give these appraisals, like shouting out like: "Hey, like I'm sending you this much of bonuses because you helped me in particular with this situation". Right this way we are using like very direct approach to thank person for his or her help and it works.

34:29 Vaida G.: Can the points like points visually can be seen? Or how bonuses?.. What does that mean? Bonus.

34:34 I-1: Bonus it means like you have 100 of these points, which you can give to anyone. You can give hundred to one person or you can give. ... I don't know, the 100 people each like one point, and afterwards, at the end of the month they can withdraw that through vouchers, maybe like some cash or something like that. So this is some sort

of persuasion for people. Or maybe when you hold a conference or presentation, someone sends you this, you know, like points bonus says like, hey, you did great. Thank you for your work.

35:26 I-1: So you write down much do you think you should send to which person and for what exactly.

35:33 Vaida G.: Nice, nice, interesting. Interesting experience; actually thanks a lot for sharing your examples. Moving to the differences in opinion, as again, I just want to remind we have around like 15 minutes or so.

36:04 Vaida G.: How do you work with conflicts or differing opinions in the team? If you feel comfortable, could you please share examples. So to ensure that people feel safe to disagree, have different opinions, and not be rejected for this.

36:29 I-1: OK, just before, uh, we move further. I just want to mention that we would have as well the team health check; which we do for measuring the average level... How the uh, all those people working together. Where we are going through like... It's like a an anonymous questionnaire where every person answers 8 or 10 questions like about the team's performance, about the trust and the team.

37:46 I-1: Is it OK or not? Or we we having some issues and then after this is completed, we are evaluating the most complex areas and if it possible raising it up to the on the executive level. So it's another approach how to measure the situation inside the team... About the... About the conflicts. I would say that, indeed, uh, I had one. I can't say that it was like direct conflict, but we had one person who has been very toxic and he's very not easy to communicate with, and he's the only one who denies to have this meetings. 1:1 meetings that I mentioned.

38:33 I-1: So at some point, um, he was very difficult to manage and one of new team members came to our team, and she was so surprised that the way he behaves; because, you know, when you are like seeing this every day, you got used to it and you just don't see it.

38:54 I-1: But when she came, she just lighted it up, his behavior... And it wasn't only me who were not happy about the way he treats everyone else. Mostly suffers the management team, because he is always complaining... Saying something that's like... Everything is like in negative way, like everything is bad. Everything wrong... Not

finding the solution and give the proposition, right? But looking in the negative side... So I addressed it this to his direct manager; unfortunately he... I didn't know whether he spoke to him or not in the very beginning, but umm, I didn't see lots of changes, so I brought this up to my manager.

39:49 I-1: That this behavior has been for for ages, and my manager said that we shouldn't tolerate this, because our company's approach is not only about technical skills and how this person performs his or her job, but also about this cultural things about communication with other colleagues and team members; we shouldn't tolerate such behavior.

40:19 I-1: And this went up, up, up and up to executive level, so... They asked uh, the direct manager of this person, to commit that he uh will talk, that he would make the necessary changes on his behavior. Otherwise, like more drastic measures will be taken and so... I can say this helps, it helps. Can't say that, uh, it cures this person, right? He is still as he is.

40:53 I-1: But I would say that raising this up, umm, helped in general inside the the team, right? I mean like... And then I would say the only my mistake would be that I waited for too long, right? It took me quite some time in order to raise this on the executive level, because I'm the type of person when I'm trying to fix everything by myself. But, unfortunately, here I don't have power because he doesn't like report to me directly, right? But what additionally I did, I spoke to each team member and asked like whether they suffer from his behavior, and I have asked some of my team members for help: like to stand out, not be like silent, don't keep silence, but to stand up and help like like...

42:01 I-1: When you're alone... It's very difficult to like to have this conversation with that one person. If you have like the team like you know, few people right behind you, it's a different situation. Right? So, uh, we changed that... I I included some more into our daily communications his direct manager, so that he can influence as well, right? Or he can be around and, if needed, to jump into these conversations. Unpleasant conversations, which might be because, you know, engineers... Because I'm not an engineer, right? And for them, you're not an authority. So they might not listen to you because, from their perspective, you know nothing. You are nobody, right? And it's the world of the development. That's why sometimes you have this person whom they

respect... It helped umm, and I guess the only one mistake would be that I should have done this way before and quite like earlier rather than later, I would say.

43:44 Vaida G.: Thank you so much for sharing. Is there any other situation where you stood up as a coach for the team when there were difficult situations?

43:58 I-1: Umm, I would say that, if I see something in the team or that someone is not performing well, I'm talking directly to that person as well. And then, if I can see that it doesn't help, I'm raising this like directly to the manager. So when we are having like a one on one with one of those managers I'm raising talk, we're discussing lots of things, not only about the projects, obstacles or blockers, but about people as well, like about promotions like I can say that...

44:35 I-1: I see that this person would like to grow and move further. What I think about that... He may share he's working on that promotion already, so cool cool cool. From my perspective, it's important to give the person possibility to grow and develop when he or she wants, and to challenge them to give like those new, like perspectives.

45:02 I-1: Aims and targets. So this way, it's not on, it's not about money, right? It's about person's like further development. Uh to challenge them. So umm, I'm trying to help with this as well. Uh, so umm by communicating, by raising up... Like some of the colleagues, like team members, they came and asked for the coaching sessions, so we had umm with them, with some of them like separate coaching sessions. So where we discussed for instance umm... Uh, how to improve the performance. How to persuade himself to, you know, work harder and to achieve the goals. One asked to coach as a coaching session for, umm, like promotion. Because he wanted to grow his career. So all of those requests were related the the work, so it's not like something like separate, and it was cool that, umm, I managed like to help and I saw some improvements.

46:37 I-1: Uh, like in their performance... That guy got the raise, so he got his title. That he'd been working for. Umm. But I would say... I did once the survey in my coaching practice. Like I asked whether they are satisfied with their uh work with the coach, like, me, right? And umm, 90% were satisfied; and there was only one girl who wasn't satisfied and happy, because one of the main reasons was she didn't have the request. She didn't know what she wants, she said in the very beginning that she wants someone to talk to. She wants to discuss some issues in her in her life. But she didn't have, like the, you know, the main goal.

47:40 I-1: What she would like to achieve at the very end. So normally, only highly motivated, only only highly motivated people, understand that you would need to work, if you come to coach and you come and ask for question for some results. It's not about like like, you know, chats, right? You have things and you have a plan which you need to complete by the next meeting.

48:11 Vaida G.: Thank you. Thank you so much for sharing. I think we have like around 5 minutes left, will try to squeeze in the remaining topics, but you actually mentioned some things already from the topics we haven't yet officially covered, so thank you. We haven't separately covered Risks, but you mentioned it is important to recognize, give kudos, and also you are always empowering people to work independently so it helps as well to be more confident taking risks. Uh, we haven't touched upon more in-depth these three last questions of how project manager can encourage help within the team members'; respect and recognition as well. You mentioned giving kudos, public acknowledgment... So from these three topics, do you have something to add from your experience? How do you, overall encourage these positive the aspects of the team, like collaboration, so that people get help, respecting each other, and recognition?

49:01 I-1: I would say that our company is very diverse and we tolerate and respect the difference because we have lots of people from all over the world, different nationalities, different races and different genders, and we, all of us, work in a trust in a very nice communication way.

49:29 I-1: Of course, there are some people who might not be that nice. It's it's normal, but we have one of the requirements in order for a person to get the offer, - to to have this cultural fit. How this person fits companies values? How he or she communicates.

50:04 I-1: If someone would be, behaving like mean to someone, I like, uh guarantee that, if this would occur like a lot of time, this might be the reason for for this person to be fired, because it's not tolerated. And right now I'm working \ in the American company. So they're very like open minded, and the way they communicate... Their business language... So my engineers, sometimes they are laughing the way I'm like writing like some messages that I'm really like polite and thankful all of the time and I appreciate it. And I conducted a few trainings and I mentioned about this golden rule.

50:55 I-1: This is what I'm like telling and mentioning to everyone that you should treat other people as you want to be treated, right? So if you expect umm from someone that

he would behave to you nicely, you should be the same, right? So if you umm communicate in a good and professional manner, if you will, I don't know... Like find the way and build the trust... This person will be like communicating to you the same way, right? So.

51:30 I-1: So what you bring to the plate, right? This is what you get... Like to the table, so this is what you get and it's called the golden rule and. I'm, I'm tolerating this approach to others to be respectful. Even if someone... I guess you mentioned and you asked like if we have conflicts in the team, right, because we might have lots of different views, right? Like everyone, let's do this. Let's do that. This might take lots of times and and discussions...

52:23 I-1: So we agree with our managers that some of us, if we have this such similar situation like we are stuck, right?.. We have like 3 different ideas or umm, thoughts on particular item. So one of us should take the decision. Which one should we pick up? And that one we should proceed. And the rest ones should respect our decision and follow and follow right? So like if we decided this approach 2 is the best one in this case, then everyone should follow this approach and it's not discussable; because even though that we are living in democratic way of life, you still need to have some sort of borders right which you needs to set up.

53:15 I-1: Otherwise we won't have normal way to work and communicate because everyone will be, you know, pulling to his or her like thoughts, ideas. So sometimes you just need to take hard decisions. I would say.

53:37 Vaida G.: OK. OK. Thank you so much for sharing and being open. Uh, we're out of time, sorry. Uh, just... Uh, not sure if there is anything else you had in your mind and wanted to share around all these situations. If you have time for that – maybe around team members helping each other, respecting and also the recognition topic topic.

53:50 I-1: Umm, I guess I mentioned everything I I could in relation towards it's important for you. If you have any further questions that you would like to discuss. I will be happy more than happy to help, because I think that is very important to promote the coaching inside the companies, because I actually raised this, umm, for my managers like... To have mentorship program...

54:18 I-1: But it's not... It doesn't work as expected, so I raised it up again in terms of mentoring people, helping them to grow in their career with like coaching, like helping them like in when they are stuck with something or want to develop... Because we do have this even like wellness programs where like people can, I don't know, like use some apps with all those...

54:49 I-1: I don't know like recommendations, programs, but when you have like personal touch, it's a different way, right? Because you on, uh, individually, individual work has more progress and better outcome. When you work, uh, yes, individually with someone, results are much better.

55:24 Vaida G.: Yeah. Great. Thanks. So thanks so much for your time. I really appreciate. And I also really want to be grateful for for sharing your experience. So yes, if you feel like you want to share anything else like you remember some example, you're free to to share that up until the beginning of December. I'm doing the interviews, and then the analysis. I will send you summary to confirm in the upcoming weeks. It's very important for research validity. Thanks a lot. Thanks for your time. I appreciate it and have a great day. Bye.

56:04 I-1: Thank you for everything and let's keep in touch. Thank you. Bye bye.

Academic research interview with I-2

Transcript

03:00 Vaida G.: Hello, please again approve if I may record.

03:06 I-2: Sure, you can.

03:07 Vaida G.: Great. Great to hear. Thanks a lot again for having the time to talk. We won't take more than 45 minutes. I just added five minute buffer just in case of technical issues or, like right now, if we start later, etc. But nothing more than that. So... Short introduction. I already told you in a message that I'm studying Project Management Master's at Vilnius University, and right now I'm doing my research on the niche that hasn't yet been researched a lot. So, how do project managers use coaching practices, if any, to foster psychological safety in virtual teams? I will analyze the interview results in terms of International Coaching Federation competencies and coaching practices. Our talk today will stay purely anonymous and the recording, after transcription, will be immediately deleted. What I'm going to do is just ask you briefly to provide me very short intro first. It would be great if you could simply share your context of being a project manager: for how long you're in this professional field, and in what industries you have been working.

05:18 I-2: Yeah. My experience in project management, I think, is something like 13-14 years.

05:22 Vaida G.: OK, OK. Thanks. And with coaching, how familiar are you? How did it come to your life?

05:34 I-2: Well, that's part of the job when working with people. My manager actually had some formal coaching training long time ago; so, probably some 12 years ago or something, so that was pretty much standard coaching training that everybody in my company did. Ah, but I mean, the main thing that I remember there is, when you do the coaching, so basically you shouldn't like offer any kind of solution, you just need to somehow facilitate the person to to find the solution himself. And that would be the best option and the best solution for his or her problems. And yeah, that's basically sticking

that very, very well to my personality. I really don't like micromanaging people and I really trust people that they will be the best people to solve their own problems.

06:35 Vaida G.: OK, I see. I I noted you trust people; you trust that people can own their responsibilities and can own their issues and solve them.

06:59 I-2: All right.

07:01 Vaida G.: OK. And any industry specificity, do you right now work for the 13-14 years in one industry or hasn't been changing?

07:13 I-2: Yeah, it's always IT industry.

07:15 Vaida G.: Oh, OK, OK. Great. Thank you for sharing. OK. And uh, before moving to the uh, the main questions that are the nucleus of this interview, I would like to just briefly align. How do you understand psychological safety yourself? Like what does it mean to you?

08:30 I-2: I mean, I don't know, like if I'm correct, but, I mean, my feeling is that it's like feeling safe to to tell your own opinion to, to make judgments. Ohh, to make decisions to share my own judgments and to share my feelings and emotions. Yeah. Something like that.

09:19 Vaida G.: OK. Yeah, there's no right or wrong here. I just wanted to ask, before we start, how you interpret psychological safety... So just to align. There's this one researcher, Amy Edmondson, from Harvard University, who specifically worked decades in this field. And and I took her defined seven topics connected with team's psychological safety. That will be those main questions I wrote you yesterday on LinkedIn as well. Please bear in mind these questions are generic. As a reminder, the interview is semi-structured; you may dive deeper into one topic and less in another; it is a free space for you to reflect.

10:55 Vaida G.: If you feel like you can add something that doesn't really adhere to these situations, you are very welcome as well. I will now present these 7 topics. So 1st topic is umm issues.

11:53 Vaida G.: So when you and with your project team face some impediment with your project. It's not again not specified, so let's just say problems. I can then try to help you if it's not clear. 2nd is mistakes. 3rd is differing opinions or conflicts. The 4th one is

risks, I will later explain... The last three remaining... So 5th is helping each other, or, in other words, - how do you coach the team to ensure collaboration? The 6th is how do you ensure that people are respected in the team, and the 7th is recognition.

13:16 Vaida G.: So specifically, how do you make sure that each team member is acknowledged and their skills are utilized in best way? So these are the seven topics. Again, you may not have the answer to all of them, you may dive deeper into one of them more and some of them maybe less and and you can add from your side if you think like these seven are not everything that is covered, that happens in the team where you coach. And so if we start with the first one, problems... So in a psychologically safe team, team members feel safe to bring up tough issues. How do you ensure that safety, if you do anything?

14:12 I-2: Well, I'm not sure, like if it's like formal coach approach, but I mean I try to give them like, I mean, like... Like typical situations... So they have no access rights to something, so I'm not in most cases, if they are like really grown-ups in terms of emotionally grown-ups, so I'm just saying that OK – you should ask your access rights. If the guys are like, say, like, very, very junior, then I'm trying like to serve them. So I will ask for those rights instead of them by myself. But I mean, I believe that the grown-up person should be able to solve this kind of problems, just they just need to have this very little help.

15:02 Vaida G.: So you sort of navigate, but you don't give the answer, right? Those that are more senior people, those that that should know already how it works... And for others who need teaching, you, you may kind of, as you said, give the answer or or teach how to do it right.

15:20 I-2: Yeah. So doing some babysitting then.

15:23 Vaida G.: Umm. OK. Anything else that pops up into your head? Any other project-related issues?

15:50 I-2: Well, things like budgets and scope creep, that's something something that I cannot obviously delegate because that's the primary responsibility of the project manager to solve. So yeah, obviously that's something that I will do myself.

16:08 Vaida G.: Mm-hmm.

16:09 I-2: But yeah, I mean, yeah, try to try to like, uh, like, uh, how do you say it? Like sort of or or,... Basically. Uh, understand? Like, what's the essence of the problem? So basically the problem is really something very minor. I always try to facilitate people to solve it themselves, but if that's something that I have to solve, then obviously I have to take it.

16:36 Vaida G.: OK. Yeah. Understood. And uh, you you mentioned understanding the essence. What helps you to understand the essence? What do you do to understand the kind of root cause of what's what's happening?

16:50 I-2: Well, I think it doesn't require that much effort. I mean, it's pretty much straightforward, I think, in most cases.

16:59 Vaida G.: Umm. OK, so it doesn't require like a lot of discussions with the team members, they just come with a pretty concrete specific question to you, right?

17:11 I-2: It's not always that they just ask me. They they can just just in the in the meeting, they can just indicate that, OK, I'm blocked with this and that. So in most cases, they don't ask for help, but in most cases, they just say they have this kind of problem. And then I have to decide for myself. So should I interfere or not? And then I just try to evaluate like if it's something minor, then they have to deal with themselves, and if that's something that really needs my attention, then I do it.

17:48 Vaida G.: OK. OK. OK, great. Moving on to the mistakes. In a psychologically safe team, each team member feels safe to make mistakes. How do you deal with mistakes, as a project manager, to ensure this safety?

18:17 I-2: Umm, I mean mostly with the humor or like, just making everybody like feel that, OK, nothing bad happened. Well, that IT specifics is that this industry, in general, has a lot of money and that means even if it makes mistakes, ohh, there's somebody that is happy to pay for those and it's not like overall tragedy. People are not dying. Yeah, we might lose maybe hundreds or maybe thousands of monies, but still it's pretty much nothing compared to the budgets. Nothing compared to the total costs of the making of this project so. At least in my case, we don't do that much mistakes that are leading to some catastrophe and so on. I know that in my one of my previous companies, yeah, we had a huge problem.

19:15 I-2: So basically that was a debt collection industry and we sent paper letters to the people that were not debtors, but we like demanded money from them. And we sent like 100,000 letters, and that was really, really big problem. But yeah, I was not like any any kind of responsible for this kind of stuff. So it was just something that happened in with some other team, but, but yeah, I I'm not sure... Like what I would do if I would have this kind of problem. There are also situations that, I mean, I really hate them.

20:07 I-2: I mean, it's not something that is dependent on the person, it's not his own mistake, but he was just a kind of declared as the guilty person. And in most cases, fired. And that's also happening from time to time. Once basically I was also fired once from one company, because exactly the same situations... Basically yeah, we had a problem. Nobody was really guilty with that, but we had to finger point somebody and that was my turn.

21:02 Vaida G.: Hmm. OK. Thank you for sharing. So you use humor. Yeah, you use like, not overly dramatizing and and seeing the situations as they are and using humor to soften the atmosphere and show support. It's, you said, it's not the end of the world... And talking with the team, where do you talk with them? In what format is it?

21:36 I-2: It's mostly in the daily meetings because...Yeah. In the retrospectives we mostly talk about the possible improvements. Ohh yeah, I don't think we talked about mistakes that much in the retrospectives. Yes, it's more like daily or some truly tactical meetings or something about some specific subject. And OK, somebody made a mistake and and again, as I say, so I try to evaluate, let's say, the impact of this mistake. So if this impact is like very very small in terms of the budget, then it's fine, I'd say. So it's nobody's hurt. Nobody's dying. So I really try to encourage the person to not to stress about that, not to think that "Ohh, I'm the bad guy, that it's something wrong."

22:30 I-2: And then he would be demotivated and then afraid to do at least anything just just not to make mistakes. So it's...

22:39 Vaida G.: Mm-hmm.

22:40 I-2: I think that would be the right way to do it.

22:45 Vaida G.: OK. OK. Thank you for sharing. I appreciate it. And now we are moving on to the conflict, not necessarily conflicts. It also could be just differing opinions in the

team. How do you ensure that people feel safe to speak different opinions and not be ignored, rejected for this?

23:24 I-2: Uh, yeah, obviously we had conflict... So I had conflicts in the team. I had conflicts myself, so the recent example of the conflict in the team that we had a couple of testers and they, I mean, one person, she really had some very specific personality. So, I mean, she is not, let's say, average person in terms of emotional dimensions and so on. And her reactions are typically unexpected for most of the people. Other people's reactions on her behavior mostly are like negative or like frustrated and so on. Ohm, I mean, I don't think I did super well in this conflict. Again, I tried to to somehow facilitate it. OK.

24:26 I-2: I talked with them that they would discuss about that separately. So I set up a meeting with the both persons. One person didn't appear. She said, like, yeah, she said everything that wanted to say. She didn't see that she'd want to discuss it anymore. So we discussed it just with another person and obviously she said, like, her vision. And I was trying to help her that, OK, for example, if you agree in something, document it, put it in the email and send it to this person so you have an evidence that you agreed on something. Because they always like to say that OK, we we agreed on that, and, no, we didn't agree on that.

25:15 I-2: I mean the root cause here is definitely this one person that has this strange personality. But I mean, uh, it's not... It's not something that happened only in my project. It's always happening now. She's in another project. She also has a problem with another tester which is different tester, and again they had some very, I would say unnecessary, conflicts. And talks. I see that another project manager... He doesn't want to do anything there...

He just says that he does, like: "That person will be switching the project very soon, so I will not do anything there." And... Uh from my side. So yeah... at least I tried.

26:07 Vaida G.: Mm-hmm.

26:09 I-2: It didn't work that well anyway, so they just stopped conflicting when I'm there... So they they continue to do some small conflicts somewhere outside. But yeah, I mean on one hand at least, the project was more or less isolated from this problem. So the other team members, they were mostly not part of this toxic environment anymore,

so that was not happening that much in the team anymore. On the other hand, so yeah, I still was receiving later some complaints like somewhere after some weeks or months after some situations again happened that I was not aware of...

27:03 I-2: With just this kind of administrative decision... Not to do it in the public, and and, as I said, I also was giving some suggestions how to handle this and that situations. But I don't see that.. I see that they didn't do it..

27:44 I-2: So yeah.. I don't care as long as the project is not is not suffering that much, I will not invest my time into that.

27:56 Vaida G.: OK. OK. Thank you for sharing. I I noticed the very specific example... That's an interesting view from you from your side that the agreement should be documented and kinda sent out to show that all parties agree on that and not only by word, you know, uh, but also documenting. OK. So that's interesting, interesting approach.

28:22 I-2: Well, to be honest, I mean still that didn't work well. So they still didn't talk that much directly to each other. They were like, not helping each other and that was really, really bad actually. And to be honest, if I think about the perfect project manager, I would do much more effort to solve that... I have my own psychological problems, so I didn't spend that much effort on that. I simply had no energy to fight with that anymore.

29:06 Vaida G.: And also is it? Is it you who should be fighting for? For the kind of solution your own, because from my understanding you're not the manager yourself of of that person...

29:18 I-2: I I was the manager. I was. I was direct manager of both persons. Uh. I mean, another thing to do is actually that HR says OK, just pass it to the HR. Ah, I don't remember if I did that or not to be honest. But I mean, uh, if I do this kind of stuff, if I pass it to the HR, it's normally ending up with nothing. So they... I don't think that they might really help us or maybe they can... I don't know...

29:53 Vaida G.: But for now, do I understand correctly the person is not anymore working with you exactly, or that that's not bothering that much the project and the team's spirit? Mm- hmm.

30:04 I-2: Now, now that project is over, so I'm dealing with other projects so... But I'm still like keeping my eye on that situation. We, as project managers, we discussed like this kind of stuff in between ourselves. Like now I have this situation with another person. So she has a conflict with another tester and I said that yes, that's what we had and that's what I tried and that's what she said, that that was another person said. And uh, we didn't fix this problem actually. And he said that: "OK, I I hope that she will just leave the project soon and I don't care..."

30:48 Vaida G.: OK. OK. I see. Thanks for sharing and moving on to the next question – risks. So what is meant by risks here, it's not project management risk plan. It's associated, again, with the project team. So, in a psychologically safe team, people in the team feel safe to take risks. They innovate, experiment, challenge with new ways of working, etc... Do you have anything to share how you maybe foster such innovative, experimenting environment?

31:31 I-2: I don't know, actually, sorry. Sorry I will be back in a minute, something personal.

33:18 I-2: Sorry. So yeah. What we talked about... Risks, right. I don't know... I think it's... It's encouraged, but it's not something I really really do do about it.

33:45 Vaida G.: OK. OK. Thanks for being open. and I'm moving to the last three of our topics about, umm, enriching team's psychological safety, team's climate... So let's start with helping or collaboration. So in a psychologically safe team, people feel safe to ask for help and it's easy to do that. How do you how do you make sure your team does that if it's needed in your team?

34:30 I-2: Collaboration and help is obviously needed. And uh, yeah... What I normally see in the beginning of every project, is that people are... They want to collaborate... But they have to be facilitated. So basically, they will not talk to each other and will not set up a call or a meeting. So yeah, in this case I mostly do it myself, but only in the very beginning of that project. I just say that, hey, guys, make a call and talk about that.. So because I know that in many cases they will simply not do it for... I don't know why, but that's why I normally set up those calls. In some cases I don't even participate there, but just having this call... This, let's say, formal invitation that facilitates the talks that facilitates people to collaborate to start somehow productively work on some projects, on some problems.

37:29 Vaida G.: Hmm, is it necessary for you to highlight this collaboration and helping each other? Maybe in these daily calls or other forms, do you need to encourage that and how do you do that?

37:44 I-2: Yeah. Yeah. In daily calls it's worked but also very very typical situation that... OK, we have like front-end and back-end developers in one call and then some back-ender says: "OK... I have a problem with the front-end." So, I mean, those front-end guys on the call, they hear it and they are quiet... I say, I mean, like... "Talk to this guy, set up a call, talk to this guy..." And yeah, I mean saying them to just make a call... That obviously will not work... But if you say like specific person that will most likely work...

38:20 Vaida G.: Umm. OK, umm. And how about, uh, respect? I mean that in a safe team, one should never feel that they are diminished, less important, etc... What...

38:45 I-2: Hmm. Well. Well, in general for the IT industry, it's very typical that people are mostly respecting each other. We don't have that much problems with that... But still, obviously, yeah, we also have some people more mature, less mature and some freshers and so on. And but yeah, obviously all the talks we try to make it... To make the environment so everybody can say something like, for example, if we do the retrospective... So obviously, everybody has a possibility to drop the ideas. And yeah, not right now, but historically... I always try to use the tools that allow you to do it anonymously. So basically you will not be seen by your name and you will not be judged by your idea.

39:43 I-2: Uh, right now we use some tool that unfortunately is actually showing the name of the person. But yeah, I don't know. Should we? Should we stop it or not? But so far it's it's not causing that much problem, because in that team I don't have any problems with respect. So basically, we have people with like starting with one year of experience and ending up with some 15 years of experience and they talk pretty much like equally like pretty much like equal. There are like no authorities. And then and so on. What else? Nothing much then, I'd say, we can move on.

41:04 Vaida G.: Mm-hmm. And what about the recognition then? The last part of our or interview, unless you have any other comments and situations you'd like to share. We we have a few minutes for that, just finishing up. On recognition – how do you ensure that

each team member is acknowledged, and all their efforts are taken into account, and they feel recognized?

41:35 I-2: Well from my side as as PM I do some little attempts and some little actions to try to get this person more or less included in the team and then having maybe a little bit more respect, but by... I don't know, like talking to this person in some more special way like in more friendly way compared maybe to some other person like just to stress that OK this guy is also good this guy is also like valuable uh but yeah... I mean it's it's really challenging, so it's not something that you learn in school how to do with that...

42:08 Vaida G.: Mm-hmm. OK, so in general, if you want the the people who you feel are kind of more silent or not very much included to feel more part of a team and you give them more attention and you show to the team they're kind of importance.

42:38 I-2: Well, I I think I I feel this as my responsibility to to somehow try to get them more attention or get them more respect from the team. But to be honest, I don't see that I have that much tools or that much knowledge how to do it. So I just tried to do it myself, as I understand it, but uh, not sure it's super efficient.

43:07 Vaida G.: OK. But thank you. Thank you for sharing all of this. Is there anything else you'd like to add? Or if you have any questions about the research itself.

43:38 I-2: Yeah. One question that I have like do you feel like could be that you're interested to present some results maybe to my company at some moment of time when you feel you're ready. So because we do this kind of, we do this kind of stuff like from time to time, yeah.

45:56 Vaida G.: I just had an interview yesterday and we talked how important it is to talk organizational level, not only team and individual level, about coaching and... Of course right now analysis will happen in October, November, maybe a bit of time in December.

46:10 Vaida G.: I'm going to defend my thesis in early January, so this is when I will know if it's good enough to bring to companies to show it as something that's not been really researched before. So I'm very excited about that. Will be very interesting, I agree. And for validity purposes... Also what I wanted to mention is that each and every interviewee, so you as well, will receive a message on LinkedIn with the main findings for to confirm the main findings.

47:17 Vaida G.: Of course, I value your time already, but to validate qualitative research is quite difficult, because it's like very subjective and one of the validity tools is to give the person who was interviewed to review... So that they don't feel that the truth of theirs was distorted, that I added something from my point of view. But yeah, I would be very happy to present this later. So, again, thank you. This was it. And thank you so much.

48:35 I-2: Yeah, no problem.

48:40 Vaida G.: I appreciate your time and have a great evening. Bye.

Academic research interview with I-3

Transcript

01:29 Vaida G.: Hello again, please approve that I can record. I'm sorry I somehow cannot hear you...

02:37 I-3: And you hear me now.

02:41 Vaida G.: That's that's better now. Could you please approve here in the recording that I may record?

02:53 I-3: It's it's OK. Yes you may.

03:00 Vaida G.: I think we will wrap up not later than we agreed, so in 45 minutes. So I will introduce myself very quickly. So I'm a Master's student of Project management in Lithuania, Vilnius University, and I'm right now researching, as I wrote, how project managers may use some coaching practices in their work to uh foster psychological safety. Specifically in remote teams. There's no right or wrong here, you are welcome to share what you feel comfortable about sharing with me. Just to ensure once again, the interview is anonymous. The recording will be transcribed and then deleted. No information about the company, your name or other people's names – so no personal information will be disclosed. But just before we start with the main questions, that I will explain also later, I just want to hear out about you.

05:22 Vaida G.: Like, what is your context? In short, your journey of being a project manager yourself.

05:30 I-3: Yeah. Oh my journey has been... In a sense that I've... Umm. ..In different sort of roles throughout my career. Uh, I have been managing different initiatives. Uh, and that's small projects. Uh, and then they got large... Uh... Either projects or in certain cases, programs. Uh, it is only recently that I've umm for the last two years that I've been sort of moved into a a dedicated project manager organization, PMO organization.

06:26 I-3: For the last 2-3 years, but before that, throughout my career,

I've been... So basically, along with the along with my sort of routine, operational job, whenever there was a new process coming in or a new sort of technology coming in. So... So

then I sort of used to take the yeah.... Umm... Take the lead to manage those projects myself as well. So, so that has been more or less my context. Umm, I studied project management as a discipline, but only more recently that I've been sort of put into an organization which is purely project management organization, yeah.

07:21 Vaida G.: And with coaching, how much familiar you are?

07:25 I-3: Yeah, coaching. I've been doing a lot throughout my career. Uh. Both as a line manager for my team. Uh, also as a uh... As a trainer I am... I have myself have been trained in some methodologies, especially on process improvement like Lean and Six Sigma and I have been, uh training as well as coaching different teams on implementing these methodologies and using these methodologies in their different initiatives yeah.

08:16 Vaida G.: OK. OK. Great to hear. Thanks for sharing... Before we move to the main questions, I just wanted to align. I see you're already very much involved in your career in coaching. If you could quickly define how you understand psychological safety in a team, what does that mean to you?

08:43 I-3: What it means to me is that the team members umm are, you know, comfortable in in saying that if they're not able to do a certain task or a certain job, also they are they are not afraid of challenging a certain decision.

09:13 I-3: Uh, and don't feel sort of a a threat of being penalized in any way if they don't if they don't agree and also they should feel comfortable in sort of, you know, saying if something didn't work or if they made a mistake.

09:43 I-3: Messed up. That's it. Didn't work as we were supposed to. So it's more about having that that comfort in terms of being being open about about the issues.

10:24 Vaida G.: OK, so you already covered almost all topics in our main interview questions by your definition – thank you for your elaborate answer. We are going to cover all in more detail... But so the nucleus, the the essential part of all this, what we're talking about here, is the research of the researcher from Harvard University; her name is Amy Edmondson. She has defined 7 statements in which you can recognize whether the team is feeling safe or not .

10:54 Vaida G.: And just to inform, the situations are very generalized; just so to say they were not built for project management specifically and I just took it because it was never researched yet – project managers as coaches of psychological safety in virtual teams – and I

want to hear how in these seven topics that I'm going to present to you how you as a project manager react and act and if there are any particular coaching techniques that you do or you choose to do something else... And then I will analyze the interview results in terms of International Coaching Federation coaching competencies and practices.

11:29 Vaida G.: Everything is valuable for me to hear. Because again, I'm not looking to find every coaching technique in every situation. I'm here to listen and welcome anything you share. It's just to hear of what's the actual situation. What's the actual reality right now? So speaking about those seven topics... We will start with problems, or impediments. The second topic is mistakes made within the team, by team members. The 3rd will be differing opinions or conflicts; as you said, when someone wants to question someone else's decision; then the 4th is risks.

12:16 Vaida G.: The fifth one is about help and collaboration within the team, the sixth is how you ensure respect, and the last one is how about recognition.

13:06 Vaida G.: You, of course, may add any other situations that you feel are important, because this is a semi-structured interview, and I'm happy to hear anything you feel is relevant to the research topic. So to start, you mentioned people should be comfortable to come to you when they don't know how to deal with problems. When they don't feel they are capable of... How do you ensure people feel safe to bring up tough issues?

13:55 I-3: Yeah. And for most, yeah, if I'm working with a... Uh, with the team member whom I have not worked with before... It would vary from such a team member versus a team member that I have been working with before. Uh, so a new team member, who is in the project working with me... If they come up with with a certain issue, or with a certain situation, ohh... Typically, at first I would like to sort of understand what the issue is. Uh, so that they can sort of explain, uh, explain that issue to me.

14:45 I-3: And then what I usually do is is I umm... So these are the different sort of coaching techniques which I kind of use in this situation, is that the first is to listen to the other person, and then after that I would ask questions.

15:09 I-3: The different sort of questions that would be related to understanding the issue and then the other questions would be to help the team member come up with the with possible sort of alternatives or or way forward.

15:31 I-3: So. So then those kind of questions... “OK, then what do you think? What should we do about it? Can you think about any other sort of options? What else can we do? Is this... Does this have a dependency on ohh other activities?” Umm, uh. And and ... “Do you have... Do you have the necessary sort of means and abilities to resolve this issue? Do you need help from someone else in the team?” And all of those kind of questions that I would I would ask, which would help... And in terms of coming up with the way forward with, with, with the such a situation... So so in in those cases I would... But it would also vary from an issue to an issue, right?

16:28 Vaida G.: Mm-hmm.

16:28 I-3: So so if there is a a certain issue which is quite well known and we also know how to handle these kind of issues, then I would simply refer the person to, you know, a certain solution or certain other person to talk to that.

16:48 I-3: “Oh oh, we know that this could have happened. It happened in the previous project as well. So why don't you go to talk to that person and he can help you out.” So. So then it kind of works.

Uh, in in some cases, if I, for example, I find through my experience in a project that a certain person is coming up with frequent issues.

17:22 I-3: Uh, with regards to a certain, let's say, uh, if you're talking about an IT function, uh project,t and there is a certain functionality of a particular system and that person is repeatedly coming up with issues regarding that system... So, so then and that person is also... Not very keen or he's very keen or on sort of, you know, not letting go of that area of responsibility, even though if I ask him that, you know... “Do you still feel comfortable about working on this task or working with this module or this functionality?” And he would, you know, try to say: “No... Yes, I'm trying. I'm trying. I'm trying.” But then I would have to take a call and then I would, you know, just have to inform him that...

18:11 I-3: “Yeah. Well, you know, because of time limitations, it's good that you want to learn and you want to take initiative. But, but I think we... I think we should give this particular task in the project to someone who has done this many times before, because we don't have time. But if you still want to continue to sort of learn about it in your own time, or you want to work with the other person to just learn about how it's done, that's fine with me.” So then some situations would also require a certain different approach. Ohh so it depends yeah.

18:49 Vaida G.: OK. Thank you. Thank you. I noted down some great insights from you. Thanks for your elaborate examples and for diving deeper into that. What about mistakes? How to ensure people feel safe to make them? Uh, can you recall some situations?

19:05 I-3: Yeah, mistakes are. Uh, it's. You know, mistakes also vary right? Small mistakes. Big mistakes. Uh. As a project manager. I sort of. Yeah. The first thing that I would like to focus on is that, OK, mistake is happened, accept it, firstly calmly. How can we rectify it – so so that's the first approach. So instead of going into a sort of: “Why did you do it and why couldn't you do it correctly?” Etcetera. The first thing is that how can we rectify it and and once we've done that, then I would either, you know, soon after that we have rectified it maybe note it down as lesson learned in the project, uh.

20:07 I-3: In the project this is sort of documentation, and then you sort of reflect on it towards the end of the project when we are doing project closure and we have sort of, you know, noting down all the different lessons learned uh, so. So because in a project there is often not enough time to do this, like in one-on-ones. But if if the person was late about notifying about the mistake or or said that they informed that other person and then I would like, then I would have to get in touch with that latter person and ask them if they had been informed or not. Uh.

20:57 I-3: Uh, those kind of situations become a little bit more sort of you know... Complicated. And in those cases then it would vary from a situation to situation, because what I would try to address in that situation is is again trying to uh... Confirm or relook into the psychological safety or the environment of the project. I would like to try to understand from the person why didn't they inform me earlier... Was it because they were not sure? Or was it because they were concerned that it might, you know, upset uh, upset me or the other person?

Etcetera. So just to ascertain that you know to make a point and coach the other team member that you know, if you've made a mistake, that's OK, no worries.

21:52 I-3: No, that's fine. But it's important that you just raise the flag as soon as you find out, and that's the most important thing from a project perspective, yeah.

22:02 Vaida G.: Yeah. OK. Thank you. Thank you. And moving to either these differing opinions, questioning other people's thoughts that you already mentioned in the very beginning, or maybe even conflicts, whatever you feel comfortable sharing. So in a

psychologically safe team, people feel safe to be different, share different opinions and not to be rejected for that. Any examples of conflicts you'd like to share?

22:24 I-3: Yeah. Conflicts are always uh, it's quite difficult. Ohm. So in case of conflicts, I I I would first, as from a coaching technique perspective... Uh and sometimes those conflicts could happen in in a team meeting, right? Two team members, they start, they start deferring upon each other, right? Uh, so those kind of, uh conflicts which are, uh, sort of occurring immediately in a team meeting between, uh, two members of the team, they have a difference of opinion about something being either the being implemented or uh or the way that it's being implemented or configured, et cetera, those conflicts.

23:25 I-3: If I sense that there is a need for those two persons to first talk to each other and if I sense that the overall team environment is getting a bit impacted by that conflict, then I, if I if I'm part of that team meeting, then I would intervene and say OK, let's note this down – there is a difference of opinion acknowledged from both of you.

23:58 I-3: Uh, but let's take it up separately, and then I would facilitate in setting up that call between the two people so that they can iron out their differences and come to an agreement. So this is one kind of situation that one would have to handle. Then there are conflicts which are happening behind the scenes which have not come to the surface for me as a project manager, and those are the more difficult ones. They are tricky to ,you know, get hold of. And sometimes you find out quite late in the project that there it is.

24:39 I-3: Apparently, there was an agreement in the meeting, but later on when it came to actual implementation, you know, they didn't actually agree and they went about either not doing it or doing it in a different way. And typically those kinds of situations then come up when something is not working and it's a bit late and ohh those situations I'm I'm really not... You know, in control of how how to handle those situations apart from the fact to try to sense ohh the team spirit. Uh...

25:23 I-3: Between between the team members and try to sort of have these different sort of 1-to-1 connects with the team members and to just generally from a coaching perspective just generally think about, ask them about how things are going etcetera, etcetera and try to sense the the working atmosphere between the team members.

25:50 I-3: But usually you don't get time for that because most of the IT projects they are so crunched for time that this kind of sort of, you know, exercising this kind of coaching is

usually... Ohh yeah, you know you don't get time for this.... Uh, you know, investigative kind of coaching of of how the team spirit is working, but it's important, generally speaking, that in team meetings I try to acknowledge even the small tasks.

26:21 I-3: If somebody has done well and all of that so uh I try to, you know, do the small celebrations of small milestones during the course of the project, which kind of helps keep the team motivated and engaged, and I keep sort of repeating of why we are doing this project, what is the end goal for us, what is the, you know, strategic impact and, you know, sort of regularly show, you know... Talking about. you know, when we'll be able to do this or implement this... You know, this is really good, going to be good for the customers, and it's really gonna improve the experience et cetera et cetera.

27:10 I-3: So those kind of things help in terms of keeping everybody sort of, you know, having the same vision of of where we wanna go.

27:20 Vaida G.: OK. And you mentioned moderating, facilitating... What do you mean by that, if in more detail, - any particular techniques?

27:48 I-3: Yeah. The first thing I try to do is I I...Of course, I try to set the scene if I'm doing a proper mediation. If it's a small point and I don't see that there is a, it's more of a uh, let's say, there are two ways of implementing a certain technical solution, and these two people are only sort of, uh, you know... Uh, you know, there is a difference of opinion of the solution itself. So there is no, let's say, uh personal attachments to those situations, you know, no emotions are as such, not attached to those technical solutions. Those are rather simple, you know.

28:35 I-3: And if it's a small thing, if we wanna go from A to C, should we go via B or should we go via, you know, another route? So.

28:44 I-3: So in those kind of situations, I would just either let one of those guys who I feel that is more senior... I would tell them why don't they discuss this and, you know, come back to me by day X... And that day I'd ask what they decided, and... And that's how I would kind of end it in certain situations. Where I see that it's getting a bit uh into a loop and they will not end up coming to a conclusion, because it might be a lot of other sort of uh personal or emotional attachments to a certain situation or a system or whatsoever involved – in those cases then I would do try to do a more facilitating kind of a session myself

where I would set the scene: “OK, this is what we're talking about; let's agree on what is the problem that we're trying to solve.”

29:36 I-3: “OK, So then let's hear out each one of us. What each one of us is proposing to do?” And then first, I'd let them discuss a bit between themselves, and I would just silently listen and what they're talking, and if I see that they are going in a good direction, then I'll just let it be. If needed I will help to structure it a bit, and then encourage to continue going by themselves... So that they can focus on the on the issue in hand.

30:10 I-3: So it again... It's not that often that I have to do that but sometimes I do, and then there is also the the question about time and you have to make those calls... Do we have time to do that or should I just trust these two to sort it out and then we will have an update on it later.

30:39 I-3: But but sometimes it's critical, and then you just have to do the facilitation yourself.

30:44 Vaida G.: OK. OK. I see. Thanks a lot for sharing in depth. Moving to the fourth topics of risks. So by risks, I don't mean project manager's risk mitigation or risk management plan. It's about the team taking risks. In a psychologically safe team, people should feel safe to take risks, innovate and be experimenting. Maybe maybe challenging standard ways of working... Do you do anything whatsoever to ensure such an environment of innovation?

31:39 I-3: Yeah, yeah, definitely, definitely... Sometimes umm, sometimes I would do it myself. Ah, but sometimes I would then ask one of the project sponsors or the line manager of the team member to sort of, you know, have that pep talk with the team members. Uh. Especially when I sense that, uh, the pressure is mounting up, especially with regards to delivery timelines and all of that, then then.... So. So then we, together with the with the line manager, we set up a a separate call with a few team members and you know, try to sort of. Give them a pep talk. Also, to hear them out as well, because if they are feeling stressed and they are frustrated about certain things... So so give them the opportunity to sort of, yeah, voice out their concerns as well. So yeah.

33:10 Vaida G.: OK. OK, good. Thank you. And we have a bit less than 10 minutes, but I think we can cover all topics. And let's move to the last few situations... So maybe you will think of... Okay, so the fifth situation is help in the team. In a psychologically safe team, one should feel safe to ask for help; it should be be easy, you know, not difficult. Do you do

anything to ensure this collaboration between team members, that help is ensured and people are not working in silos?

34:01 I-3: Uh. Yes, umm, I think it's a. It's very important, uh. We normally... What what I try to do is...

34:16 I-3: At least during the initial phases of the project, we at least try to get together for uh for lunch, combined with a certain sort of meeting objective and just try to get to, you know, know each other and especially in these days where our meetings are happening online, it it really helps to to have have this kind of a ohm exercise.

34:51 I-3: Then usually what I would do even online is that first of all, if there is any new member coming into the meeting, I would always sort of encourage them to uh uh, introduce themselves and talk a little bit about themselves, and then also when we are having our uh regular meeting...

35:13 I-3: So each meeting which I have on Mondays. Uh... Then I would always start off talking about how was the weekend and what did they do. So. So that kind of helps everyone to you know, get to know each other, get to know hobbies and each other's hobbies. And sort of feel like a, you know, more connected as a team, yeah.

35:40 Vaida G.: OK. OK, OK. Thank you. And second to the last question, about respect... So in a psychologically safe team, the team members of course feel respected. Their efforts are not diminished, they are not ignored.... How do you ensure this respect within the team? Sorry I don't see you anymore...

36:37 I-3: Sorry, I had to take a very short personal call... Sorry... So what we what were you saying?

36:46 Vaida G.: As we're running out of time, I'll have to combine two topics into one question, sorry for that. So we have the respect and recognition questions left. So in a psychologically safe team, people feel respected, their efforts are not diminished. And when people are in a psychological safe team, they they feel recognized, their skills utilized and acknowledged in the best way; they feel valued. Again, if you if we think like how, how to ensure both of these – respect and recognition? I can try to elaborate more if needed...

37:15 I-3: Yeah. Yeah, that's that's always a, you know, a tricky tricky in the sense that, you know, some people would take more, you know, more space in the meeting. Some people are.

Uh, you know, so it kind of varies from different personalities of different people, and some people would be more talkative. Some people would be less, some people would be a bit more assertive, some people not that much, and that varies from person to person, and they're different personalities. But generally from a from a coaching perspective...

What I try to do is that I I try to sort of involve everyone in a meeting and in a discussion especially. Those who need to be involved. So...

38:14 I-3: So I would then call out then that person's name and ask them that: "So what is your opinion about it?" Even if he was quiet throughout the time for that. So. So that's how are typically try to ensure that everybody gets to gets an opportunity to talk about what they wanna contribute. And that their ideas are heard, accepted or at least like a a acknowledged. And generally, about respect, you know, in our organization we are being respectful – it is one of the core values that are, you know, that everyone talks about.

38:50 I-3: So so generally, we don't have that that kind of issue of lack of respect, but but it's important that everyone is engaged and included, and that's from a coaching perspective and from a facilitation perspective that is something which I try to, you know, exercise, especially when I see that somebody would have said something about it but they haven't, then I would just call for their opinion in the meeting. And if that was not possible then I would just call them back later.

39:25 I-3: Ohh and talk to them about it and see if they had to say anything about it. So it's very important as a project manager to uh, and it's it's also very difficult because again due to the timeline pressure, it's not always possible, but it's very important for a project manager to be to be sort of.

39:50 I-3: Uh, you to have an high emotional intelligence to be able to, you know, pick up these these different scenarios and situations in a team prior to follow through on those.

Also, I know we're out of time, just wanted to add. I I wanted to say that sometimes I openly express my feelings in the team, if I am concerned about something. Uh... Also, if I am not happy about the progress, or even if I made a mistake, or had a lesson learnt, I openly accept it in the team. So yeah, just to add. And as I said, I I recognize all the small works done, so people feel, as you said, acknowledged. So yeah that's probably it.

40:07 Vaida G.: OK. Yes, uh, thank you. That was it actually. I really want to appreciate your time. It's definitely very interesting to hear. I learned a lot from you. The next step is that

when I have analyzed and kind of summarized our discussion, our interview, I will let you know...

40:48 Vaida G.: I will send the summary of interview findings on LinkedIn. It won't be kind of urgent for you to confirm. There will be time for that, but it's very important for the validity purposes of the research and, also, to be truthful for you and respectful for you as an interviewee. That nothing from my side will be added to your words. So that's it.

41:26 I-3: On the final work - it would be actually very interesting to see it. So I think it's a good, good research that you are doing. So it will definitely be interesting. So if you're able to share that, yeah, it would definitely be an interesting read. And in fact, since I sort of work in the project management organization, I think it will be interesting for my other fellow project managers to read about it. I think it's a very good one and, who knows, maybe I invite you to do a short presentation for the team. Uh. So that will be good.

42:07 Vaida G.: I would be happy, of course. Thank you for your support.

42:27 I-3: Yeah, that would be great. That would be great. Thank you. You're welcome. You're welcome. Wish you all the best for the research. Nice talking to you. Bye bye.

Academic research interview with I-4

Transcript

00:00 Vaida G.: Please approve the recording once again.

00:02 I-4.: Sure, you can record.

00:05 Vaida G.: Thanks. Nice to meet you and welcome again. Thanks for taking the time to help me. It's going to be 45 minutes, not more. I booked 50 just in case some technical difficulties happen. The recording will be deleted immediately after I transcribe the interview. And I ensure anonymity.

00:43 I-4.: It's OK, thanks for informing.

00:45 Vaida G.: OK, so I start recording. Thank you for your approval. And so I'm going to present myself very quickly. I'm Vaida, I'm studying Master's of Project Management at Vilnius University. And what I'm doing right now is doing interviews with different project managers who work with remote teams and who do coaching at some point in their in their project management work. My research focus is on project managers acting as coaches to foster psychological safety in virtual teams. So, the topics we are going to talk about that I wrote you yesterday are taken from Harvard University researcher Edmondson's research.

01:35 Vaida G.: The topics which help to reflect whether there is psychological safety or not, and we're going to go to those later. I will analyze the interview in accordance to International Coaching Federation coaching competencies and practices. Therefore, I will ask you to kind of speak in examples as much as you're comfortable with. Again, nothing of your particular company details or your own personal details, names – nothing will appear not anonymized at the end of the research. By the way, I will let you know when I summarize. It shouldn't take more than a week or so. The purpose of me sending you the summary of interview findings is to validate if it's all good, if nothing was different from your truth and that I didn't add anything from my side and that I heard you correctly.

02:23 Vaida G.: Do you have any questions so far?

02:26 I-4.: Sounds amazing and I've just remembered my master's thesis. If I have done it at least a bit similar that you did, it would be totally different research...

02:41 Vaida G.: Interesting – please briefly share what it was about?

02:43 I-4.: I think... Let me remember. It was more than 10 years ago when I wrote my Master's thesis. It was about, I think it was about conferences as a part of teachers' professional development, something something about that, because I I studied educational management and... So that's why it was connected with my workplace. At that time, I was working in a hobby-related institution, like where pupils, I mean, students, come after the school and have some hobbies, like sports school or music school, like art, crafts, dances – all together under one roof. And then I was working as a deputy director at that time and I wanted to find out. Yeah, if the conferences is a place where teachers can improve their professional...

03:43 I-4.: Abilities like become more more better at the conferences, but it was... Yeah, more than 10 years ago. And I remember how I wrote my Master's... So I feel totally different approach from your side and that's great that I can be a part of it.

04:05 Vaida G.: Thank you for sharing and for your support. It's a very new niche that wasn't like researched before. So I'm I'm very interested in what I will find. Again, like you know, I've already mentioned there is no right or wrong answers. So I'm just expecting to hear your experiences, your examples around topics that are connected to psychological safety.

04:45 Vaida G.: So, but to start – let's begin with a few introductory questions about you. Could you briefly give me a short kind of understanding of your project management career in general. I mean, how long you work as a project manager, and in which fields.

05:05 I-4: Uh, yeah. When I read your first message to me on LinkedIn about your research, I was like, hmm, what kind of experience should I share? Because I think that for me project manager management is more like mindset. The things I'm doing every day as a project manager. I would say it comes already from the school. When I started to organize different kinds of events, I was the one who usually took the ownership of the processes, encouraging my classmates and encouraging other pupils at the school, because I also was the President of the school council, I think it's called... For one year. It was the final year at the school, so this is already, I would say, starting starting the idea of project management that I I was taking this ownership... I was a leader.

06:01 I-4: Let's let's call it. So I didn't didn't call it that way, when I was in the school, but if I look back, it's already the beginning where I started to become a project manager as such.

And then then I, uh, I was working for more than 10 years in governmental and municipal institutions. Uh. Again, different roles, but all of them were more or less connected with project management. Whether those were, I don't know, students camps in the in the summer, whether those were some kind of opportunities for NGO's to participate in our our contests to receive money and and implement their activities...

07:01 I-4: It it was all kind of project-based approach... Together we would achieve the result like implementing the program they wanted... And yeah.. And the the last last two years it's, yeah, it's more connected with educational projects for adults in IT.

07:44 I-4: So I have a team. I have a result to achieve. I have stakeholders. I have a participant number of almost 5000, so a lot of stuff happening at the moment... We have... We have three more weeks left in this program, then all the final stuff will happen with questionnaires, reports presenting and etcetera.

08:21 I-4: But yeah, it's it's like... From 2022, I can call myself project manager officially.

08:41 Vaida G.: OK. And if briefly with coaching, what's your connection? How much familiar you are with coaching?

08:48 I-4: This is something I'm very interested in as a lot of things in my life, but there is something I have experience on myself because I I use an opportunity to help new coaches when they are learning... They have a lot of hours to spend in kind of sessions just to become a coach.

09:16 I-4: So I used an opportunity to participate, to help them and to receive also something for me. And then in this case I can say that I I had been... I have been as a participant of the coaching session. I have never thought that I'm using some kind of practices until you wrote me and then I started thinking... Yes, maybe it's something I do too, because it's again a part of me, because I like to challenge myself. I like to challenge people, so that they can reach the result themselves; and I do this just by asking them, I would say, correct questions.

09:57 I-4: It's, I would say, my approach how maybe if if you call that I'm implementing coaching... Then this this could be my approach that I am asking the questions, I am challenging and I'm trying to I'm trying to... To underline, let's let's use this word. Underline the strengths of each team member they have. So if somebody is good at presenting, then I'm trying to challenge the person to be more more presenter, or if I know that somebody wants to learn something new, I will provide the opportunity to at least to try it out.

10:47 Vaida G.: OK. Thank you. Just before we start – I just wanted to ask, just to align before we jump into different topics around psychological safety... So for you, what do you think, what is psychological safety?

11:08 I-4: Ohh one of the the things that I feel when my team members are psychologically safe, is that they come with their problems. They are free to tell them... They say that they struggled with something. That they need help... So if they are able to tell you loud all of this, then I feel that it's safe. If you can not only celebrate but also discuss issues, it's it's one of the points of that safety. Also, when they reach out to me individually, like saying that we need to talk, like “Uh, I just want to share my feelings, my emotions.” So, something personal as well... It's not always connected with professional life, so I can see people trust me when they share something more.

12:13 Vaida G.: OK. OK. Thank you. So uh, I will then briefly present the situations, or topics, we're going to cover, although I I wrote you those situations themselves already. They are very general situations. These situations were taken, as I mentioned, from Edmondson's research, and it was not directed towards project management teams, but more like teams in general. This is where I decided to niche it down and specifically investigate how project managers do coaching, and specifically in virtual teams. So, the 1st situation is problems, or issues experienced within the team.

13:04 Vaida G.: 2nd is when mistakes happen in the team. 3rd is differing opinions or conflicts. People questioning each other's opinions, not getting like along into one unified decision. 4th is risks. The last three are help, respect and recognition. I will go into details when we come to each one.

13:54 Vaida G.: This is also as I mentioned, semi-structured interviews so if you feel like these situations just don't show everything that happens in your work life, you can add some more... You may specify and dive deeper into some of the topics more, and less to others – again, I'm not looking for particular answers, but I'm happy to hear anything you think may relate to my research subject. So if we may start?.. Problems, like you mentioned, in your definition that when your team members have some problems, they cannot maybe manage themselves, they come to you when they feel psychologically safe.

14:31 Vaida G.: So how do you ensure this safety, and how you act and react?

14:39 I-4: Before we we go into details about those situations, should I concentrate myself on the situations in the latest team which is remote?

14:57 Vaida G.: Yeah, the one that is remote.

15:02 I-4: So yeah, basically when there is some kind of problem situations, I'm the person who usually tries to find out as much details as I can, so that I can, like, rely on them afterwards. If the person mentions the other teammates or the timeline or some kind of miscommunication, assumptions, etcetera. So that I can have a broader view, not just that something happens and that's it. I will try to find out what's happened, but really asking the questions to find out as much as I can. So it depends again on the teammate, how much is basically she... Let's concentrate on "she" because I have only "she" in my team.

16:04 I-4: So so how much is she willing to tell me at this point? How much of emotions does she still have? So it is also depends on what stage of anger does she come and share the information. So why I... I... Can't find the word?.. Ohh I try to zoom out a bit and like take a look... And can't find the word in English.... Try to observe. Yeah. Observe what's happening with the person. If it's, if it's emotional like, I need to tell something. Or it's something that really happened and can destroy anything we have done before... So I I also try to give some kind of level how important this problem is in this stage of the project.

17:02 I-4: Again, kind of measuring... Ohh but yeah, basically asking questions to find out, and then one more thing which I usually try to do when it's a problem... Either it's one to one talk, either it's in the team, I ask what could be your solution? What could be your suggestion? How can we do it? Not not one person alone, but how we as a team can solve it? Maybe there is something we can help so that we feel as a team supporting each other.

18:04 Vaida G.: OK. Thank you. Thank you. Let's move to mistakes as they happen; again, it's not defined whether they are kind of very costly or just simple small mistakes... Feel free to share whatever you would like. So in a psychologically safe team, people are safe to make mistakes. I'm interested to hear about your approach as a project manager when people make mistakes. When your team members make mistakes.

18:22 I-4: Ah, usually it starts with the question how can we solve it at the very fastest so that... Because it's usually... More or less but interrupts the processes, so how can we solve it? And the next question, when we have done it, then we try to have like sincere discussion within the team. And yes, I facilitate it. Uh finding out what happened so that to not repeat it

afterwards, after some time in this project, or sharing best experiences with other teams, because we inside our organization have so-called quarterly project reviews. So when our project will finish, we will sum up all those. Ohh problems, mistakes... Ohh those issues, and we will share also with other teams so that we had this kind of problem, but this is our solution.

19:21 I-4: So maybe next time be aware that there is this, this and this issue, so be like be prepared solve this kind of problem; so, also, informing others.

19:39 I-4: But in the team? Yeah. First of all solution, then analyzing why it happened, not blaming anyone, but trying... Again, find out in which uh, which? Uh way we could. We have, I mean, we might have avoided it if we have...

19:59 Vaida G.: OK, so you do some deep dive to the root cause. What happened right?

20:04 I-4: Yeah, we try to find time for this, because otherwise it will arise in some other stage of the project, because we have quite long projects. That's why.

20:16 Vaida G.: And do you do particular... Do you use particular techniques to find the root cause? To better understand what happened, and so that we prevent it next time?

20:32 I-4: Haven't used any so-called technique... It's usually my intuition which helps me to provide the best questions, cause mistakes might be different, and I would say that it's my feeling or what kind of questions... And it's again also asking for help in the team. So they also provide their questions and together we dive in that together. So that we have found yeah, the solution together, it's not like my research and I found out but, we did it together.

21:13 Vaida G.: OK, OK. Mhmm.

21:17 I-4: It's time consuming, yes, but it's usually very good result and... So we can celebrate in the team, like dedicate some time to really see how good work we did together..

21:24 Vaida G.: Great. Thank you for sharing. What about any differing opinions? Or conflicts? So in a psychologically safe team, we should feel safe as team members that no one would reject us for having different opinions.. What role do you see here, in terms of conflicts?

21:50 I-4: In this project we had two situations which I could really even call conflicts, and both were connected with one person and with the miscommunication... And assumptions. It

affected the whole team. All of us, except that person, knew how we're going to go with one specific project.

We thought that it will happen in this way because we are used to that things happen in that way. But, but the other teammate, she decided that she will do different way. So she didn't inform us... So later we did sort of like retrospective. Maybe it's a usual tool for project managers, maybe...

22:44 I-4: We had a long meeting and we discussed those difficult questions in a softer way.. Not asking like: "Why did you do that and why did you do that?" But playing games, analyzing similar scenarios, but like not from our team, like analogies. And then moving towards those questions which were basically answered in the end by the team that that the issue is in our team is miscommunication.

23:03 I-4: So we try that we try to find out. Uh... How to improve communication in our team so that people feel free to share... For example, if they cannot do something on time... What is our Plan B? So this is something I informed from myself that it is important for me – informing each other. I asked others to tell what is important for them. I encouraged them. That's also kind of challenging teammates to feel free to say what is important for them. And we were like playing, as I said, playing games, doing some kind of analyzing situations so that I can find out and move towards the the issue, and more about what is important for them, each of them individually.

23:54 I-4: By playing games, analyzing different scenarios, we talked if we have similar situations in our work. So it was a retrospective of around 3 hours I I think... Yeah.

24:20 I-4: I understood that this will be very intense period. This because this is the program for three months. That's why it's day-to-day tasks. Very intense communication is the key in this. So yeah, and this was something we got to do - to know what is important for each and every one of us. So the people felt free to say what is important for them. Like: "For me, it is important that other teammates do that and that..." So we said it loud so that all teammates know what's important for us. I told them: "Because if you don't tell, I don't know... I assume. I use my own experience of how I act in the situation, I assume about you." But basically yeah we got to the the feeling that people felt free to tell what's important for them.

25:18 I-4: Uh and afterwards? Yeah, we try to try to stick to this one... Like: "I I remember that you told that it's important for you to not to disturb the morning of your Monday."

25:31 I-4: So those little little things, really.. But it has improved a lot of communication issues, drastically.

25:44 Vaida G.: Thank you for the example. Is there something, some other situation, you wanted to tell more about?

25:53 I-4: Uh. Both situations with the same person, with miscommunication, so that we resolved it in one retrospective. So fingers crossed that we will finish ohh without any new conflicts and challenges.

26:14 Vaida G.: Thank you for sharing, I appreciate that. Next – let's move to risks.

26:16 Vaida G.: By risks I do not mean risk management plan here, as is usual with project managers. But what I mean mean is that team members feel safe to take risks and experiment, innovate, challenge standard ways of working... How do you ensure this kind of safe space? Could you share?

27:01 I-4: Good question... Let me think a bit... Well, first of all, I think I like to share my experience a lot in this case. Like to be vulnerable and share, if they want to to hear that. I also ask also others to share their experience about the last time they felt insecure before new experiences. Because it is very important to talk in the group, I mean, in the team, together all about it. And I facilitate the conversation... In order to get them feel better about risks that will come, and to get the feeling that we will overcome this new situation together. So yeah, like making sure they have support if needed, and that I trust they will do do good, so that's it probably...

28:38 Vaida G.: OK. Thank you for sharing. We're now going to go through the last three questions... But just before we move on, you mentioned that for this miscommunication, conflict, you used games and analyzing situations by games...

29:19 I-4: Games. So we basically use games for the first part just to make them feel safe to make them feel funny, to feel relaxed so that the we don't feel that we have come to war like something, something from... Yeah...

I created that space so that we are here we are. Ohh. Yeah, you're here and we are all with all our senses here.

31:01 I-4: So that we we feel that we yeah, we are together... It's it's yeah it's something that we needed, and I was very happy to organize and see the difference then later.

31:25 Vaida G.: OK, OK. Thanks for these details and yeah... We have around 10 minutes left. Let's move to the fifth topic on helping, collaboration. How do you see your role as a project manager? How do you ensure that people feel safe to ask for help and that they get it?

31:57 I-4: It's something... I as a project manager do at the very beginning. That we have the session, let's call it, so... Session that each of the team members shares their strengths. What they are good at, they are interested in so that people know who is in the team. Not only that, he is the person who is responsible for technical stuff or the person for social media, because we have cross functional teams as well. Yeah, we we like introduce each other with our strengths, with our interest. It is also place for me to find out that the person is interested in doing this or doing that. So I have the space throughout the project to provide this opportunity.

33:00 I-4: You told that you would like to train public speaking skills, so here is the lecture. And you can be the moderator. So the people know if they have any questions throughout the project that they remember that there is this person who might help with, I don't know, with docs or anything else. So you know someone who can provide help kind of...

Also, I can ask for help... Like giving giving them the opportunity to share about themselves.

33:49 Vaida G.: Thank you, okay. Thank you for sharing. Moving to respect part. So when people feel safe in the team, it is ensured that no one will be diminished, ignored; overall, not respected. What do you think you do, as a project manager, about this? To foster such respect in the team...

34:20 I-4: I think yes, because we are we are having weekly meetings on Monday. So we usually have the meeting when we plan, like look back at the previous. So we have something to take away from that one and thinking of this one and I try to make agenda for the meeting, such that I know that each of the teammates will have an opportunity to say something... Like providing the space for them or kind of asking, even asking them to participate so that they see their place in this. But it's more like I would say... I kind of thought that it's more connected to project management as such, but maybe it's also a part of coaching as well. So that people see that they are worth, they have, they are worth to come. So they will have an opportunity to say something as well when we are discussing any issue, any kind of situation where we need more than two, two people opinions. I ask each of them, like maybe challenging them, but again asking how do they think, well, should we do this or should we

do that... or how can we solve it or or... Like not not voting but really asking people so that... They feel valued in the team so that they can share their opinion. Of course, not always their opinion is taken into account, because the project has some scope as well, where we can move or where we can't. But but saying thank you for sharing for, yeah, taking time to think of it. And and on Fridays we have a... I am writing so-called wrap-ups... The long long list of everything we have done in the weekend; also putting what we are going to do next week. And the thing I do usually is when I write about the task that is done I tag the person who did it, thank them, appreciate the efforts and add some emoji... Like, I don't know, clap or raised hands or anything, so that that the the person finds uh herself in the list and feels that their work is appreciated and others also see what what they have done and OK...And yeah this is something that comes to my mind.

40:27 I-4: If it's respect or not respect, I don't know. But people feel that they yeah, they are valued.

40:35 Vaida G.: This really connects with the last topic - recognition. The last part that we will cover. Maybe you would like to add anything else – how you recognize, acknowledge your team members and their worth?

40:52 I-4: We are inclusive and we accept others as they are. But with, I would say, with the the putting the comma that only (!) if you share information about yourself. If you are not willing to share, then we don't know. We can't respect this thing or we can't take it into account if we don't know. But this is something we ask kindly, of course. Ask to share, if there is anything. But I would say that there is also quite a lot of personal things I know about teammates that they have shared only with me... So this is something that I, uh, hold to myself, something that I know for myself and take into account when I plan the work or when I communicate with the emails. But again, it's something because they have shared with me. I think it's again the personal relationship which we have created and I feel that I need to take care of them and this is something... Yeah, I sometimes... It disturbs me that I know so much about them, but in many cases it helps as well.

42:59 Vaida G.: OK. OK. Thanks so much. Uh, we are actually almost done with the time as well. So I noted as well quite many highlights. I will send the summary for validation purposes, as I said. Whether you agree that it's all truthful, that it wasn't in some way distorted and that you agree. Also, it helps not only the research to be more valid, but also to

be more kind and just respectful towards our interviewees, and you, of course, being one of them. Thank you.

43:33 I-4: Do you, do you have enough interviews or may I help you with this?

43:40 Vaida G.: Uh, I have for now. Thanks a lot. I have uh, I think enough. As this is a very new niche, I'm looking through if I can talk to more people, I'm happy to. But I will know that I can write you if I need some help finding out the people. But thanks a lot. I really appreciate your time.

44:16 I-4: It was very interesting for me also like reflecting a bit more what I'm doing and how I'm doing. And this is something for me like personally, personally individually... My take away is that I had this time to to reflect. Yeah. And to find out that, umm, I'm doing a good job. So thank you for this feeling, which I really received and maybe it was something I really needed even at this point of the program. And at this point where the team is... So it's just to finalize the project and then to have this last boost to finish it.

45:47 Vaida G.: That's lovely. That's lovely to hear. Thanks a lot.

45:53 I-4: Yeah, I will wait the information you will provide me afterwards.

Academic research interview with I-5

Transcript

00:00 Vaida G.: Thank you so much for your approval to record. Please approve once again, thanks, as I need to record it.

00:10 I-5: Yes, I approve.

00:13 Vaida G.: I will transcribe and delete the recording right away. The transcription will be anonymized, so you can feel free to share safely as much as you want. So hello again, nice to meet you. I'm Vaida, studying Master's of Project management in Lithuania, Vilnius University. And I'm, as you already know, analyzing how, if at all, project managers do coaching in their virtual project teams. Focusing on specifically fostering psychological safety in the team. And I analyze interview findings in accordance with International Coaching Federation coaching competencies and practices. I think we won't take more than 45-50 minutes.

01:01 I-5: I have plenty of time, no worries, I can stay longer, if needed. You can record, just that I would prefer that it's not published anywhere... Yeah.

01:22 Vaida G.: Of course, I guarantee. So of course, neither this video nor any company names, your name, your colleagues names, if they would be mentioned, - nothing will be public. It would be anonymized. And recording deleted immediately after transcription. Yeah, it's all anonymous. For starters, I'll firstly ask a couple of like background questions. So to get to know your experience with project management and with coaching and then we will dive deep into 7 topics I wrote you about as well already. They are very general. They were presented by Harvard Professor Edmondson who has spent like decades investigating psychological safety in teams. So we will look through the topics she proposed that are connected to psychological safety, such as when there are some problems in the team, mistakes made in the team, risks, differing opinions or conflicts as well; then we will move to help, respecting each other, and recognition. So I will go one by one and explain a bit more in detail later, when we come to it. You don't have to remember everything by heart here. I'm here to listen, and I am thankful for your insights. You can dive deeper into some of the situations more; you may feel like some of them are not relevant for you. So I don't expect any particular answers from your side. We can start, if I may...

03:21 Vaida G.: Could you tell me your experience in short? Your experience in project management in general. Year-wise, and in terms of industry on industries you worked in.

03:31 I-5: Ohh yeah, so kind of... I'm overall in the IT industry for close to 18 years already, so I usually think 17, but must be 18 already. So maybe first seven years was not managing experience at all, then some different roles that require being a manager. So not a project manager as a project, but some parts of it. So like a release management, delivery management, some parts of it... Yeah. So kind of seven... Last seven years is a pure project management.

04:53 Vaida G.: OK, so 18 years in general in IT industry and then around 7 of project management.

05:01 I-5: Yeah, I would say that would be correct.

05:03 Vaida G.: Thank you. And with coaching, how familiar you are?

05:12 I-5: Ohh... I did some some trainings and the practice that I have... It's not, also not, you know, the standardized way, so kind of it's part of a job, one of the role that you have to do, as new guys are coming especially. So it's kind of how we deal with situation and me being in a managerial position of the people... It's kind of my job to deal with different situations and that's where I think my experience as a coach comes.

06:00 Vaida G.: OK. And before we go into these situations that are all connected with the term of psychological safety, I just wanted to check how you yourself understand this definition? It doesn't have to be from some theory, but how would you explain what psychological safety means to you?

06:19 I-5: Hmm. Oh. I would say for me it means a lot about the team's spirits.

About communication and hmm, well, what we in IT call soft skills. So anything besides the hard skills which are programming and whatever else. Overall understanding of psychology that helps a lot, and so understanding what you feel, what you think, what are the reasons for it, how you deal with the different type of situation on your own and with the people you work with.

07:14 Vaida G.: OK, so how others are feeling? How I'm feeling, being mindful. Understanding some psychology...

07:28 I-5: Uh, yeah. So kind of my job is to have a happy team. So not, maybe, excited, but if the team is happy, then it kind of helps productivity as well. So that's what it means for me at least.

07:53 Vaida G.: Good. So now we will jump into the situations and we have approximately 35 minutes for that. To start with, just to inform – the situations are very generalized, so you are free to explore some of the topics you feel relatable to you more, and others less. No wrong or right answers. We will start with issues, or impediments. In a psychologically safe team, one should be able to bring touch issues, talk openly, not to be afraid to speak about problems one faces. How do you... How do you act? What do you do that people feel safe to do that?

08:45 I-5: OK, that's better. Yes. So sorry I didn't hear you very well. Could you maybe repeat please again?

09:02 Vaida G.: Do you hear me well?

09:05 I-5: That was just one interruption, so, I heard something, but not not well.

09:07 Vaida G.: OK. OK. Let me just turn into the mobile data because it could be definitely me. Let me check it will take a minute. I've been having some problems, but I can hear you well. However, I want to make sure that it's both sides that you hear me properly as well. OK.

09:58 Vaida G.: Can you hear me now? Better. OK. Yeah. So the topic was about problems – what do you do to like make sure that people feel safe to bring issues to the table, not to be afraid to speak about problems they are having?

10:18 I-5: It depends... Usually, it's my job to deal with problems, not team's. Ohh team's job is to to deliver a working product and if it's something about it just writing code, testing code, then that is their job. I try to not interfere there, because they're professionals and so on. Maybe if it's something that they see that is being unprofessional, not enough skills, wrong decision... Then I can help. Or with also technical issues. So laptop is not working. Network connection not working. This is also an issue...

11:11 I-5: Also part of my job is to deal with this type of issues. Usually I will not go and buy a laptop. However, on my previous job there were such cases also, because nobody else was responsible for that. So then my job is to find the person responsible. If it is a technical issue

or any other type of issue, then we know that there is a specific person whose role is to deal with it.

11:37 I-5: Other thing is just overall people not working good. Maybe then it's my turn to step up maybe, but there is no ohh objective solution to it... So I have have to dig deeper and understand what's happening there. So we have something we have to understand what happened, what should we do and. Umm well how to resolve it and how to avoid such problems in the future... So that that's the plan

12:17 Vaida G.: OK, so you dig deeper by asking mainly these three questions: like understanding what happened, then how to resolve this right now, the problem that we have, and then how to prevent it from repeating in the future. So we don't have the same situation repeat.

12:29 I-5: Ohh, maybe not directly asking these questions and definitely not at the same time.. So first of all.. So first of all, we have to deal with situation. Minimize the risks. Find the solution. After that, during retrospective, we look at it and see, well, what was the cause of it. Definitely not the first thing you do. First, you deal with consequences. Then find the costs, then find how to avoid this type of situation. Kind of. If if we look at this issue resolution workflow.

13:20 Vaida G.: Umm. OK good. Thanks for sharing. We may move to the second topic. How about mistakes? What is your role as a project manager to ensure people feel safe to make mistakes?

13:38 I-5: Ohh for me it's expected! So we are people, even if you would not be people... So I work with software and software has a lot of mistakes and it is caused by people or not caused by people. That's another question... But I can expect mistakes, really. And uh, maybe the level of mistakes and severity and how often they happen. It depends on a a... On a specific role, specific person and so or so. Well, let's say a person who just got their degree, just joined the company, short time working together and so on. So I would, I would really really expect and encourage all kind of mistakes here... In communication, in the writing of the code, and so on.

14:37 I-5: So but if a person has 20 years of experience, I would expect a lot less of that. For me it would be a problem to see why it's happening and so if a person is not learning from

their mistakes, then it is an issue that we have to deal with. But overall, mistakes are normal. That that's human.

15:04 Vaida G.: Mm-hmm. And and what do you? Umm do you use any particular phrases you have or any particular techniques to make people feel better if they make a mistake? You mentioned like it's normal, you expect it.

15:20 I-5: Yes, I I'm... I'm trying to recall the situations that... Yes, so some sometimes I say so. Well, first of all, I'm... I never blame. So well, it's too late – the mistake is there already. So you don't have to blame... So well, maybe if it's constantly happening, then it it should be looked at in different way. The person that makes horrible mistakes constantly and not getting better and not trying to solve – not someone I would work with, really.

15:57 I-5: If we go through the situation, understood the causes, what needs to be done differently, and so on... But if this continues happening then and it makes a lot of trouble for the team, myself personally, client or the company, then we shouldn't work with with such people.

16:22 I-5: And sometimes it happens. Ohh maybe some are not professional enough. Let's say some cannot work with certain people, some just want to do something else and don't pay enough attention. So first of all, if we're we are not capable of working together, then we shouldn't, and I'm kind of really honest and open about it within my my team.

16:57 Vaida G.: OK. OK. So thank you for sharing. What about any differing opinions? Or conflicts? If you recall any situation that you would be comfortable sharing with me, where you also kind of had role in? To ensure that everyone can speak up, share different opinions.

17:21 I-5: One situation in particular comes into my mind, and there was... We had several teams there, so I was responsible for two of them. One was kind of what I was working with on an everyday basis... So you know... More friendly atmosphere and so on... Other was having another manager previously who left the company with not the best basis, let's say, whatever, you know, you know... And so that team was a bit struggle for me to deal with and atmosphere inside was not the most pleasant, let's say so. And that team lead was complaining to me that he cannot work with a particular person there.

18:09 I-5: And but then the, well, not the fun part, but actually it was a little bit funny that he sent me some screenshots from their conversations with that particular person. Like he's talking to that other person in chat. And I thought: "Well, that's not exactly what you are

telling me, because what I see in a chat that you are... Well, being too bossy in a in a way that it's kind of..." So I was trying to understand both sides – the team lead and that person he didn't like to work with. Trying to understand persons, so I don't see it all black or white and. So then I come into the situation when a person is complaining to me, but I see that well... I know the person he's complaining about.

19:01 I-5: So we worked in other things together and so on. So he's... Well, that particular person is maybe not the most nicest person to talk to. Ohh, but you have to understand your team. And there are other people, and they have to ohh find a way to work with you. You also have to do it here. So I tried talking to both of them... Like: "Let's see what's your position". So I talked with each of them individually. Then we sat together. To try to solve situation... It turned out that they completely miscommunicated.

19:45 I-5: So the priority... And the overall, so... So it was not understood. We tried to find what's the rationalization of all of it...

20:07 Vaida G.: Mm-hmm.

20:09 I-5: Why one person behaves like that? Why the other person have to have the reports? In my opinion, I tried to do my best to try to understand their positions. Trying to figure why how they can operate together? Uh solution from the team lead was to leave the company.

20:38 I-5: Probably not the best for the company, but well, if you are well... We all now call "toxic", and it's exactly toxic behavior from him, so I wasn't really upset of him leaving, but yet there were troubles... But that's like, that's how business operates. But for him, it was it was the best solution. For me, it wasn't the worst solution, let's say so... But in in any way I didn't... Uh, I don't know. I I didn't want to blame the other guy just because another person complained to me that he behaved in some way.

21:22 Vaida G.: OK. You wanted to hear actively both sides and not to take one side, and just not to take one person's opinion. OK. And anything else you would like to add to this conflict?

21:41 I-5: We can move on, I think, yes...

21:45 Vaida G.: Now we will be covering the risks topic. This is not risk management in projects. By risks, I mean team members in the project team feeling safe to experiment,

challenge standard ways of working, being very innovative... Do you do like anything from your side to ensure such such an environment that is welcoming this risky behavior?

22:36 I-5: Ohh well here the overall my approach is to first think what's what's the worst thing that could happen. So if there are some changes, delays... I think what can happen to me; personally, I care, first of all, about myself; then – what can happen to the team and what can happen to the company? And so what is the worst case that can happen. I really support people taking risks if if they try to manage their main role. But I think it's motivating for them. And sometimes clients get even more.

23:11 I-5: Who will be hurt by this? Nobody. Usually, it's like that. So there even some opportunities for us with those risks. 26:17 Vaida G.: Yeah, I see. And then you show trust. I see by this that yeah, that you trust them as professionals. Thank you for sharing. Then now we're moving to the last three topics. One of which is help and collaboration within the team. In a psychologically safe team, people feel safe to ask for help and it's not difficult to ask and get help. Do you do anything, if yes, what, to ensure that collaboration, that everyone is working hand in hand?

27:12 I-5: Well, pre-COVID times helped with that more. So you are in one place, especially if you're sitting in one room. This is the best approach. So yeah, sitting at your home office is much better for myself, but it's not as good for working in a team and making a team a better team. So let's say yeah, so I can feel better here at home, but the project feels better when we are all in one place. So when it is what we have now, some of the team members that I I never seen in person in fact...

28:04 I-5: So we usually try to get at least the core part of the team, if not the whole team, into one place and do the initiation phase. Talk about the requirements and so on. Then go for dinner, that keeps us all together in one room. Or at least in one office, for a week or two, especially if it's an absolutely new team where people don't know about each other. And so on.

28:33 I-5: If all that is not possible, I know there are practices of like having online games. I'm not a big fan of it, so I cannot say if that it is good. But uh. Uh. Ohh, maybe I'm too afraid. Maybe I'm too lazy or I just don't practice it...

29:02 Vaida G.: Mm-hmm. OK, OK, I see. But thank you for sharing this, that you bring people together in the very start. The second to the last question is respect. That everyone in a

psychologically safe team is respected and no one's efforts are diminished. No one is ignored or feels little, not important. What role do you have as a project manager to ensure there is respect within the team?

29:44 I-5: Ohh it's more... More or less natural, I would say so. But I haven't heard about this and any particular situations.. What I'm also trying to do, is I'm trying to to handle not have restricted hierarchy first of all, so everybody is doing his job and so... I personally, as a project manager, don't look at my role as a you know... A more advanced place in a team or in a company there. So I don't know how to code. I don't know how to... Well, I do know how to test, but I don't do it, so probably not a pro... So so that that's not me. So I respect other people as professionals and want no hierarchical structure.

30:47 I-5: Of course, there are roles as a team lead, for example, that are... Uh, are having this hierarchy there. But it's more on what you have to do on your role... Some do, well, less tasks. Responsibilities are smaller for some of the people and the bills are bigger. Of course, it makes a little bit hierarchy, but not that their voice matters more in all situations. Well, that's ideally... Uh. In life, it is in fact more complicated, because it depends on what the person means for the company. And then this pure business comes in place... So if we have a situation where... So then, because, well, there are people that you can lose, because that's how business operates, and there are people that you cannot lose.. So but if it is toxic colleague, but also highly professional developer in a team.... He makes situation sometimes worse. So either you have to give them... Yeah, I don't know, tasks, and say: "You are very good professional, do this work on your own."

33:02 Vaida G.: Umm.

33:04 I-5: "Don't communicate with other people if it disturbs you, and this serves other people."

33:26 Vaida G.: OK. Umm, but what I heard from you is that although this respect comes more or less natural from people, you as a project manager try to show actively... Like vocalize the idea that you are not better than others. Just show example that we are equal and that we have the...

33:47 I-5: And also kind of help with overall healthy atmosphere in the team. So I remember the cases when we were talking and then somebody tried to talk about the person who was not there. I stopped them immediately because that's not what we do. So if especially, well,

you know you can say something that it's not about the job or it is not making the situation worse or or okay... But if you're talking about his professional attitude, attitude in the team, but the person is not here, so you don't want somebody to do these things. And in the team, so if you can say that same thing face to face to the person, OK, that's fine.

34:36 I-5: Then we can argue about it. But if we're sitting here and just speaking behind someone's back, that's not what we want to do, and, uhh, we agree all together with the team about it.

34:47 Vaida G.: OK. OK. I'll just turn on the light. It got dark. Actually it's getting darker earlier and earlier.

35:01 I-5: We'll have the time when you start your working time in the dark and finish in the dark.

35:07 Vaida G.: Yes, that's the dark times that are kinda cozy and inviting to go to like cinemas and theaters and just stay at home.

35:25 I-5: When is kind of established and that's fine. But this time like it is like now, it's like ohh it's dark... I want to go to sleep already, but then in a couple of weeks, you understand that, yeah, that's how we live now. And then you know that it's it's not too late.

35:40 Vaida G.: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. You have to get used to it. That's correct. Thanks. Thanks a lot for this having shared already quite a lot. I just wanted to finish up recognition. The last topic is recognition. Meaning, than each team member feels valued, worthy, and that their skills are utilized in a good way. Overall, how do you acknowledge your team members, how you make sure that they are recognized and seen? You already mentioned this great trust you have in people that they are professionals, and you don't interfere much. Anything else?

36:54 I-5: Yes, I show trust, that's right. Also, like everyone should should have the opportunity to be involved in the meeting. But they don't have to, if they don't want to. Like I'm very considerate. Not pushing. Uh. So you you know, when we have stand up.. This kind of make it equal so everybody has the has the turn to speak and about the problem... So so I I have one on one to one meetings just for the reason that if somebody cannot or doesn't want to speak in a public, they can talk to me personally; in fact, usually that's not the case. But I want to make sure, as you said, I acknowledge everyone's opinion.

39:40 I-5: I never heard that. But there are people that don't want to talk too much. There are people that don't want to attend, you know, team event, going to dinner or having a company event like a sports event that... They just don't want to attend and it might be the same people, that might be the same person who is most vocal, who tells jokes all the times, and so on. And being a good professional. So, but he just doesn't want to go to to this company event because he doesn't want.

40:26 I-5: So should I force him? Absolutely not. So that's fine and everybody should kind of respect it. On the previous workplace, also not a professional situation, but more team situation... We had a girl who had several things they do or don't in her environment: so they don't celebrate birthdays, New Year's and so on. And so when we were having some birthday parties somewhere and brought a cake and so on, she usually just left the room. And I asked her...

41:04 I-5: "And so do you feel not involved?" So she told that she understands that is what people do. But her belief is that she is not doing that, and so she's not doing that. So we don't congratulate her. She's trying not to participate as well.

Other team members were kind of concerned that we want to have a New Year celebration, and whether it will harm her or not. Or then we have a Christmas party, but she will not attend.

41:43 I-5: So will it hurt her? So I'm kind of happy that these concerns come uh, so means that people are worried. But then I tried to explain that that's not a big deal. So she leaves when she wants. We just don't hurt anybody's feelings here. Well, obviously, I wouldn't like completely change company's culture to adapt to a needs of one certain person. But when a person comes to a place, they know what happens here and in the company, in our culture. And they attend or not attend the events.

42:34 I-5: I hope and I feel like it usually happens, that if it's something that is culturally inappropriate, people just don't go in this type of companies.

42:48 Vaida G.: OK. OK. I see. Thank you all for sharing in depth. So that's actually it. We're done, unless there is something you have in your mind, you would like just to share that maybe is out of these situations, maybe something that from my questions didn't stick to these situations. Anything else you'd like to add?

43:13 I-5: No, no, no, nothing on my side. So hope this helps you in your research.

43:20 Vaida G.: Yes, I I'm sure it will. And right now I'm actively doing the interviews. I will be doing the interviews and analysis work throughout the coming month. So what I will do now when I analyze our interview here, I will let you know on LinkedIn. I will send you a short summary of the findings. What are the highlights, what I heard from you, so you can...

44:14 Vaida G.: Verify because it's also important for research to be verified. Validated. Meaning, that I didn't put something from my side.

44:21 Vaida G.: That I didn't create something, didn't make it up. Is there anything else you'd like to ask or comment, or add to the interview material? Please go ahead.

44:44 I-5: Yeah, I wanted to ask you if it's possible to see the work results after all is done.

44:49 Vaida G.: Thank you for asking, sure. I can share the results or present them in the format you prefer later. Once again, thank you. If any questions pop up, you're always welcome to contact me. But then I will get back to you in a couple of weeks. Thank you a lot, goodbye.

Academic research interview with I-6

Transcript

00:00 Vaida G.: Hello. Could you please let me know once again if I may record? The session will be anonymized and deleted after transcription.

00:02 I-6: Yes, thank you, you may record. Sorry, could you please help me how to pronounce correctly your name?

00:10 Vaida G.: Sure, it's Vaida.

00:12 I-6: OK, thank you. And nice to meet you Vaida.

00:26 Vaida G.: Thanks a lot for taking the time. I really appreciate that that you find this time on Friday – we will take around 45 minutes. So to introduce myself, I'm Vaida. I'm studying at Vilnius University in Lithuania. I'm doing a study on how project managers include coaching practices. If they include them in any way in virtual teams. I investigate this kind of coaching practices in remote team in terms of the psychological safety aspect in the team; how project managers foster psychological safety within the project team.

01:57 Vaida G.: Harvard University researcher Edmondson have done research for decades about psychological safety. And she has defined seven particular topic that denote psychological safety in the team. After our interview, I will analyze it in terms of International Coaching Federation coaching competencies and practices. So what I want to do in this interview, just to talk very freely, there will be questions, but they are more like guidelines for us to discuss; for you share how you react, how you act in those situations. I'd be grateful if you spoke in examples about usual practices of yours. You don't have to think if the things you do are coaching or not – just please share freely. If you don't have anything particular in your mind, that would kinda reflect those situations, you can of course say that it is not relevant. There are no right or wrong answers.

02:56 Vaida G.: And, as I said before, it's anonymous. Your name, your company won't be reflected in the thesis at all. So you can feel safe about that. And after we do this interview, after I transcribe it and systemize it a bit, I will send you like a short summary of the findings for you to validate if it's correct. It's important for research validity.

03:47 I-6: OK, and it would be nice to see the final results. Nice to know some findings, like maybe like it's also interesting to see the highlights of other people because I understand that like I am not the only one who you are interviewing. Yeah, OK.

04:05 Vaida G.: Great. Great. Yeah, I'll be happy to present the results. So before we start, umm, I just wanted you to know that I may highlight some things here in my notebook.

04:26 Vaida G.: But yeah, before we start with those main topic, I would like to briefly hear your context of being a project manager – year-wise and industry-wise.

04:43 I-6: Uh-huh. OK, so, in general, my working experience is around 10 years, so like particularly, as a project manager, like it's like 5 plus, like 6... And before this like I was working more like on the process project management, so like more like aligning... Like we didn't have a specific time frame; also like it was kind of enhancing the process management.

05:17 I-6: So let's say like if to be concentrated more like with dedicated teams and specifically with some results gaining... So like it's like some my last five years. Umm I have experience in outsource companies and product companies, so like also the fields of logistics and ecommerce. Umm.

05:55 Vaida G.: OK. OK. Thank you for sharing. This is more than enough for me to understand just the context. And what about coaching itself? How did you get familiar with it?

06:14 I-6: Umm, you mean like my knowledge is or in general like how do I work with teams?

06:20 Vaida G.: Uh, your knowledge. Like with the project management, you answered your experience, like how many years, etc... So with coaching, when did it come to you?

06:33 I-6: Yeah, like, OK, first, it came from my experience. I was learning something from the books, from the forums, from experience of my friends. Then like when I wanted to like, let's say, drastically change... I decided to enhance my knowledge and like I went to specific courses, I made some certification, and after that like I applied for positions as a project manager. So yeah, it was like self-learning, some external courses and also... Like reading books and like internal courses.

07:19 I-6: Normally I would say that project management and all this stuff is that is connected with IT. Umm, it's developing so fast that normally it's worth to read some forums and some and some webinars than like to read the big manual.

07:54 Vaida G.: And with coaching, how much familiar are you, how did it come into your life?

08:02 I-6: Let's say like it came together. So like when you are working with this project management that you know how to deal with the team, like you know how to work like how to work with stressful situations, like what this conflict management, how to present information. So like let's say umm, like I didn't do any specific trainings, but like it's a constant learning and experiencing that with work.

08:34 Vaida G.: Mm-hmm. OK. OK. Thank you. And before we jump into those main questions that are all connected with the topic of psychological safety, I will just want to ask how you yourself understand the term psychological safety?.. There is no like right or wrong answer here... I'm not checking any theory knowledge of yours, but how do you see – what is psychological safety?

08:59 I-6: Yeah, actually it's the question that I wanted to ask you. But OK, let me, umm think about it. So like, perhaps it's something that like if team is feeling comfortable and determined, so like if team can be motivated and feel safe in their workspace, feel trust, feel... Umm enough power to perform and to know like some... In short, like it's a comfort of work.

09:37 I-6: Something like this?

09:41 Vaida G.: OK, thank you for sharing. So if you wanted to ask me from what kind of perspective I am doing this research, so it's not that you must think the same way, of course. I always ask interviewees how they see psychological safety just to align before we go into the main questions; just to know that we're on the same page, but of course, you don't have to know any theory before answering.

10:10 Vaida G.: So the researcher from Harvard I already mentioned defines it as a feeling that a person can make mistakes, not know stuff, take risks in the team, like speak up when there is different opinions and say something that is, you know, maybe not to be supported by the whole team. Uh also going into conflicts and the team being safe that if they make a mistake, they won't be punished, they won't be like held against and they won't become some

kind of an enemy of the team... So I'm now going into details more, but we will go through those situations through how that researcher defines it. So in general, it's like, yeah, feeling safe that you won't be held against in the team for what you do and who you are.

11:03 Vaida G.: Umm, but yeah, it's similar of course to what you mentioned. So right now we will go to these seven topics. You can share as much or as little as you feel safe that you want to; but as I mentioned it's completely anonymous. The topics that I I will introduce, are generalized, so you may elaborate into as many details as you'd like. The first situation is issues, or problems, within the team.

11:53 Vaida G.: I will explain further. Then the second is mistakes done; third is differing opinions or even maybe conflicts; and fourth is risks

12:09 Vaida G.: And then the fifth is about help between team members; sixth is about respect. And the last, seventh, is about recognition. So when we come to each question, I will also try to explain them more in detail. What I mean by that.

12:56 Vaida G.: I really welcome you to speak in examples as much as possible, and it will be easier then to deep dive into the situations. For some, you may go deeper into, for some you may have less to say – it is all fine. So if we start with the problems: in a psychologically safe team, one should feel safe to bring tough issues. How do you act? How do you react as the project manager when team is facing issues, so that they feel safe?

13:41 I-6: OK, so like it all depends. If we're talking about like it happened first time, so like this this problem occurred first time. So of course, like we can first sit together like on one to one to check like what is the problem... Like how it happened. So it depends. Like if you're talking about IT projects normally. So like, I'm not technical project manager, so like, I mean, I cannot code, so that perhaps I will find the right person... So like I

find the right contact to find the person who can, who can have the exact expertise that we can use for resolving this question.

14:24 I-6: But also like if it's something like on the organizational levels that I can help or like maybe on the product level... Of course like I can make the reply on my own. If we have this problem like persisting... So like, it may also be a separate case so that we just consider that maybe there is some problem of understanding or like maybe concentration. So like we can discuss it umm like already like this in other form.. Like questions let's say.

14:58 I-6: So like we can see like why this problem happened once again, like what we can do like to not umm have it again and like... What is also worth it like... As we are working as an agile team in Scrum, so like it's also good to have like some in some periods a retrospective. And like when we resolve some type of problem, like it's good to voice out to learn for everyone that OK... Like in these two weeks in this Sprint that we had like this case... So just like OK it happened, so that we can say OK it happened, like, we had this issue, so please be aware. So not blaming like... We all are human and like if there is enough...

15:50 I-6: Understanding motivation and intention to resolve this problem. So like, no like there is nothing bad in a problem. So does it? Does it answer your question?

16:04 Vaida G.: I think yes, for sure. Uh, you mentioned that you use particular questions when either when it's the first time issue or when it's repeating.

16:15 Vaida G.: And I noted questions like how it happened, how we can prevent it. Are there any other particular questions that come into your mind? Like what do you ask person so that they can think, how you encourage thinking?

Encourage that solving of the problem.

16:30 I-6: Normally like umm, I'm asking them to think like what we can do to resolve it. So like what options person can have.

So because like if this situation occurred that he is the first person who is dealing with this... Like we can all brainstorm these questions. "Because if you need more attendees for this issue, so we umm request a meeting and we can have a conversation with others on that. But this in on you to decide." But like normally we need to know like, OK, what happened, what we can do to resolve it and like how we can prevent it in the future. So like normally like we also we always ask like what we can do to prevent, because like we don't want to waste time...

17:42 Vaida G.: OK, OK. Umm good and thank you for sharing. Moving to mistakes made in team... In a psychologically safe team, people feel safe to make mistakes. What role do you see as a project manager when facing mistakes made by team members?

17:59 I-6: Also depends about the mistakes. So like, I think the team members that when they start working... Like they they are passing some trainings by understanding like what what

harm each mistake can make. Let's say like if the person is deploying the code in production on Friday and then on Saturday and Sunday, also team is not having enough free time but like resolving the issue.

18:28 I-6: So, like, let's say it's an obvious mistake that person like umm, like it's something that that is very easy for adult person to omit. I'd say like if it's something that like is safe, so like it's OK to try on the safe environment or like experiment something and like just learn from this.

18:51 I-6: So like it's like... This type of mistakes are encouraged, so like by the teams.. To actually do something, than just to waste time thinking.

But yeah, like it depends on the type; it is expected from the person to be accountable of, like some important taking some high risks even like if the person doesn't have a lot of experience.

19:20 I-6: But uh, companies and projects, they give this first inputs information like what is good, what is bad. So like after this type of trainings, it is expected that some hard mistakes will be omitted uh by team members. And of course like, let's say nobody's happy. Uh. Like when they need to work overnight.

20:00 I-6: Yeah, let's say like, of course, like in the business environment, like in the working environment, like nobody will like swear or like use like some financial punishment. But of course, like team won't be happy. And yes, as a project manager, I will try to do my best like to facilitate this conversation. But like let's say, as adults like we expect that people know and understand. Like what consequences it can make. And of course, like we are trying to be as much as umm, I don't know, like friendly work-oriented and try to understand each other.

20:42 I-6: But let's say what is written in the books and like what... What is happening in real life? That person can be silent, some senior manager can be, can be silent and like he won't express uh like their disappointment.

But I know that. Yeah, in depth of his mind... Like their relationship can be like not destroyed, but harmed... With very critical mistakes that can happen. But let's say the vast majority of other mistakes would say like, when... When it's like on the safe environment, like when they are learning from that, like when they're coming and saying: "OK, I made this mistake but I want to just change it"... Like it's not a problem.

21:30 I-6: When person is not trying to omit this and like try to cover it by guilting somebody else, umm... On my experience I didn't have any toxic issues.

21:52 Vaida G.: Mhm. OK. Thank you. Thank you for sharing, moving to conflicts or just differing opinions in the team. In psychologically safe team, everybody should feel safe to share different opinions and not be rejected. Do you have examples you would feel safe to share about conflicts that you maybe had a role in?

22:06 I-6: Let me let me think of one.. Umm let's say like when it happens within the team. Uh, like we also we always encouraging like and in retrospectives like we explain umm... Me and like my coworker engineering manager like we explain that it's very important to have like to have good brainstorming of ideas.

22:33 I-6: So like, it's doesn't mean that like you as a senior manager or senior person can say something, and then like mid or junior need to be silent. So like, we try to encourage juniors and middle ones like to share opinion and like even if they're not correct, but it's it's a training for them that... So teams pass different stages. So like when team members are just learning about each other and when they are like working for substantial amount of of time...

23:19 I-6: Different opinions are treated in different ways. So when the team is already formed and everyone already knows each other... So like these type of opinions like different opinions are taken in a very easy way. So like, and it's very mature discussion, and people trust each other in the team. So like when the team is just in the stage of storming, it can be challenging because like when one developer can propose one technical approach and another developer like doesn't consider it's the correct one, so they can enter the silent games saying that....

24:09 I-6: And umm, like on the virtual teams... It's not very easy to determine, and perhaps like maybe in one to ones you can hear like some yelling or something like that... Because like they are not feeling safe still in this moment to voice out what is OK and what is not OK. But like my feeling is that it is very important for the technical leads like in IT environment like to share...First of all, to show trust; because normally, project managers they are seen like punishers by teams since like they have this evil eye and find somebody guilty...

24:53 I-6: But I'm trying to encourage lead technical engineers. Like to bring this culture of discussion from the inside. Then, umm, the engineers have more trust like because of them. So like I'm trying to build that like that safe place.

25:21 Vaida G.: OK.

25:24 I-6: And yeah.

25:25 Vaida G.: Good. Thank you. Thank you for sharing. So I heard that usually different opinions are usually accepted in the later stages at the project. If the project is starting and the team is storming and forming, there may be some differing opinions. Emotions are maybe not shown too much unless it's one to ones. And you really highlighted the importance of trust in people.

26:13 Vaida G.: Right. Right now we talked about conflicts, but I think maybe in general I'm interested in how you as a project manager show the trust in the team and what do you do to show it. Do you just say it specifically in some words or you do something else that they see that you trust them?

27:11 I-6: Umm. Normally I'm just trying to show um, like the willingness to like... Let's say, to not to admit, but to resolve the conflict. So like, let's say to show the trust... I'm not very like... I don't feel. How can I explain it... So like for me trying to... I don't like to take one or another position like. If I take one position that means that like another one is wrong. So like to see that all the points matter like... Showing both advantages and disadvantages of both sides. And also, like, I give team to...

28:06 I-6: Give them the tools and instruments to resolve this issue on their own. So that... Because I don't want to be the person...

28:13 I-6: Like who... Who will like resolve their problems like without them. So.. like let's say from what I hear and what I see in different projects and in different environments... Like developers, like in IT teams, developers like... They take Project Manager as a type of like, I say, like punisher or somebody like who is just like checking like when it will be done.

28:49 I-6: So like they don't feel this trust like, because sometimes like it really happens that project managers really don't have time to go into the depths. Like of all the small issues and problems, and like they can miss some, maybe like miscommunication or something. So that's why I'm trying to build as much as I can the good relationship with lead technical engineer and on my one to ones with them to bring like even like these problems. That's like: "Look like I saw this one."

29:20 I-6: “So like what happened? Like maybe you can help out?” Because, yeah, like when your peer is giving you advice like it's more valuable than like someone from a side, from different field showing you how you need to work... It's like if... I I don't know, like if I go to hairdresser and say like how she should cut the hair. So that's why I'm just trying to show that like we can't ohm like argue and like starting like, you know, blaming each other like, but also like I don't like to be like... Say that like everything is nice and rainbows.

30:00 I-6: So, like let's say, OK, we have problem like let's admit it, but let's see like what options do we have et cetera et cetera, but not umm like not resolve this problem by myself.

30:16 Vaida G.: So they own it themselves. And you said you give those uh people tools and instruments to resolve those issues, those conflicts themselves. What did you mean by tools and instruments?

30:33 I-6: Yeah, I mean like, just like asking them questions. So like what? Like proposing, like. OK. Like maybe like we should have, like separate meeting for that. So they can discuss it in like, not in front of like 5-10 people but like in front of like three or two. Like if we can like, ask them the questions like, OK, like why it's happening? Like what? What is the benefits, like structurize it little bit..

Because sometimes technical conversations can be like very artistic. So like they are going into depths and they don't structurize...

31:09 I-6: So like to see like the benefits and for them to have, like asking the questions like OK, how it can benefit like... What will be the end results like we have in future, like if you implement this like.. Like what risk we have, what timelines like... And after that like to say OK like... We have these five criterias that we use.. Like what do you think like we can.. What options we can work on?

31:35 I-6: Umm. So like it, it's like if we are talking about uh.... Some, umm... Working processes, so like normally I use it and also umm like by adding this technical expert that also can encourage them uh from the engineering side... Like to be uh like to feel that like it's safe like... To share like all the technical details and like that they are also protected. Because like engineers and project managers – they have different goals, let's say. Let me be a little bit specific. So probably what project manager is willing is for the project to be delivered as fast as possible, within budget etcetera.

32:33 I-6: What engineer seeks like, normally, is like whether the code and the architecture is good, and that like the code is written like in the good way. So let's say in total, of course, like the team needs to deliver right product in the right time, but the focus of what is needed like in different team members can be different. So it's important for me to balance it, so that team is not, doesn't feel that like they are stressed just like to deliver fast and like and overnight or like and everything. So yeah.

33:07 Vaida G.: OK. OK. Thank you so much for sharing specific examples. And now before we we move to the last three topics, let's cover risks. What is meant by risks – is that in a psychologically safe team people are safe to take risks. To be innovative, challenging standard ways of working, experiment. What do you do to ensure that people feel safe to take risks within the team?

34:01 I-6: Umm. I'd say it's a mix of factors, really... But but... Can I come back in a few minutes, sorry? I need to check something for work...

So yeah, the risks. As I said everyone are accountable for what they like do so like it's not like they are always like scared to to take responsibility. It's like kind of natural like...I I also make sure that they are like seen and like recognized for their ideas and extra mile, so that like maybe... Maybe that motivates... And, of course, like I think money factor is like crucial. If you want to go up, you have to like show more than usual and do more, take risks, manage them like well. But what I do.. I ask team to share doubts as soon as possible. I would like try to encourage them and like help with like like their doubts...

39:08 I-6: So first like it's be sure that team. Umm, like is accountable for and committed to that. So like they have and ensure that. So like making them accountable. For what they're doing.

40:17 Vaida G.: OK, OK. We have, uh, only 5 minutes left, so I'll ask to uh that we go through the three last remaining topics kind in brief.

40:31 I-6: It's like, I mean like, I have time so that we can... If you don't have, time it's OK. But I mean, I have time to to answer all your questions.

40:37 Vaida G.: OK, OK, I can as well. So then thank you very much.

Moving on – help topic. In a psychologically safe team, everyone in the team can ask for help, it's not difficult to do, not scary, not embarrassing. How do you encourage, or do you do

anything if it's needed, to make sure that team members are getting help from each other? That they are collaborating, that they are not working isolated, you know, in silos in the team.

41:35 I-6: Hmm. OK. Yeah. Umm so. Umm. First of all, like just like little bit on the side. Not all projects start with new team, so let's say like there are a lot of cases like when the team is already formed and they know how to work, and the project that can start in the middle of their forming stage, or like or when they are already performing good as a team. So like it, it's not very often case like when a new team starts.

So, like, let's say it's a very umm risky case like... Because uh, when team doesn't know how to interact with each other and they don't know the product well. So like it creates double risk. Uh.

42:25 I-6: And like we try, at least like in my experience, like we try in previous position, in in this position we tried to...

42:35 I-6: Bring to that new team some team members who can collaborate already, who who worked previously with each other. But when it's new, you of course like... First of all, I'm trying to understand if team has everything that they need, so like if they have all the accesses that like, they know that they can address all the questions that they need. So like to explain them that it's OK to ask what all type of questions and... Like it's even better to ask than be silent.

43:18 I-6: I explain them that they have trustful space here and everyone is happy to help. And like using this scrum technologies, we are trying to... Ohm ohm interact with team on the daily basis; to see like how do they progress if they having these blockers... And when they have like blockers – who can help? Saying that like, OK, I see that team member named “A” already knew how to work with this, so... Like encourage to come to him or maybe like in other team I know that... Because like I am managing several teams at once. So I.. I know it like this person has expertise. “Please do check with him how to do it better so.”

44:03 I-6: Yeah, like the first thing... Like, yeah, there is particular challenge with umm online calls, and I wanted to also to bring to your attention different mentalities. They behave differently. Let's say I was working with Slavic teams, with US teams and with Australians, and like it's very interesting that like Slavic teams... They don't like to switch on the camera, while Australians and US always have their camera on and trying to show their emotions like... And it's easier for me to understand the communication. While with Slavic...

44:50 I-6: It's more difficult. Umm. And sometimes, like I needed to force teams to switch on cameras to see at least what's going on.

45:00 Vaida G.: Mm-hmm. OK. OK. I see. Yeah. Anything else you want to add to encouraging collaboration or ensuring that people don't work just alone?

Besides what you mentioned.

45:12 I-6: Yeah. Like as I said, like about the practices. So one of the very important scrum practices is refinement.

45:19 I-6: So like when it's a new project, I am making sure the team has specific meetings, so that the product manager can go into depths with description to answer all the questions; like then we can see like if everyone understands what's going on, like what we will be building. If the team says "OK, we need mitigation or we need to consult something that we don't understand." So like they have enough opportunities to voice out their questions... Uh, like they know, like the chats, all the contacts like if they have questions.

46:04 I-6: So I really in some moments, like when we have lots of projects and I don't have more time on like very detailed explanation or something. So like, I also expect that they hear us like, and they have open space and they can ask questions so that they will also come with those questions.

46:29 Vaida G.: OK. OK. Thank you. And the last few questions. So you already mentioned the cultural differences. The differences in cultures. OK, so in order for the whole team to be engaged, you mentioned that sometimes you like particularly just ask straightforwardly to open up the cameras. But is there anything else? So do you also need to kinda use different approaches to different people in order to engage them all in the team? As you mentioned they we are all very different personalities, maybe more talkative, less talkative.

47:46 I-6: Umm yeah. And I would say that, like, let's say for U.S. Team, you can't be direct. So like you need to be... For me, it's difficult to explain, but like you need to find the correct words, like you need to be more like open-minded like you... You cannot just criticize, you first have to say that someone did nice work and something needs a bit of change. Like, "Ohh so nice but like I would like to change like here."

48:14 I-6: "Like, what do you think?" Uh... With the Polish team like or like with Ukrainian we can say OK like this is so really bad. So like... But also like as what we can do with that.

So you can be more straightforward and they can be also more direct with you. Uh, so also? Uh. Even like between Poland and Ukraine, like lately, I found the differences in seeing the things. For me it was discovery like several weeks ago that they are very different and I'm still learning. Like what patterns I don't need to use with Polish team. Uh, that can be harmful, but yeah... I know that, let's say I can answer you... What would be written in the paper... So like in the articles like how it should be. But like when you have different like several projects and like you like... Honestly, just you don't have time for sleeping. So sometimes, like all these best practices like coming to like uh out of order. So normally, yes, I don't force people like let's say, I don't force people to be very talkative and like to... To respond on all the questions.

51:36 I-6: But let's say if I see that person is very quiet and like I see that there are some questions and the person is quiet and this is the reason that some tasks are delivered late. So then, like, maybe we'll talk on one to one or ask some engineering and team leader to to work on this problem saying that, OK, maybe there is some issue and we can somehow encourage person or like to build more trustful relationship with this person and to make this person talk when it's needed talking.

52:16 I-6: Uh, yeah. So like it it all depends like on the results. Like if if results are suffering from ohh silence or additional like or excessive talking so like I'm trying to adjust it.

52:50 Vaida G.: OK. Yep. And just to finish up, thanks a lot for sharing so much and in depth, with the respect and recognition. Sorry I'm combining two topics into one, but I see the time and we need to manage before I have to go, sorry. You mentioned already being respectful for different cultures - is there anything else to add? And for recognition – how do you ensure that everyone feels valued and important in the team?

53:51 I-6: Umm, so respect, not sure, what else... If I see that there are some issues, uh, like that, uh, like through some type of humiliating or something... So I know like I'm not their people manager. So like I can't say them like what they need to do, but I have regular talks with their manager. And I'm trying to point out that like, look like this happens...

54:28 I-6: So and maybe like be present in these calls and just like because umm, is it as I said before like... I don't want to be a punisher or like the resolver like ... Because it's one of the problems that I have in one of the teams that for some time it was built a culture that like one team member was leader like technical and charismatic leader...

54:52 I-6: It's just like he decided what had to be done. Everyone was listening to him and it was just like one decision point of everything. And in the end,so this person moved to another department and it happens that like these people like right now awaiting that like somebody will tell them what to do, how to resolve the questions. And unfortunately, like this team is already working for three years and even like after this time, they didn't... They don't want to learn by taking decisions on their own. So it's very, very important from the very beginning to show that there is no mom or father like that will come and help them to do... So yeah, and for recognition I think I told everything, let me think. Yeah just notice people that like do more, like like really striving... I don't know...Also including juniors, because like their opinion is always like important even if like not right and... If I remember, I will write you.

56:13 Vaida G.: OK. OK. Yeah. It's nice to hear how you're managing this kind of self-managing, self-organization in the team; that you're giving ownership to them. I'm glad we met. I thank you so much for all this. If you feel like something pops up into your head that you want to share, as you said, please write.

56:49 Vaida G.: When I summarize the interview, I will send you the main findings; you can verify that it's your ideas. This validation is important for this research of mine. Thank you. Have a good evening.

Academic research interview with I-7

Transcript

00:00 Vaida G.: Hi. Could you please once again give the approval that I can record?

00:02 I-7: Hi. Yes of course. But do you hear me well?

00:10 Vaida G.: Yeah, I hear you well, but let me turn on maybe mobile data. I will try; because I can see you quite poorly, but it's my fault, I think. So let's let's try. I will change my Wi-Fi in a second.

01:03 Vaida G.: Yes, technical things... I can still see you quite poorly, but do you hear? Ohh now it's perfect. Now it's good. Very good. Good. Nice to meet you again.

01:17 I-7: Nice to meet you. Yeah. Yeah, I will try to put my lights to be brighter, but something it's...

01:30 Vaida G.: Uh, I think it was connection problem, but overall it's right now OK. Thanks a lot for your quick reaction and for accepting this invite. Just for your information – the recording will be deleted immediately after transcription, and I ensure anonymity of this interview. So just to quickly present myself... So I'm Vaida. I'm studying at Vilnius University in Lithuania, I'm studying Master's of Project Management. So, right now for my thesis, I'm interviewing project managers who are working with remote teams, or virtual teams, and whether and how they implement coaching practices in their daily work in different situations in order to foster psychological safety in those remote teams.

02:24 Vaida G.: So I found this as a niche and I use Harvard University professor Edmondson's seven topics that she defined, and we will go through each and every of them in the interview. I wrote you on LinkedIn briefly about those topics. They are presented very generally, as Edmondson has studied psychological safety for decades, so it's a very reliable source to kick-start my research from. I will analyze the interview in terms of International Coaching Federation competencies and practices of coaching. And this generalization of those seven topic allows for semi-structured interview; so I will ask you to think like freely and share your experience and examples as you wish. For you to feel safe, I will once again remind, it is anonymous. I will be taking little highlights and notes here in my notes, but

mostly I'll be looking at you and listening to you because we are recording. And we will start with three short introductory questions.

03:55 Vaida G.: So, could you briefly tell me how much experience year-wise and industry-wise in project management you have? Just for me to know brief context.

04:11 I-7: Yeah. OK. Sorry, I'm sorry for my English, maybe some words we'll be OK. Actually, I am a graduated project manager, but in the field of art and culture. But last two and half years I'm working as a project manager and in the field of education and about IT, online education in IT. So yeah, previously I had the project manager experience, but in a different field.

04:57 Vaida G.: OK, good. And overall, how many years in project management?

05:09 I-7: Don't. Umm, I would like to say five or more little bit, yes.

05:18 Vaida G.: OK, good to know. And with coaching – how familiar you are?

05:27 I-7: Umm, so I will like look for clearance... As I'm as a coach er or someone coaching me?

05:39 Vaida G.: It would be the first option. I mean, did you learn it somewhere yourself? Like any practices? How did you start doing it?

05:47 I-7: No, I didn't study it. It came naturally from... From my experience as a project manager, and then going with the flow, and I'm watching what my teams need and I think... I didn't study - just reading and using it in in the practice.

06:15 Vaida G.: OK self-learning and practice, right? And then before we move into those main questions about psychological safety, could you just in simple words explain what do you think psychological safety means for you?

06:46 I-7: So for me it means that... Everyone, including me, is feeling feeling safe and say they can... They can... As we and with my team. Uh, the safety means that they can ask everything they can be like a... Just a minute, I will figure out my sentence. So yes, it means that my team can feel free to... I've suddenly I forget the name, the word or... So yes, they can do not the right thing and don't feel guilty about that. Yeah, making mistakes. Umm and... They can learn, they can ask questions...

07:57 I-7: They can share what is in their mind? What is in their heart? And they can feel free to talk with me if they feel unsafe. They can say to me it, and if they do some mistakes that uh, then can come to me and say ohh I what to not to hide , but feel free to learn from mistakes in my team...

08:27 I-7: So yeah, maybe you have some clean, maybe some, some words or some suggestions and maybe you can... No, it's. OK. Mm-hmm.

08:44 Vaida G.: I really accept any answer here; most important that we are on the same page and we both know what it in general means. Before we move to the main interview questions. There is no need for a theoretical answer or so... Of course, there is theory, I'm happy to share how researcher Edmondson explains it it. So she basically says the same. That people feel... This is the feeling of, uh, being not afraid to take risks in the team, to be different from others in the team to to come into conflict and resolve it. So basically to be yourself and to yes, make mistakes, learn from them.

09:17 I-7: And well, and one very, very important point is that, uh, they can express their feelings.

09:24 I-7: I asking my team member: "How are you feeling?" But like... "How are you really feeling? Are you feeling tired? If you're feeling tired, so just slow down a little bit. I will take care of some works if it's needed and you can take a little bit rest if it's needed." But it is... It depends on the project length, so it's it's three months or four months or 10 months or one month. Yes, it makes a difference, but I I always asking my team members how are they feeling, but for true true feelings, not just chit chat. It's very important for me.

10:03 Vaida G.: Thank you so much for sharing this. I will now just explain what kind of situations we will cover. So as I said, they are explained very generically as Edmondson was studying different kinds of teams, and she was just forming this kind of defining situations where psychological safety could be important.

10:31 Vaida G.: And what I want to understand and learn from you whether you do any coaching or in general how you act in these situations. And maybe something will be coaching, something will be just umm teaching people or whatever you may do. I'll I'll just ask how you react and act in these situations. There is no right or wrong answer. Best is to speak in examples, anonymous examples as much as you feel comfortable to do. And so 1st one will be problems within the team. Then, second is mistakes made in the team, just as you

said. Then there's third - different opinions, conflicts. Uh. And then, uh, 4th is risks. The 5th one will be help and collaboration inside the team; the last two are respect in the team and recognition in the team, so meaning that everyone feels part of the team and equal part of the team. So nothing more added, the same topics I wrote you yesterday about in LinkedIn. Let's start then, shall we? Right. And so. Yep, if we start right away with the issues. In a psychologically safe team, people can bring issues, talk about them openly.... How do you ensure people feel safe in the team to bring tough problems they cannot maybe tackle themselves?

13:55 I-7: Firstly, I want to hear the team members part of the story and I am allowing to speak out. Tell everything. What is in their mind or in the heart? And then I always ask the questions to make... Just a moment, I will translate this this.

14:27 Vaida G.: Sure, no worries.

14:34 I-7: Just specify the problem. I'm asking the questions and I'm always asking: "So what do you think? What we can do in this situation?" And I'm trying to always give space for like thinking or or talking to come to some conclusion.

15:11 I-7: So yeah. Mm-hmm. Ask my questions and then I'm always asking is it clear for them or are we doing as they say now or are they need some, umm my examples or my vision? Uh, actually... And in the end of the questioning, I'm talking, if they want... Because I'm leading. I'm not just like a project manager. I'm leading the team now, so I may share my vision at the end.

16:03 I-7: How big is this problem? It maybe sometimes can be that it's not a big problem. because I have experience little bit more.. And I can explain that also... "You know, I understand you, but you see we can do that or that or that". And sometimes it turns out, at the end, that it's not big problem so we can...

16:31 I-7: Find a solution. We... Because I'm person who always will find the solution and, well, will calm down my team member and say that it's easy, don't worry. We have time or we have money or we will figure out; and step by step I can tell what we should do to solve this problem.

17:14 Vaida G.: Thank you for sharing. You mentioned you ask them what is in their mind and their heart... And I really heard this "heart". And you also mentioned that you calm the

people down by saying that it's manageable. Is there anything else that you help to you know, work out these emotions to calm people down? Is there anything else?

17:42 I-7: Actually, the emotions... Sometimes you have to let the people speak. Speak out this. Sometimes it's maybe it's stress or something and in stress situation you need to just sit and and hear what the person said, speaking and talking. And it's the first thing to let them speak out and then OK. And I'm always. The person who think that it's like all problems can be resolved. There's always... We can find a solution always, because every problem is it's... It's just experience. It's experience.

18:38 I-7: This is what I'm teaching to my team. Yes, at the beginning of the project. I'm always saying that every problem actually is... This is just experience. It's we don't need... We, of course, we need to worry, but every problem is is experience and you experience... And after every problem we are now becoming more uh better as a professional and everything is... We can find a solution for everything.

19:35 I-7: It's like my motto. Just speak out. Don't hide it.

19:40 Vaida G.: OK, speak up. Great. And what about mistakes? The second situation. OK, so we have a mistake made in the team. In a psychologically safe team, people feel safe to make mistakes. What do you do about this – that the team feels feels safe?

19:57 I-7: Firstly, actually the... I think it's similar because I'm always trying to figure out how big this mistake. I always want to get clear about what's happened. What happened and what can be done to solve? ... Well, every mistake is a new experience, so it's kinda the same.

20:27 Vaida G.: Umm, OK. You talked already quite a lot about emotions. Do you see the difference in people's emotions when they have like a problem and when they have made something wrong? Is there a difference in the emotions that you need to work with?

20:43 I-7: Now I can't imagine any mistake that can be so... Umm so I I don't know. Probably in the another field where where probably is involved with a lot of money or big money. There I would act different, but in my projects I don't know mistakes... Well, we can talk with partners. We can talk if there's something wrong happened. I think the conversation and communication is the key. Everything can be resolved if something happens.

21:28 Vaida G.: OK.

21:30 I-7: You know, if I can be joking little bit, I... Did you see the movie Hangover? I found this meme sometime ago in Instagram. It's about the one of the persons saying "I had a bad day" and this other man is saying "Yes, but did you die?". If you don't die, it's... It's OK, it's just a bad day. It's nothing big, sorry for this off topic, but it's something like...

22:25 Vaida G.: No, it's okay; it shows that you're not dramatizing. Mm-hmm. Not making drama around it, you bring this positivity. So do you usually do jokes also in the team like this? OK.

22:39 I-7: Yes, I do. I just thought it to cheer up my team, I'm sometimes sharing some memes... I'm always a meme person and my team knows that.

23:07 Vaida G.: OK. And with the conflicts then, or with differing opinions... Maybe, uh, you remember some situations when you had conflicts or strong different opinions? How did you ensure that team feels safe to have differing opinions and they do not get rejected, ignored? How do you deal with that?

23:33 I-7: So yeah, mostly I don't experience such a situation of different opinions. But sometimes complaints appear when some of the team members ohm not uh... Let's just say .. Not respecting the timeline or deadlines, if I can say that... Yes. There was a situation when I clearly knew that we talked about deadlines and when we need to. Uh. Ohh... Open the next next level of our project, and this person is very important team player ithe team, because all technical things is on this person and I clearly knew that we talked about...

24:46 I-7: We noted the time and date when everything have to go on, so she, uh, didn't follow this, this, this timeline and then then deadline. ..

25:04 I-7: So it was awkward situation when we needed to.... So it was that we needed to open a new web page for registration and for participants and she just just ohh did this IT thing technical thing in website, but she didn't test it and didn't get more information for other team members.

25:34 I-7: So yes, we needed to call her in the midnight and ask what's wrong... Why is it not working? It was midnight and I don't like to... Bother in the after work time, but we didn't didn't know what to do, so it was very awkward. But OK, I'm very patient about it and I was very patient, and just said that you need to come up and do this work till the end because we have deadline, we have responsibilities.

26:09 I-7: So yeah, she was little bit mad, but she did it. And I'm like, uh, in these situations... I'm very patient in the work life.

26:28 Vaida G.: Mm-hmm.

26:30 I-7: Allow some mistakes, like once like this. OK, I'm being patient, but I'm asking why... Like what happened and blah blah blah? But if the person is the same second time, well... OK, I'm saying it's not OK and if they need some help: "You you have to ask, we will figure out how we can help you or just to not to delay this."

26:58 I-7: Yes, so uh. But at the third time, if this person allowing any mistakes or it's very uncomfortable to speak with this person or or do some things... Actually, at the end of the project, I won't take that person on my team then anymore. In the retrospective, which is always after the project we have, I will tell it very politely. I will speak with this person and say it's it's not, you know, it's not OK we have the problem. Please don't do it again and if you need help, please inform way earlier before it becomes a huge big problem.

28:10 I-7: Yes, but but my vision is that I will not want to work with that person anymore in the team. But I am very patient. Yeah, but no more work with that person in the future.

28:28 Vaida G.: OK. And did you have like... Conflicts between different people and the team, like people not agreeing or not?

28:42 I-7: Umm I it wasn't that big conflict, but one person... Very, very close to me, which I'm very, uh, thankful for her job because her work ethic is very similar to mine, and there is another person who's this the same situation where this person is very close to me like professionally... And these two persons, once said: "The person X... It's not really my person. I can't talk too much. I'm not the person who is speaking too much. I just like to do my work, but she is always speaking, engaging". And I said in this situation: "OK, you don't have to be friends with her. Just do your job how you want to do it. She will do her job and you are very important persons in the team."

29:45 I-7: "This will shall pass too. Just do your job." I would ask her like: "Be patient, just to make your concentrations on your work. Not not so much on the personal communication." I can say that now these two persons like working together... Like nothing happened before. And they didn't even, uh... Remember what another said about another person. Yes. And if you ask about the problem when someone in the teams is not agreeing, maybe about the job, maybe we do have to do that or why we are doing this. So I'm always

remembering these KPIs of project. Why we have to do that or another thing and why we are doing something? How we are doing? I'm always uh... I will allow to speak up why they are thinking that we are doing wrong or we can do maybe better and will always ask....

31:11 I-7: "Ohh OK, if we are doing something wrong, maybe you can suggest how we can do it better?" And if this person just just don't know how to do, I will return back to our KPI and will say we have to follow that or that.

31:31 Vaida G.: OK. Hmm. Thank you so much. Let's move to risks . To explain this topic, it's not about risk management plan of project managers. The statement around risks is this: that when I feel psychologically safe safe in the team, then I feel safe to take risks. And by risks, it is meant innovate, experiment, challenge status quo and working standards. Is this something relatable to you and your experience? How would you ensure your team is safe to take risks?

32:43 I-7: Yes. Of course. Let me think for a minute.... Uh, as now I have a little bit more experience than a two or three years ago. At first always when I'm starting the project I will always get clear with my team. How we communicate something uh, how we talk about something. I encourage them that they have my back. Uh. Uh. They can come to me whenever. And as I say before, I do the encouraging them, that this is just a new experience and not a issue. And I always say thanks for work or new milestone which they achieve... And I I, when starting the project, very clear expectations how the team is going to communicate, where, how often. Said that already. Allowing them to call her or write - choose comms they prefer. Being very approachable. So yeah. I just always always encourage. "Don't be afraid to ask". Uh. "Please feel free to ask now and don't... Don't be afraid of... Never be afraid to ask something if something is not clear for you". It's it's like it's like... It's second moto, like in Bible. Please ask. Never be afraid. Yes.

35:00 Vaida G.: OK. Thank you. Thank you so much for sharing. As we have around 10 minutes left. Moving to the last three topics. So the fifth one is help and collaboration. So in psychologically safe team, I feel safe to ask for help. It's easy to ask for help. What do you think is your role to ensure, to make sure that help and collaboration in the team is working, that we are not working just individually, but we're working as a team altogether.

36:21 I-7: So the question is what I what I'm doing that the team is working like team.

36:28 Vaida G.: Yes. What do you do – if if you need to do something.... To ensure the collaboration and helping team...

36:50 I-7: Ohh. I think that... I'm very sorry... Like I don't know how it will be... Well, how it will sound in English... Like I'm very leading democratic... So uh, I'm always making sure that all my team members know what is the role. What they have to do? This is first step. Next step is that just watching them, like uh, I'm if my like I'm now... I'm a senior project manager. Yes, I'm leading the team and I have a project manager in my team, it's like... I don't know how explain. She always knows that I'm here for her, that we can call if it's needed. Uh, and I always encourage my team member that...

38:12 I-7: They trust what they're doing, and sometimes... Sometimes they ask me to help like to check this document, or to verify something.. Today I had such situation. I said I didn't see this document... “But I believe you that you did everything what we are talking about and I'm totally trusting you and that nothing bad could happen... Even if you didn't add some word or some some text in the document...” It's so I'm trusting my team members. When I'm building my team and and I know what persons I'm inviting to my team. We match very well, and I believe they are good professionals.

40:10 Vaida G.: OK. Anything else you'd like to share about? Uh, about help and the team.

40:18 I-7: Ohh. Probably... I thought about my leading type, and I think that I'm very humanly... My leading style is very humanly. I will always will say to my team members that.... That they are very, very important.

40:58 I-7: The work that they are doing, you know, it's even if it's small work or something little... I've always encouraged them and say that I'm very happy that they were working in my in my team and I'm very happy always for them.

41:23 I-7: So and I... Just one more thing... That what I want to say: I'm always asking how they're feeling, if they're not burning out; and if they came to burn out, then I say: “OK, it's time for you to please take rest. I will do something if it's needed.” It's very important for me. Yes, this humanly approach. Ohh, because the people it's not. It's not robot... Even Chat GPT has feelings.

41:57 Vaida G.: Yes, yes, I see. Thank you for your remarks. I know we are almost out of time, but talking about respect – second to the last topic. Do you do something as a project manager to ensure that respect to everyone is ensured? And, so to say, there's no kinda: “I'm

more important. He's less important, she's less important" . That everyone is equally treated, that they feel safe no one is seeing them as smaller or less important than they are.

42:28 I-7: Now I think that I'm showing with my attitude that everyone is equal, even if I'm senior or leading team. I'm trying to not show that I'm like higher. So and you have to respect each other. It's not like bossing or something like that, or mobbing. It's not for me, not for our team, or organization. It's like totally, uh, unacceptable.

43:12 Vaida G.: Mm-hmm. OK, OK. Thank you very much. And then the very last topic – recognition – you mentioned a few things you do already. You show and vocalize the value of the people, you also show gratitude, give thanks and overall... Is there anything else you do to ensure that team members feel recognized, that their skills and professionalism are utilized and valued, and and appreciated? What do you think about this?

44:03 I-7: Again, it's communication. We are... It depends again from the project level... Because in one project maybe at beginning someone is more involved and the middle of the project is someone is little bit resting more or doing something else, not another project. So we have this, uh, in this year I had this idea that we need to have the weekly meeting. And then again, we have this like wrap up what we did and who did something in our Slack channel, we are showing and ohh like where and how someone is from the team members are involving in involved in the project in this current week...

45:12 I-7: So it's it's depends on the project um, but yes in which in which which which yeah....

45:30 Vaida G.: Which type of project you have, right?

45:33 I-7: In which phase that project is currently, so yes..

45:45 Vaida G.: OK. Yes, so depending on the phase, right? But you usually do this once a week meetings to say thank you, to appreciate each other's work, right, as I understand?

45:57 I-7: Yeah, we are talking, we are talking about what we have to do in the project; and then of course, we'll also have little small talk and always saying thank you for, for for everyone, yes.

46:16 Vaida G.: Mm-hmm. OK. Thank you very much. I will be analyzing in the upcoming weeks what you mentioned to me here. And the next step is I'm going to summarize what we talked and write you to validate, confirm that yes, this is what you said. You confirm that it's

true that I didn't add something from me, that it's all your ideas, your experiences. I will write to you on LinkedIn

48:35 I-7: Just wanted to add to say I'm always by my side; by my team's side, sorry. So my team always know that they have like, how to say, my back? I'm always taking care of them, I mean.

48:43 Vaida G.: OK. OK, will write this also down. Thank you so much. I really appreciate it. I hope you enjoyed it as well. It was really interesting for me.

49:10 I-7: Have a nice evening.

Academic research interview with I-8

Transcript

06:07 Vaida G: Transferring to English, thank you. As we agreed, it will be easier for transcription and analysis of the research to use English. Can I have your approval here as well that I record this? After transcription, the text will be anonymized and the recording will be deleted.

06:15 I-8: Yeah. Yeah.

06:17 Vaida G.: And so I'm Vaida. I'm studying at Vilnius University. I'm doing the research right now on how project managers use coaching in different scenarios to foster psychological safety in teams, focusing on project managers who work with remote teams.

07:03 Vaida G.: And yeah, I may take a few notes here and there, but as I'm recording, I won't have to do a lot of writing, so I'm happy to focus on you and your insights. Everything out here will stay anonymous. Uh, your name will be uh coded. And if names pop up, they will be anonymized. So you can feel free to say how much you want and keep within yourself whatever you don't want to share.

07:50 Vaida G.: Before we go into these uh situations that I also wrote you about on LinkedIn... I would like to just ask... Could you briefly introduce yourself as a project manager? Mainly, how many years and what industry or industries you have worked in?

08:10 I-8: Umm so my name, should I say my name? Or not?

08:16 Vaida G.: No, you don't have to. It will be all coded if you say it, it doesn't matter.

08:22 I-8: When it comes to managing teams, I had some practice during maybe university years.

08:44 I-8: So let's say you know 6-7 years ago or something like that. So I had experience outside my career right now, which is IT area. I was working with teams in more volunteer-based organizations previously.

09:07 Vaida G.: Umm, OK, thank you so much. That's enough. And in terms of coaching - how familiar you are in general with it?

09:21 I-8: Funny enough, I just started last month a course on learning coaching, accredited by ICF, so this is a new area, but at the same time... I know the basics, I know, I've heard about it or I've been using specific things previously. I just never took it as like coaching, right? So some methods I was using it already, I just never was, never learned it like this is coaching.

09:56 Vaida G.: OK, great. Great to to hear you are familiar with ICF as well. So this I'm going to analyze the interview through those defined ICF competencies and practices that you may have or not yet have heard. So if you would be interested later I can share that as well with you.

10:52 Vaida G.: And yes, before we jump into the situations on psychological safety, I have one question. How do you yourself understand psychological safety? Just in general.

11:10 I-8: So first, maybe from my side how I understand personally. So I understand it as a... As an environment that is happening between two people or multiple people, depends... You are quite calm to express yourself. Doesn't matter – whether it is positive or negative.

11:49 Vaida G.: OK, OK. So that's what I wanted to hear from you. How you understand it. Because uh, just to be on the same page before we jump into the actual situations that are all connected in terms of psychological safety. The situations we're going to cover were presented by researcher Edmondson, Harvard University researcher. She says very similarly that it's a feeling that you can take risks in the team and you won't be held against for having different opinion, for showing that you disagree with someone, for showing that you maybe don't know something, making mistakes, etc.

12:41 Vaida G.: So it's very much also connected with learning experiences, so I will present quickly those seven situations. I won't go deeper into each and every one before we go to each and every one, because then it will take much more time and we have around 30-35 minutes left. So the situations will be: first, issues or impediments, whatever you prefer to use as a word to denote problems in the team.

13:13 Vaida G.: Then mistakes, the third is differing opinions or even conflicts within the team; the fourth is risks. And then jumping into the last three: help or collaboration within the team, respect and recognition. And OK, so I say situations, but they are very general – and our interview is semi-structured – so feel free to share as much or as little as you want and as you feel comfortable to share. There are no right

or wrong answers here, I'm happy to hear and observe whatever you share and think that may be relatable to the research. We could start, if you have no questions.

14:07 Vaida G.: So to start with problems. When one feels safe in a team, one can bring tough issues and talk about them openly. Can you share what how you ensure that? And how do you act and react as a project manager here?

14:31 I-8: Umm. Really depends on a situation. Strongly depends on the situation. Because how we have a process in the company itself – we do one-on-ones... So this is one of the ways how I know what are the impediments of the team. If I'm not actively in the project itself, because also I'm managing not one team... And somewhere I am actively in the project and somewhere else I'm just people manager, so totally different roles sometimes and sometimes I need to. ...

15:11 I-8: Umm have this one-on-ones to just question what is the problem itself? I'm not seeing it in every day, so during those one-on-ones, because it's more time, let's say one hour.... I try to go through the problem and not try actively solving it, but try to question the person what they have done previously to solve it.

15:45 I-8: Uh, and what are the possibilities of them right now that they see what can help to solve that? Like am I the person like? Because that's mainly the core issue usually like... Am I really the person to solve it? Sometimes I am, so sometimes I am the person....

16:05 I-8: Umm, but other times it's either the colleague or maybe the person himself. Maybe the problem is just to write to someone, right? So sometimes when there's a lack of time, of course, I'm more direct and saying just to write to that person when I hear the problem. I'm like... We already had this problem. Just write to another person, like... Depends on the situation. If I have like one hour to go in depth in the problem, in the impediments that they are having, I try through questioning, try for them to solve the problem and... But if it's on Slack messages when they come with a problem and there's a time limit of...

16:54 I-8: How much time I have to solve it or like the person have to solve it.... Of course, sometimes you just take this more straightforward path and just say what to do.

17:06 Vaida G.: OK, but usually, what I hear, if it's possible, you try to kind of empower people and help them autonomously make decisions. Like encouraging them, right? To umm to involve themselves and solve that by themselves, right? OK, OK.

17:28 I-8: Or at least, I will just add, or at least to ask like when they show a problem, at least ask how I like... How can I help in this problem? So at least questioning am I the person that this problem is addressed to? Maybe they just want to ventilate the problems – that sometimes also happens.

17:47 Vaida G.: Mm-hmm. OK. And when this ventilation happens, what do you do?

17:56 I-8: Usually I just listen mostly.

18:00 Vaida G.: OK. So they can feel, as I see, comfortable to come to you, but you're also preparing them to think for themselves before, like, maybe they can already fix it before coming to you.

18:17 I-8: Yeah, yeah.

18:19 Vaida G.: OK. OK. Thank you. And moving to mistakes then, if we may. How do you react in this case? To ensure that people feel safe in the team to make mistakes.

18:53 I-8: Yeah. When the when the person makes a mistake, right? Like that's the question. How is the situation?

19:03 Vaida G.: Yes, usually when it's like... I would say, when some individual makes a mistakes.. And then what's your role to... What do you do?

19:16 I-8: I can share a few examples because there's also... It depends again... Umm, there are moments where person does something wrong. And based on what kind of connection I have with the person, I sometimes know that they understand that they made uh wrongdoing or or or... What was the word... Uh, a mistake, so there are times where I don't say anything.

19:58 I-8: It's like a minor mistake and I notice that the person understood that he made a mistake and just no one wants to like, rub your nose in it, right? If I'm not sure, but I assume that he or she understood that they made a mistake, then I write. I usually write when it's like not a major issue. I just wanted to make sure that we're on the same page that that cannot happen again.

20:41 I-8: So we're on the same page. Because there's a client that we're talking to. "Let's try not to do it, or let's just maybe discuss how we can vocalize it differently next time. If you need, for example, help to do that." And there are situations, of course where... Where you catch one person is doing something wrong and it's in front of a client. And just because it's

not only individual, sometimes, problem, but you need to vocalize, in general, like some sort of rules, you create together usually. It's a communication with the client.

21:31 I-8: Usually. So these mistakes are usually communication ones. There are moments where I vocalized that "Let's agree not to communicate this or this or this". So kind of umm making some sort of rules. Based on these, these mistakes. So for everyone to understand that it's not bad, like it's not something horrible that this happened, but let's agree to not make specific communication mistakes or try not to do that. I will just quickly think of maybe I have one more...

22:28 Vaida G.: Sure.

22:33 I-8: Conflict is another one, right? Because it's also can be... Umm because I have similar answer to when it's a conflict. It's quite similar sometimes.

23:01 Vaida G.: OK. So you either write to the person or if it's something... And that you think that when it happens in front of a client, for example, you then make some kind of lesson learned agreement for the future. OK. And anything else you would like to add the mistakes?

23:45 I-8: Yeah, I mean, because it's an IT area... So curse words when something fails, it's quite common thing, but this I usually just. I know that this is how they (I like that word) ventilate out, because mistakes in a code or mistakes in general while you're doing the work, I don't consider them mistakes and I think they don't either that much, maybe like during one-on-ones we go more in depth about it. If they think that that's a mistake, but I think mostly I just look from the perspective whether or not like stakeholders or the ones who are kind of impacted by these mistakes.

24:39 I-8: If it's something personal, like the person is like: "Oh my God, I did something so wrong", and like going in this emotional roller coaster... Then it's like a one-on-one conversation, where it's more for me to listen and to question why he thinks like that. Ohh, I now remembered... That there was a situation like that where I tried to question whether or not his assumptions of him being wrong in that situation was really correct assumption. There was, for example, this kind of situation. That mistake was only from someone else's perspective and mistake, but not from his and vice versa.

25:22 I-8: There was situations like that, so I tried questioning how how the person sees and whether or not he can see other one's perspective as well in that situation.

25:35 Vaida G.: Mm-hmm. OK. Thank you so much. Yeah. And then, uh, conflicts topic... So in terms of conflicts, again feel free to share whatever is not too sensitive for you. Like whatever you want to. And again, it's anonymous,.

26:05 Vaida G.: Whatever you think you have examples of and how did you? Manage those. So that people feel free to be different and not agree, but somehow you have to move forward.

26:16 I-8: I have a specific situation in my head that I can go in more detail. So my first reaction, because like I saw it... The emotions were, you know, saying some bad words about another person, like this kind of situation. Obviously, what I did first was to sit down individually with them. And I think I did two rounds of that, if I remember correctly. At first I sat down with both of them individually just to understand the story. What happened. Not trying to explain one another to one another, but just tell their part, and for me to listen.

27:24 I-8: What was the situation. And then as far as I remember, also did the second round, also individually, uh to go more in detail because it it happened... Like I talked when that happened, and then after a week I kind of came back to that situation because the emotion lowered down at that point.

27:47 Vaida G.: Mm-hmm.

27:47 I-8: And and then I tried to... Go through that situation and try uh. Tried to make... It's strange expression, but also to see if there's a possibility that the other person reacted as they reacted. Because I knew why they reacted. But I was not straightforward in saying that ohh it was because of XYZ. I wanted for that person to think of like what were the reasons for them to react? And then they kind of understood each other's side, even without talking to one another. That's straightforward.

28:31 Vaida G.: Umm.

28:34 I-8: And then. I was too.... Maybe scared. Did not know how to deal with a conflict. If I put them together so... So we had like a meeting where, of course, both of them then were participating, and then they expressed also vocally more things. I just allowed them to, you know, go back and forth. But just because we had those one-on-ones already, how they communicated was already different and after a few months that I'm now seeing everything worked out quite well. So they just understood from what perspective another one was going.

29:24 Vaida G.: Mm-hmm. OK. Anything else you would like to share in this conflict topic?

29:32 I-8: Umm that I started also allowing... Well, it's not... Sometimes it's difficult to see when it's already a conflict, like what is the moment that you can consider a conflict? Because I got some feedback, even for myself, that sometimes I try to mitigate the conflict where it may be beneficial to have it.

30:02 Vaida G.: Umm.

30:04 I-8: So I started looking more into it like the last half a year and... Allowing people to more openly express, like if they strongly disagree with someone. But we we came back to some also agreed rules which were... I don't know how familiar you are with like Scrum values and and so on... We also had a workshop for everyone to have some space to discuss how they consider those values and whether or not we have to have them in the team to have this sort of conflicts, because... Because without those, those common understanding, I don't see how this open conflict can be beneficial, because you have to really know another person and trust that it...

31:03 I-8: It will be perceived as not conflict, but like strong disagreement to move forward, like to generate better ideas and so on. So it's it's nuances. So yeah, the last half a year I allowed more anger, like the more disagreements that could convert to conflicts, let's say that...

31:33 Vaida G.: Umm. OK. And so far, how are you feeling about it?

31:42 I-8: Quite good, sometimes scared. Because if the conflict would occur, I would not really know what to do. Just you know, I have like few situations that I mentioned how I dealt with it, because it was very personal but came from logical side; like they had really good arguments. They just did not listen to those arguments in the conflict, so.

32:11 Vaida G.: OK. Thank you. So now we will be moving to the fourth topic. It is risks. To explain - it is not usual risk management as project managers do, but more like taking risks in the team. Feeling safe to take risks in the team. By risk, it is meant that it can be innovation, experimenting, and similar. How do you ensure that the team members feel safe to take such a risk? If you have any examples to share. Yes, please go ahead.

33:30 I-8: Yeah, it's a very good question. To even think. And in general umm. Firstly umm I think it is teambuilding activities or meetings, where team can know each other better, that

helps to build trust. Also helps to create environment where they can challenge each one another.

34:25 Vaida G.: OK.

34:30 I-8: Secondly, having brainstorming sessions only inside the team, like no one else comes here, only the team. There we can freely discuss and figure out actions and communication for these actions. Also, acting as a mediator in the meetings with the clients, where developers can feel that I'm on their side and I can vocalize their technical ideas to business people. Supporting their ideas in front of the client. In my situations, um it all comes down to communication with the clients and being the front person for that, so that the team can feel safer in taking risks.

37:06 Vaida G.: OK. OK. Thank you so much for sharing. So just before we jump into the last three situations, I noticed the trend that throughout all this, what you have already talked very in detail, you mentioned a lot of listening to other people, to team members just being the space for them to vent. Ventilate. Uh, how do you do this listening if you could give like a little detail, is it just you sit there and that's it and that's enough for them? Or do you do something else, so that they see that you listen?

38:10 I-8: This summer I learned what is active listening as a term.

38:15 Vaida G.: Umm OK.

38:17 I-8: So of course I did that before, but just started being more aware of how I listened overall. Because for that hour, like I should not be distracted, or if it's like a mandatory thing for me to answer something just to stop and then, you know, come back and be also again in the conversation.

39:05 I-8: Umm. Then I mean, if the question is how I listen and how person sees that I'm listening... So of course, you know, nodding. Saying "umm", like these small things. Umm. Then then of course... Like the next question also always is connected to what I heard. So sometimes if it's like a, even if it's like a small talk, right, you just iterate more from like this person's topics rather than coming to "Ohh but my experience is like that". Of course, sometimes, sometimes I also go into that, but it's more about that other person.

40:03 I-8: So if previously I listened with already thinking of like, what is the suggestion for that problem that he or she is describing is? Now I try to just listen through the whole like

thing that is being said... And not jump to conclusions or suggestions or like this. What you have to or not have to do.

40:34 Vaida G.: OK. OK, great. Thank you so much. Good to hear. Thanks for sharing and moving on now to these three last topics. It is going to be help, respect and recognition. We will start from help. Or collaboration, you could also say. OK, in a psychologically safe team, it's very important that people can ask help, it's not difficult to do.

41:26 Vaida G.: So how do you do anything about it? How do you ensure this collaboration and help within the team?

41:43 I-8: Mm-hmm. Umm so of course. Well, of course.. Of course, we do team buildings, again. So, in my opinion, it's mandatory for people, if it's possible, to meet in person. At least once every half a year, especially if it's like in the beginning of the project, because people tend to not use cameras. Ah, of course... Encouraging to use cameras are also quite important thing in online specifically meetings.

42:19 I-8: Uh, so I think that's one of the things to for people to meet outside. We sometimes also would have online meetings that are for developers. So it's not about specific problems in the project or processes in the project, but more about like for them to talk about their interests. So there's more small talks happening in that meeting.

42:58 Vaida G.: OK. OK.

43:02 I-8: And then of course, during these meetings, specifically in the beginning of the project, I would do like this ice breaker or once in a while this like random game where they just can a little bit relax, maybe say something about themselves, we can discuss someone else's hobbies; just to have more context of the person themselves and overall.

43:32 I-8: Of course, the trust builds with time, like there's no team building exercise that builds trust. You just really see what processes fits to that team, like way of working, because usually problem happens not between people individually. Well, sometimes it does, but it's more that the process does not fit for them to really collaborate, because they have different expectations. A different way of working from before, like from previous projects.

44:08 I-8: So for them to make even a process to not worry about outside things and just to to work on the the tasks, and usually it evolves into also trust between people; because if the

process encourages for people to take responsibility as a team, then like with time, of course, with some moderations that evolves into people trusting each other.

45:05 Vaida G.: OK. And as we have very little time left... Wanted to you ask you about respect. So here by respect I mean that no one's voice is ignored. That no one is more important than another person in the team. Do you need to do something about this? How do you act to ensure that everyone is equally respected?

45:41 I-8: I think it comes very hand in hand with the previous point with trust. And just in the beginning of the project or not even in the beginning, but every time some new people are joining in to the team... For everyone to remember that they're working on the same thing. They're not in any way working against each other and they're working for the same goal.

46:21 I-8: So even so, it's either product, right, like some product goals, if it's like sprints like some sort of Sprint goals. There's varieties of goals that can be set, but for everyone to understand that they're in the same boat. And usually that helps to build trust between people...

46:45 Vaida G.: Umm OK.

46:48 I-8: Because when you're in the same boat, well... Of course, one can be a captain, but if that captain is the only one rowing or just, you know, shouting, the boat is still not moving.

47:04 Vaida G.: OK. OK, a nice metaphor here and noted it down. And, finally, recognition. I think it's. Could you please share what you do to recognize people's value in the team? So that they feel acknowledged. It's the last topic and then we close.

48:11 I-8: So yeah, of course, one of the most simplest way that we do in the the meetings if I'm facilitating them is let's say a retrospective. It's where everyone is encouraged to vocalize their thoughts. And I acknowledge, paraphrase and like comment on every thought. It's not like someone's ideas are not discussed. And just let me think.. Yeah... I always remind them it's their great job, that they are responsible for it as a team, that they are very valuable like overall. As individuals and as a team. I try to show this.

49:38 Vaida G.: OK. Thank you. Thank you so much. I noted quite a lot and this was very insightful. Also for me to learn from you, to hear from you. We actually came to an end. And so what I'm going to do right now, hopefully by the end of this week, I will analyze the transcript itself. And so I can write you a short summary. How I understood your way of

coaching the team and you just confirm. Thank you for your time. interviewee, that I'm not adding anything from myself and and kind of deteriorate your style by my style coaching or whatever.. And the second thing is validity of my qualitative study, because like qualitative studies always have this kind of subjectivity. So it's also very important that I get your confirmation and I will write on the paper that I got all of that people's confirmations and validations. Great. Yeah. Thank you so much for your time and if you get any kind of questions or want to share something additional, you're very welcome to do that.

51:28 I-8: Thank you. Thank you for the interview.

Academic research interview with I-9

Transcript

03:18 Vaida G.: Could you please you once again agree with recording?

03:25 I-9: Yes, you may record. Yeah, but can you hear me?

03:29 Vaida G.: I can hear you perfectly. I don't see you, though, but it's okay.

03:37 I-9: Yeah, I think my Internet is quite slow and I haven't updated my laptop. So I think if the audio is good, I would prefer to keep it that way, because in previous meetings I had some issues.

03:52 Vaida G.: It's fine, it's fine. But thanks so much for taking the time and I will make sure we won't finish later than in 45 minutes or so. The recording will be deleted immediately after transcription, and the text will be anonymized. So we talked quite a long time ago, so I will introduce briefly myself once again. I'm Vaida. I'm studying at Vilnius University and right now I'm writing my Master's thesis on umm project managers as coaches in virtual teams and what I'm trying to to analyze is how they foster psychological safety. So whether and how project managers act as coaches to improve the psychological safety in the team, to foster it. And yeah, this is like a very free space for you to reflect, to share examples as much as you want.

05:11 Vaida G.: To ensure once again, the interview is anonymized, and any personal information about you, other people or company you work or worked previously at – won't be disclosed at all. If you have any questions around it, I am happy to answer.

05:50 I-9: Mhm.

05:50 Vaida G.: So yeah, and what we're going to do today, I'm going to ask you a couple of initial questions just to get to know you a bit better. Again, you can tell as much or as little as you want, and then we go into the depth of the interview. We will go through 7 situations, and I will analyze them according to International Coaching Federation coaching competencies and practices. I wrote about those situations in the message yesterday to your LinkedIn. We're going to go through those 7 topics or situations, very generalized situations that kind of depict how psychologically safe is the team or not. I will again present them when we come to them. By the way, they were introduced by Amy Edmonson, Harvard researcher who has been

studying psychological safety for decades. And yes, it's kind of a very semi-structured interview. So I have guidelines, but I have no kind of specific questions that I will ask you to answer. They will be more like guidelines for for a discussion. If you have no questions, we could start.

06:45 Vaida G.: Uh, could you briefly tell me your experience as a project manager, just like year-wise or industry-wise?

06:53 I-9: Yeah. In IT industry I have been in project management, I don't, know for six years already in terms of general like projectmanagement, including the business, project management and Waterfall project management and,also, writing proposals for bids or RFP's.

07:18 I-9: I have been like, you know, since I think it's already some 20 years sort of general project manager, but yeah. But IT-related project manager, I could attribute it, let's say, six years.

07:35 Vaida G.: OK.

07:36 I-9: You know.

07:38 Vaida G.: Yeah, that's more than enough for me to understand the context. And with coaching - how much familiar are you with with coaching?

07:46 I-9: Yeah, that's a good question, I think. I would say that those six years that I am in in the IT I would attribute as a coaching experience because I ... I think I, basically, I use the coaching experience during my project management manager / Scrum master role. I don't know...

08:18 I-9: Does this count or does this not count? But, but I think it's sort of a like this. Yeah, I don't. I know there are like the professional, like professional coaches and like our professional agile coaches, but I I would not like to call it me that way, but I'm using this sort of the approaches during my my my work.

08:45 Vaida G.: Yeah. So definitely I'm not looking for necessarily some trainings in coaching or life coaching or or agile coaching. As you said, it's more of an approach, like mindset. So when I ask, when we go through these seven situations, they will be kind of general. You may share some examples in some situations more, less than in others, if you feel like they are relevant or not.

09:19 Vaida G.: But like when I will be asking you the questions, just don't think like you need to kind of pick and choose the answer from all your experience, you may just share how you act, how you react in different situations. And for me, it's interesting to learn whether you just kind of... If there is a problem in the team, whether you own it, whether you manage it yourself, whether you teach people to do it themselves, whether you kind of facilitate that process, or you coach people; just the approach, how you, how you act and react in different situations... And with psychological safety...

10:05 Vaida G.: Before we start, I just wanted to ask how you understand it just to be aligned that we're talking about the same thing. Like I'm not asking a theoretical terminology, but like what does that mean to you – psychological safety?

10:08 I-9: Umm, I think it's the environment where people can freely express what he or she thinks without any judgment from from others, especially from like leaders and like managers.

10:28 I-9: Yeah, I can speak up freely without any judgments from others and and and raise maybe some... Yeah, not pleasant issues. I think this is the... I think. First, I think, first level is like sort of the people can feel comfortable and talk about everything and then, I think, the more deeper level when people can raise up the sensitive issues and without fear.

11:00 Vaida G.: Hmm, OK.

11:03 I-9: I think. I don't know. Maybe. I think that's what comes into my mind. This is what comes into my mind first when I hear “psychological safety”.

11:15 Vaida G.: Great, great. And that's more than enough. It is very similar to how Harvard researcher Edmondson, who has been researching psychological safety in different teams, has defined it. I'm basing my research according to her defined seven situations.

11:39 Vaida G.: She denotes like in theoretical way that it's like environment of feeling safe not to be judged or held against for having different opinions, for being different. Or we're also feeling safe to not be ideal, to not be perfect and make mistakes. Have questions and learn. So thanks so much for sharing that. I just wanted to hear how you think about psychological safety and we will move into the topics. We will be talking about problems first, then about mistakes, then differing opinions or even conflicts; then people taking risks.

12:24 Vaida G.: Meaning, being innovative, experimenting; then we will move to help and collaboration – if you do anything to foster psychological safety in terms of how you encourage people to help each other, collaborate with each other; then ensuring respect in the team and, finally, recognition. So we'll go one by one, and I will ask you like the question that will be a very general one. Please share examples – that is very welcomed.

13:03 Vaida G.: If you feel OK with that. For example to start with the first – how do you, as a project manager, ensure that people in the team can feel safe to bring problems? Like, how do you maybe act or react when there are problems in the teams so that people can feel safe to bring them?

13:45 I-9: Uh-huh. I think the first thing, uh, I think, we are sort of an IT company, in quite a dynamic environment and we do not know each other usually. Sometimes there are people who are not switching off cameras – you don't know how they look like. But yeah, in general, I think the common approach for every project when we start, we do the common kick-off calls and common like... Uh. Sort of. Joint calls. Just planning calls. Also, following Scrum methodology, do the retrospective, so so that we can collect all the information and relevant information. But obviously this, I think, is the first step, and usually it's almost in every project.

14:34 I-9: There are like more silent persons, silent people who are not speaking up during those sort of important, like planning calls, especially if there's more people involved and especially the client.

14:50 I-9: Then I think one thing I usually do is to hold internal sessions, like sort of the retrospective to capture the mood anonymously. Using some tools like, I don't know, Mentimeter to capture some feelings. Uh, this is the next step and 3rd step is also to do some one on ones with each team member because, obviously, these one on ones might not be relevant for like more of a talkative or leadership style people, but for more of introverts where they're not feeling safe...

15:27 I-9: To raise some concerns during the common calls or especially with the client is then then it's... Then it's quite quite important for those people to get to know each other, to talk about and sometimes even those one on ones make people feel quite formal and and and maybe they usually they don't, don't feel comfortable bringing some, some sort of uncomfortable questions.

15:57 I-9: But then I think one thing is sort of to talk about people without tackling job-related questions, like more overall interests. What interests they are having? And then sort of, you know, later you can try to drill down to the more important questions to get to capture their feeling, whether they feel comfortable raising some issues.

16:30 I-9: I think this is general approach I'm following and more or less working pretty well, yeah...

16:39 Vaida G.: OK. OK. Thank you for sharing. So you create these different spaces, different formats of spaces for people to talk depending on how you, as you said, talkative and open they are, and you adjust this space and format to to people's needs. And you also try to get to know people better so that they can maybe trust you more and open up more.

17:06 I-9: Yeah. Yeah. But what about the spaces - do you mean like some sort of different chats or tools or sort of?

17:21 Vaida G.: Like you mentioned, different meetings, like you have kick off meetings, you have retrospectives, then you have one on ones. So yeah, you have different like formats to talk with people, right?

17:33 I-9: Yeah, I would call them like sort of formats. Yeah. So that everybody is here then, and even some more silent people are able to speak up if if they have something. And obviously it's also some sort of... What came into my mind now it's like also some sort of satisfaction survey which is anonymous and even though someone don't trust me as a scrum master or as a project manager, he or she still can raise, raise some concerns...

18:08 I-9: Either it's regarding me or company or project or or any other like thing. So it's quite crucial also, if you don't know the people so much. It tends to be that we usually do not know some people because we are start ramping up project quite quickly and then we are finalizing it quite fast and we are... And do not have a like a lot of time to talk about relatives or family or hobbies or sort these kind of things.

18:44 Vaida G.: OK, so with more silent people, you have more personal meetings and also, what I heard, if I'm correct, you often use the anonymous kind of format for people to speak up, so that that they feel safer... OK. Thank you. and... The next topic, the second situation is like... The team that is psychological safety allows the team members to make mistakes. So how do you also make sure that people are kinda not afraid to make mistakes?

19:44 I-9: I got the question. I think it's usually... You follow the same procedures that I outlined in previous steps. But yeah, yeah, I think it's... It's very important that you do everything that the people do not feel ashamed if they make mistakes.

20:05 I-9: I think one thing I do when people make mistakes, I do not try to discuss it in front of others because of the sensitivity, it's more of a bring it one on ones for more sort of the silent space. But then then? Then. Uh umm, can we? Can we pause for, I don't know, 5 minutes? I will have a quick, quick call with my manager.

20:37 I-9: Can I call you back here?

20:40 Vaida G.: You can come to in the same link and you'll find me here, sure.

20:46 I-9: Good. Thanks.

30:54 Vaida G.: OK, welcome back.

30:57 I-9: Sorry, it was urgent, but OK, OK, yeah.

31:07 Vaida G.: Yeah, we can move on. It's fine. I know that happens. It's fine. I'll just inform that we will need to close the meeting in 15-20 minutes due to other call I have, but I think we will manage. So is there anything else about mistakes that you wanted to say? Like no shaming and showing support by providing like a separate discussion not in front of others to provide the safe space for sensitive topics.

31:35 Vaida G.: Is there anything else on mistakes?

31:38 I-9: One thing I wanted to say, but I wasn't able to... Just.. It's not like more of a saying, what did you, what did you do wrong? But for what can be improved in the next times, so that the feedback is more forward- looking, not like blaming for the mistakes, but basically you sort of the tell people that there was some...

32:05 I-9: Mismanagement or some things went went wrong, but sort of looking forward and I think there's also like these uh these 4Ls in in the retrospective templates or what what went well, what needs to be improved and what action items you can bring; basically this kind of or what are the four or 4Ls like I can't remember, but I use the template also...

32:33 I-9: Yeah. So basically you are not pointing fingers to the mistakes but looking forward. You are like already looking forward and forgetting, forgetting about that that the mistake.

32:52 Vaida G.: OK. OK. Thank you so much. So the third topic is conflicts: in a psychologically safe team, we are allowed to share different opinions, be different from others, kind of maybe not agree to everyone. How do you ensure, as a project manager, that different opinions are accepted? Any examples on conflicts or differing opinions would be great.

33:25 I-9: I think when the conflict is emerged, usually, usually the policy is... I think first of all, if there is a conflict, then it's serious conflict. It's not like sort of a bad day at someone's work, but you see that it's growing and growing. Obviously, you then need to act in there. Umm.

33:48 I-9: And then you sort of try to talk with each of the parties separately to understand the root cause of the conflict, and then basically when you have a solution and then bring all the parties to the table, and then sort of try to propose the solution, what would be not the beneficial, but the sort of adaptable for both of the parties, you agree with them. And how do we work with way forward.

34:27 I-9: And then basically, yeah, you, you, you bring together those people and then you try to sort of agree on what would be the best way for both parties. But it's very important to do some homework separately with those people, hear their stories. So, during the meeting with all parties, there is no like surprises and nobody's escalating something and so on.

35:04 Vaida G.: OK, OK. Thank you. Moving to risks topic. I'll try to explain. So umm, in a safe team you are feeling safe and comfortable to take risks.

35:17 Vaida G.: So as a professional, it could mean like innovate, yeah. Provide new ideas. Experimenting, challenging status quo. So is there anything you do to ensure that people feel comfortable to, like, take risks, try something new? Learn, innovate in the team.

35:42 I-9: I think it's again... You sort of obviously you do encourage people, uh, all the team in front of the whole team, you put the initiatives that we need to sort of innovate, but obviously nobody is listening sometimes...

36:03 I-9: This message is being treated that it's "it's not for me. It's something it's for someone else, for others". And then you try to... If you require particular innovation from the particular people you try to approach, also in the background, and encourage them to, uh, bring some innovations or what we can do and also one thing is that you can.... What is the cycle for us? It's a. It's a. It's a... Once in quarter, I usually sort of create some.... How to say

it in English... Some uh... Like titles for the employees like... Let's say "Innovator" or "Hidden Star" for extra mile they took. And then people can vote for one of the team members.

36:56 I-9: Who is, you know, innovator in our team? Of course, you do not have a power, as a project manager, to add like bonuses on for the salary every month or something like that, but you do... You can like recognize you have this power on people being recognized and that's how that's how you can encourage them to be innovative or suggestion challenging some status quo. And once it has been done, you can give those recognitions to those people.

38:23 I-9: But just, just like with a particular topic like innovator, I don't know... We had a hidden star which is very quiet, but sometimes doing background job without being noticed by everyone in the team, but sort of two or three people already recognize it and that's the way how he can... He can also feel secure and motivated.

38:28 Vaida G.: OK. Thank you so much for sharing these examples and moving to the remaining three topics. So the 5th situation or topic in general is the collaboration within the team. The statement says that people are in a psychologically safe team when they are not afraid to ask help. Do you need to do anything to kinda also again encourage or facilitate this, helping each other, collaborating, so that people don't work like isolated and in silos just individually, but they help each other?

39:17 I-9: Umm, I think one good method that's extreme programming. We use the pair programming as a method. Then obviously you cannot do like 5 or 7 people together... But you you can ensure that they are doing it in pairs. So... And it's always not maybe put two quiet persons together, but you just want to put one lead and one sort of like an intern or unexperienced in person and then so that they can like test the solution that they have been developing and, yeah, work in pairs it's one thing... Umm what else; yeah this is the one thing...

40:09 I-9: Yeah, I don't know. I need to think about other things to encourage cooperation. Yeah, no, obviously, these meetings we have are helping when people get to know each other. And they can talk. Not like on job-related topics. There are two people who like playing basketball. I don't know... Two people playing the same computer games or table games and they basically... It's also motivating for them to cooperate with each other.

40:56 I-9: Basically, they can speak also not for work-related issues.

41:00 Vaida G.: OK. And by social events you mean remote online or like also on site?

41:08 I-9: Both. I think some, some, some quizzes, some... Some joint lunch, also remote lunch. Then they also are more likely to put on cameras, because sometimes when you can speak you sort of if you don't feel comfortable you are... Don't want to turn on the camera, but when you're like just eating and talking about some, I don't know whatever like politics, economics, like music, sports, then then they are more like relaxed and and then there are more so sort of they are more open...

41:54 Vaida G.: OK. Thank you. One of the two last topics is respect topic. So by saying respect, we have a team that, uh, has like respectful approach to each other, meaning that there are no significant power plays and that there is no significant hierarchy that would impact team spirit. And that would mean that no one's effort is kind of diminished or valued less than someone else's.

42:35 Vaida G.: Do you do do something about it? Can you share?

42:43 I-9: That could... Could you rephrase it? You mean uh?

42:48 Vaida G.: Umm sure, I can. So respect. Maybe you can share how you understand it, but from this kind of research perspective is this: when there is respect in the team, no one diminishes your efforts, undermines your value in the team. So maybe when you're... When there's like more senior people or less senior people, it's not like everyone is just listening to the more senior ones and there's like, very hierarchical structure that everyone is just listening to those more senior people, that there are no kind of power plays that everyone is valued in the team.

43:47 I-9: Ohh OK yeah, yeah, yeah, good. Yeah. Yeah, I cannot think about precise examples now, but... I think what I usually try to do... Uh. Get appraisals or like saying good things about when everybody has done something, and I think that's the very crucial thing. Because yeah, when everybody is working hard and at the end they do not get some recognition... I think you need to say I think... The simplest thing is saying "thank you for doing this. Thank you for reaching the deadlines and thanks for the hard work." And and especially if some things do not go well as as planned... Then you need to also encourage people to not feel very depressed, because they do get sad about if something not, not something, has not happened in the right way.

44:46 Vaida G.: OK. And in what format do you do this appraisal? What's the format that you choose to to show this recognition?

45:01 I-9: Uh, usually I do in meetings. Uh, I'm not writing the formal email to the team, but I think I should... Because I'm more of the person... I do these things during the calls or either write privately in the chat. "Thanks for putting this presentation together." Thanks for, I don't know... Ohh, managing this release deadline or so on, but something like that.

45:34 I-9: Yeah, but once I'm now talking, I think one option would be like to write like more formal recognitions. And thank you emails, because usually people don't get these. Uh, these quite often... Sometimes, some, usually the client or some upper management, pay attention to the team when something is not going well. And then then they get some hard words. But yeah, I think my as a Scrum master, Project manager support like sort of the duty would be to to... Ohh, write those things on more frequent basis.

46:21 Vaida G.: OK. Thank you for sharing these examples. And finally, as we have very little time left, you mentioned this already in the last answer, we have recognition topic.

So you mentioned the gratitude and saying thank you when things don't go as planned. Maybe sometimes you talk more privately in one to ones with more silent people, so that they feel valued and safe to talk and share concerns.

47:09 Vaida G.: Is there anything else you would like to share in terms of recognition? So to say that everyone feels part of the team. Is there anything else besides what you told?

47:30 I-9: Umm, no, I think I mentioned a lot of those, nothing that would pop up right right now.

47:47 Vaida G.: OK. Thank you. Thank you so much. Uh. If there is something else you would like to add after our meeting, you are always welcome to write me on LinkedIn. What I will do right now in the coming week or so I'm going to first do the transcription, analyze it and then write you to confirm the main highlights or insights from this interview.

48:20 Vaida G.: So I will write a short summary of the main statements about your coaching approach that you provided me in these different situations. I will ask for your confirmation in order to kind of validate this qualitative research of mine. I won't be asking to read the whole transcription, but just the main highlights that would be taken as examples in the research itself: whether it's fine, I didn't add anything from myself.

49:23 Vaida G.: It's all your words and that you agree and that that's it.

49:30 Vaida G.: Thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate it. I know it's kind of intensive time for you, so I wish you all the best with the with the new start and with the week ahead. And yeah. Thank you so much.

50:07 I-9: Yeah, cool. Thanks. Bye

Academic research interview with I-10

Transcript

00:00 Vaida G.: Uh, once again, may I ask for your approval that I'm recording for transcription purposes? Please say if you approve. Thank you.

00:20 I-10: Yes, I approve this for your purposes. All good.

00:36 Vaida G.: OK. Thank you so much. Nice to meet you.

00:42 I-10: Nice to meet you too. I'm a bit nervous, you know.

00:44 Vaida G.: It's going to be just a conversation, so no worries. I'm here to hear your experience and how you work with the team. I'll make sure that it fits in 45 minutes. I booked 50 just in case we have some technical problems, but hopefully no; not yet and yeah... But could you share please what are you nervous about? How can I make it more comfortable for you?

01:17 I-10: I'm just this... This is the first time when I participate in in such kind of research, that's why I'm like a bit like... I know I should help the most way.

01:34 Vaida G.: Ohh that's lovely you want to help so much, thank you. And also this is not the last time we are going to communicate, because I will send you the summary of the findings. So this is how it's going to work after our interview that is going to stay anonymous, I'm going to code your name or any other names. If company names, for example, or people's names pop up, I am going to code them as well. And then I do a like a primary analysis of our interview and give you the summary of findings. It's for you to validate – it's very important for the research validity. And of course, I will delete the recording immediately after transcription. Please let me know if you have any questions whatsoever before we start. Or if something is not very clear.

02:48 I-10: OK, let's let's start. Yes, yes.

02:53 Vaida G.: As we start, I want to present myself. So I'm Vaida. I'm studying at Vilnius University in Lithuania. Yeah, I'm doing right now research on project managers: project managers who specifically work with remote teams, people that are distributed, maybe

through different contents or countries or cities doesn't matter, and how these project managers coach the team to build psychological safety within the team.

03:52 Vaida G.: So and we're going to go through a couple of intro questions, then we will go into these situations or topics I wrote you quickly about yesterday on LinkedIn. I will probably explain them later, but for the intro...

04:13 Vaida G.: Please tell me briefly your project manager's experience like year-wise and industry...

04:22 I-10: Yeah, well, if what I can say is like a general project management experience, then I'm in this field approximately for, I would say, for 20 for 20 years, because I was working as a learning and development specialist, and then learning and development expert in different corporations, like huge corporations... And then every like learning project of the training is like a project itself. But I did that shift from the educational projects to IT projects recently, like two years ago. So in terms of project management, if we focus on this recent IT role specifically, so yeah, it's like about like 2 years from me. So I completed this.... Some courses, you know, some specializations and something.

05:18 I-10: And now I'm in the process of moving gently but steadily to Scrum master role. Yeah. So this is just a short summary about my experience in project management.

05:33 Vaida G.: OK. OK, scrum master role. It will be short off topic... I'm scrum master myself, so if we have like questions or discussions, we can always talk later on and keep in touch. And thank you for sharing. It's more than enough then. Yeah. Any questions you have or comments?

05:52 I-10: Yeah, I I have just one comment... In my previous professional experience, when I was a learning and development expert.... I've completed several coaching specializations. Meaning that uh me as a project manager, I know the power of coaching and coaching things in project management and how it differently helps to run the product smoother and to communicate better with the team. So like I'm already in the field, if you can, you can say it like this.

06:30 Vaida G.: Great. That was my next question. So you already answered the coaching background question, so, so you could say that you do it in your everyday life as IT project manager?

06:44 I-10: It's... I cannot say it's like in my in my blood or something, but I know that this is like.... Well, for me it's quite natural to be not just a project manager, not to manage the project, you know, according to all the processes, according to all the reports, but it's important because, well, the main workload of the project manager...

07:15 I-10: This is OK, in my humble opinion, it's like 80% is just communication and for communication purposes, it's just really good to have this and I encourage all the project managers to to study some coaching to learn, to learn something from this just to boost the coaching skills, because it goes definitely together...

07:41 I-10: Yeah, I'm on your side.

07:44 Vaida G.: Yeah. OK. Thank you so much for sharing both project management and coaching experience of yours and knowledge background... And before we jump into the main questions, there will be seven of them.... I have just one more question. As our focus is psychological safety... So again, I'm not expecting from you any kind of terminology or theory knowledge, but – how do you understand team psychological safety?

08:18 Vaida G.: What does that mean?

08:21 I-10: Ohh well I would say that psychological safety is to creating a space where people, uh, could feel at ease and communicate without any obstacles to each other and this clear communication leads to a great result. Hope it it makes sense.

08:47 Vaida G.: It's really good to hear from your perspective and from your experience what it means. And so now as we are going into the main questions. I will briefly present the background like how I decided to take this coaching topic. So there's this research from Harvard University, Amy Edmondson. Uh, if you would be interested later, I could share. So She has studied for decades for decades like what psychological safety in different teams is, what does it mean? What kind of situations show actually how safe is the team. And so I found the seven situations she defined that denote psychological safety in the team. So to say they're very general, they are not going to be project management specific, but this is where my niche is like: I want to understand how project managers coach. We will go through seven topics: issues, problems in the team and I will present each topic a bit more in depth when we go. Then mistakes made.

10:09 Vaida G.: Third will be people kind of not agreeing, different differing opinions or conflicts in the team's, fourth will be taking risks in the team, being innovative. Fifth will be

help, help or collaboration, encouraging health and collaboration with the team and then the last two are respect and recognition. You don't have to have like answers right away for each, you may skip some questions, or I can rephrase them if it is needed. Maybe there could be situations where you will say you don't do coaching at all for this: maybe you take ownership yourself to tackle issues, or maybe you teach people how to do it. So I'm here to listen how you act. How do you ensure that that safety, but you don't have to think like "OK, this is coaching, this is not coaching, this is coaching, this is not coaching." Just share what you do and then later on, according to International Coaching Federation competencies and practices, I'm going to kind of classify those practices. And and to start with the first situation, if you don't have any questions right now... So issues or or problems in the team. So I will start with a statement how this researcher defined this topic of problems. So in a psychologically safe team, team members feel safe to bring tough issues, problems they cannot tackle themselves. They they cannot kind of figure out themselves.

12:33 Vaida G.: So how do you, as a project manager, how do you act and react when people bring issues to the table?.

12:50 I-10: Ohh while... I could see two sides of the coin here. 1st is uh, well, this is definitely good. Uh, the first side of the medal that this is definitely good, meaning that I did a lot of things right, if, umm, people are not, you know, afraid of talking openly with each other on issues they have. It means to me that I made this rapport. You know? Yes, this rapport with them in a good way, like I got to know them a bit. I do it when I just start to work with them. So they they know they ohm that there is a democracy and they could come to me anytime, come to any team members anytime and they can openly discuss tough questions and bring them to the table.

13:54 I-10: But the other point here, and it's tricky one... Is that uh, sometimes not very often, but... People are like.. They would like to transfer this. They don't want to take the decisions themselves, so they would like someone to do it for themselves, and this is the this is the another side of the medal here. So and they will bring you all the questions that they can solve by themselves, but they won't do this because, like, I don't know, it's like childish behavior or just they want do not...

14:45 I-10: Umm well, I think this is the lack of the skills or they do not want it to, uh, just fix problems or to deal with stuff and issues. Some of their personal characteristics... So yeah, this is the another set of the medal. So and for me it's like a balancing act. So it's good that

we're talking about the features and we can talk about them together and find the solution together, but I should set up clear borders where all... For example, this is like their decision... I say: "You should work on it, because this is your area of responsibility." I know they are the professionals in their field.

15:39 I-10: "I can help you, I can guide you with some coaching questions. But this is your field and I'm sure you can take care of it." So yeah.

15:54 Vaida G.: OK. So you kind of acknowledge that people are professionals in the field and therefore they should be taking this responsibility to make a decision themselves, not you.

16:05 I-10: Umm well sort of. For example, in my recent project we had very, very junior mentees and senior managers who were like a mentor for them, meaning that these junior ladies are like junior front end developers...

16:32 I-10: And they cannot, like they cannot make a proper decision because she even have no knowledge about the field and that's why she consulted to a senior expert in this and he showed a wide variety of different hmm circumstances that influenced the decision and then they discuss it together and then they bring the decision to the table to me. So that was the path...

17:04 Vaida G.: Hmm. OK. OK. I see. Thank you so much. And and you also mentioned the first very first thing like the the good part of the medal... That you did a good homework so that people trust you and they bring those issues right. So what does that homework you mentioned mean? How do you do it?

17:27 I-10: Well, it's the very, very first.... Initiation phase of the project when I need to know my team members and in my like... I'm talking about the recent IT projects, not about the learning and development projects at the moment. So uh, at these projects I... First of all, I interviewed people by myself. So I was playing a bit of a recruiter role, not a project manager but the recruiter role. So I already know who will be in my team and I already was trying to match them to match their personal characteristics together and to match their background professionally. Both professional and personal sides to balance out.

18:20 I-10: And of course, when I was interviewing, while we're talking small talk, you know... So I was trying to find something that we have in common with everyone. Uh, and I think I'm... Good at this. So there's always something that we have in common. I I don't

know... I could try to find one similarity even with you, if you will tell more about yourself. So we're talking about the project management by the way.

19:03 I-10: So hey we already have something in common, right?

19:05 Vaida G.: Yes indeed.

19:09 I-10: Yes. Yeah, yeah. So I'm trying to not push the people. I'm more democratic in my management style, so... Of course I should take tough decisions sometimes. And the team knows that when I'm not kidding and joking at those moments... I'm stepping into the manager role and say: "Hey guy, now it's not time to relax. Just go and do a job". And they're doing it because they already trust me. And they know that I can, umm uh. They believe that I can be, umm, be not a friend, but I can I can provide them support. They would love support.

20:08 I-10: Yes, this is the most important because in some projects I saw like a that ohm....

20:16 I-10: Some people, especially developers ,they feel they have some frictions with the managers because of not their personalities. No, but , because they do not trust them. Some reasons because, uh, some project managers started starting to blame the developers because they're not delivered the project on time. But it's not the developers. I truly believe this is like managerial skills, so it's mostly about the manager, project manager, skills in general, so that's why I'm trying to be on their side like always. I'm supporting them and not blaming, because it's our teamwork. So we're working in the team together, we are all like one. Yep, sounds maybe too optimistic. I don't know.

21:12 Vaida G.: Moving on to mistakes then. So when we have a psychologically safe team, we are not judged by or held against. How do you ensure that people feel safe to to make mistakes? And second, questions like how... What do you do when that happens?

21:59 I-10: Ohh. Nice questions. I didn't think about it. Could you please repeat it once again?..

22:12 Vaida G.: So let's start maybe from uh, from this homework, right? How to make sure that, uh people?

22:20 I-10: Yeah. Umm.

22:20 Vaida G.: So how to ensure that team feels safe, that each team member feels safe? Like to make a mistake. That they won't be judged by you as a project manager, by the team

itself. Like it's fine to make mistakes. How to how do you make sure that people feel safe to do that?

22:43 I-10: Well. It at this specific moment of our like initiation phase of the project when we're starting when we had this kickoff meeting and then was just started to plan the project together.... Umm, I had this. Uh on my fingertips. Now they are starting to open up themselves like they're starting to joke. They are starting to. Uh. To communicate. Umm, openly, but not too much. Not too much, but still they can add some personal details so they can... It's something from their personal life. Some stories or something like this. So for me this is the sign that, OK, they feel at ease here. So and that means that if something will happen, if in some case some trouble, they will come to me and tell me about this...

23:54 I-10: And one more important thing here is that I always have one on ones with everyone, with every team member...

24:01 I-10: Uh, after the kickoff meeting, because I need to make sure that every member understood what we are doing properly, because... When the project starts, it's the team of strange people together and this is my task to say them what we would be delivering. Who's our client and why? I would do an actually this and what is my role and how I am helping them to o deliver the project. Well, basically, I'm talking to them that I am their helper and supporter, not the manager.

24:51 Vaida G.: Hmm. OK. OK. I will note that citation. OK, mistake happened. Like the person did some some wrongdoing. What is expected? How do you act and react as a project manager when that happens?

25:18 I-10: I talked to the person who failed. Of course, personally, you know, this is like a basic thing in management. When you say good words in the team, like openly for everyone, but you're talking about like bad things like privately so... First of all, I'm talking about this, because there are... There can be a huge amount of reasons why this mistake happened. It might... It might be connected with some lack of professional skills, or this might be connected with some personal reasons, and I should know why. So if this connected with some professional things, like I don't know... The software wasn't updated or the computer like crashed...

26:06 I-10: Or he just failed? I don't know. Sometimes happens or it is connected with some personal reasons... I don't know. The daughter got sick or he himself got sick or whatever.

Ohh, he maybe just forgot to do it the task. This also might happen... We are all like people, so I need to to find out what is the root cause of this failure, and then we should figure out together how we can fix it and what the person could do to fix it quickly and what kind of support he needs from any team members and from me to to do this.

26:51 I-10: And I had this some time that.. Developers' team, they said they cannot deploy some specific features and they said it was.... It's impossible to do this, but I didn't believe them. OK, I googled, consulted another experts in the field saying hey, is it really impossible to do? This is just the lack of professional skills, so I invited an expert on this topic and he described how we can fix this. So I just invited this special person who taught my team to do this task. This is what I did.

27:59 Vaida G.: Thank you. Thank you for sharing. Now I'm looking at the time... We still have around 20 minutes. So let's try to fit in. It's very interesting what you're saying and and I'm learning from you a lot. Yeah. OK, so we have then the next situation. So when I express my opinion, I will not be rejected. Overall, how to work with different opinions in the team, not necessarily conflict. But if you feel safe and want to share any specific conflicts, that kind of escalated, you can share as well.

28:37 Vaida G.: So so how do you work in these difficult kind of task-related conflicts, personal conflicts, different opinions, whatever you have in your experience?

28:50 I-10: Yeah, I had, yes, definitely had. Umm... Well...

29:01 Vaida G.: Mm-hmm.

29:04 I-10: Well, this uh, this conflict management... Well, this conflict... It depends on how deeply it involves the project itself, or maybe it's just the personal matter of two people in the team. So if they are just quarreling about something on their own, I'll let them go. And let them solve the issue. But if they started to influence the project, so I should interfere into the issue...

29:44 I-10: Umm. And I should talk to them together, one on one first, and then together. Just saying: "Hey, uh, I know that your opinion on that is this and your opinion is this, but OK, for now, for this task or for this project, for project safety... What can be a... The combined opinion on the point.?"

30:11 I-10: “So can you just, uh, stay calm and continue delivering your task tasks or not?” If not, let's talk about what we can do. And unfortunately, in one of the projects, the conflict was it... It wasn't so big. I would say it was mostly the lack of competencies, like professional competencies of their junior specialist, and we couldn't proceed with the tasks, and were like short of time, and the team was very, very nervous and the person was very nervous like he cannot...

30:51 I-10: He could not learn so fast as it was needed for the project... And he decided to leave the project. But we still are acquaintances, and we still have some good relationships, and with the team as well. But at that moment we understood that this incompetency influenced the project and the team was nervous, and like rumors are starting... The gossips through the project: “He cannot do this and he cannot do that. He's not the professional at all. We cannot have him in team”. I had to stop it. Yeah, we had a conversation with the guy and with the team. So he left.

31:48 Vaida G.: OK. OK. Anything else to this conflict or different opinions? Any other examples you have?

31:57 I-10: Not at the time. Let's move on.

32:00 Vaida G.: OK, so the 4th one is risks, I will try to explain a bit more in depth, because it's not usual kinda risk management plans for project managers... Umm, so OK in a psychologically safe team I should feel safe to take risks: to challenge status quo, to bring some new light into the team, and be innovative, and experiment.

32:35 Vaida G.: As you can see already probably, psychological safety is not only about just feeling safe to kind of be in the team, belong in the team, but also to challenge yourself and others. So what I heard from you already and I want to kind of confirm if you agree, you very publicly openly recognize any achievements or any efforts, right?

33:24 I-10: Yes, this is the answer.

33:26 Vaida G.: And how do you do that? What does it look like?

33:35 I-10: Well, I do it in several ways; first, like in one one, then publicly during meetings. Uh, it could be like during stand-ups or it could be retrospective meetings. Ah, I'm trying to, uh to meet with the team in informal way in, in a cafe, or we're going for a hike, for example.

And it's a very good thing for team building, you know. And then. Uh, I usually write them emails. Semi-formal. I would say for different occasions it might be.

34:27 I-10: Uh, like holidays? Like public holidays. Ohh. Maybe like personal, uh, something. Something personal things. Uh, definitely. I congratulate and I make it very personal. I do not copy paste in the chat GPT or something; I'm trying to find specific good things that I can underline in every team member.

35:05 I-10: So even if the person failed, the project failed and someone failed with the specific task. Still, there is something that I can find good at. Maybe he's a good communicator and or he helped the colleague to solve another thing. I don't know, but it's nice when people are not being treated, uh, like robots on the project, and now again, it's mostly about still about the communication.

35:47 Vaida G.: I I wanted just to check before moving forward. If there is anything else like you do in the way you talk to people; like how you encourage this innovation or being brave. Do you do anything besides thanking people for their effort, even when maybe they fail, you still always recognize them?

36:21 I-10: OK. Of one things that I differently do in our project... Uh. In every project, we have a special channel or WhatsApp group, whatever special communication channel. Where I put a lot of new things on the topic related to the project. So it's like an educational site. So I'm like a bit of educating my team members depending on their roles on the topic of the project. So this is what I'm doing. So, and they know. Yeah. Mm-hmm.

37:28 Vaida G.: Let's continue with help or collaboration. So again the statement is that when the team is psychologically safe, I am... I am sure that I can ask for help and it will be given to me. So we don't work in these silos, isolated spaces, but we work together, and help each other.

38:10 Vaida G.: So do you do anything to ensure that?

38:16 I-10: Umm what I do to ensure?

38:20 Vaida G.: To ensure the team collaboration helping each other, working together.

38:31 I-10: Ohh, maybe I misunderstood the question, but we're working together in a project, so I see no reason why they can work independently on something or.... But we're still working as a team together, so we're...

38:48 Vaida G.: So how do you kind of encourage that that we are a team, that we work together like, help each other. Do you do anything? Like, how do you ensure that people help each other? Or do I understand that it comes naturally and you don't do anything?

39:15 I-10: At the very first of the very beginning of the project, even in the kickoff meeting, I usually present the the scheme of the project; like umm, the project plan, so we could see the dependencies, and we can see the whole picture of the product who is doing what in what specific roles and how we depend on each other.

39:41 I-10: And definitely, when you're working on the project, you definitely depend on someone's tasks. You cannot do it like solo, because, for example, if you're delivering, if you're a developer delivering some task, then you should have it from a product manager and you're discussing it with the project manager at the beginning of Sprint, for example, and developers are working together and then like come and testers....

40:18 I-10: So it's team job. I did not do any maybe super specific things. Hmm. Here for me it's quite obvious.

40:33 Vaida G.: OK, OK. Yeah. OK, so that's also fine and interesting to hear. Moving to the 6th situation. So when I am in a psychologically safe team, I can be sure that no one will kinda diminish myself as a person, professional, and that I will be treated equally. So this is the topic of respect. Uh. Yeah.

41:08 Vaida G.: So do you need to do anything to ensure no power plays, that everyone is treated equally as part of the team? Anything you can do?

41:22 I-10: Well, this is one of the one of the things uh that I keep in mind when interviewing people for the project. So and if I see like a bossy trace of character in the person, I should definitely define whether in what specific place in the project this person might fit or might not fit. So this is the first thing. Umm. Umm. Ah. Can you repeat the question once again? Umm. Hmm. Ohh yes right.

42:11 Vaida G.: So the statement is that I'm in a psychologically safe team – no one will treat me differently from others. You already mentioned that when recruiting, you already think of this balance of the team, so this could be it. Maybe when I write you the summary, maybe you'll think of something additional. That's fine, yeah.

42:46 I-10: I'm not sure. Yeah... I don't know now. Let's continue then, I have not much much to add...

43:03 Vaida G.: Yeah, we come to the last situation and so I will try to explain it. The last topic is about recognition. When I feel psychological safe, when I'm in a psychologically safe team, I can feel safe that like my all my best skills and everything I have best in this position will be utilized and I will be valued and like yeah uh, fully engaged in the team as a, as a person.

44:20 Vaida G.: So is there anything that you do, as a project manager, to ensure people's best versions are in the team? And kind the how to say umm to ensure that yes, people's people's efforts and people's skills, people's knowledge. It is used for the like the maximum.

44:48 I-10: Mm-hmm.

45:06 I-10: Umm. Ohh well this is well, I think that we're umm most of the time we're talking about the communication within the team. Ohh well, first of all I should keep an eye on the on the communication style, if any inappropriate or rude words are used. And say: "Hey, this is inappropriate style of communication here. So please change it to the proper one. So this is not OK". You cannot joke about someone and just make fun of them.

46:23 I-10: This is not good. Yeah, I cannot, you know, check how do they communicate with each other without me. But if there is something... Ohh basically they coming up to me and saying: "Hey, I feel like embarrassed because I've heard something unpleasant about my I skills"

... Or something. And I tried to to find out what's happened. So it's very sensitive things you know, uh. Uh, but again, this is about the, umm, listening to people with empathy. It helps build trust. Yeah. And I would underline here that this is also might be conducted with providing feedback to people.

47:39 I-10: Because I didn't mention that previously, but of course, uh, I could say that providing constructive feedback and providing positive feedback, because without saying that's one of their most important things for project management. Mm-hmm.

48:30 Vaida G.: And just to finish. As this last question... I heard what you are now saying, it also adheres to the respect part, but if we finish with recognition part... You talked previously

a bit about people's growth. Do you kind of challenge or help people grow in any way, like by coaching, by asking any questions? That they feel recognized and can grow.

49:03 I-10: Umm, well, you know. We have uh reviews with every member twice every project, I would say uh, basically twice during the project. So in the beginning and in the end and during these one on ones. Once when I when I'm asking them: "OK, you're working here in this project and this role, but..."

49:56 I-10: "Do you wanna stay in the role? What are you going to achieve to on this project? What are your umm? What are not not the wish, but what are you going to do here, simply complete tasks? It's fine. Anything to learn new? Why it's important for you to work on this project."

50:26 I-10: "So how can I help you to to how can I help you to boost your productivity?" OK. Yeah, like this. And it's not about the umm, specifically... You know, in some corporations there are so-called like review sessions at the end of the year, like evaluation or performance appraisals or something. So this is a kind of a sort of a performance appraisal. Mm-hmm.

51:00 Vaida G.: Thank you so much and sorry, we're a bit out of time, so I won't keep you for longer. I want to thank you for your time. It was very interesting. I noted insights and thank you for being open. I hope you felt safe in this room and in our meeting. And yeah, I'll send you some more info as you're interested in Edmondson's research, and I will get back to you. I think, in like a couple of days or so, next week, uh, with the summary where you can confirm the insights.

51:39 Vaida G.: Thank you. Thank you so much.

51:42 I-10: Thank you so much. Bye.

Academic research interview with I-11

Transcript

00:00 Vaida G.: Hi again, please provide the approval for recording once again.

00:02 I-11: Hello, sure thing, no worries, of course you can – whatever you need.

00:10 Vaida G.: Thank you. How how are you?

00:17 I-11: Good, good.

00:20 Vaida G.: Right, great. Thank you so much for joining.

00:40 I-11: Thank you!

00:44 Vaida G.: Yes, so the recording is for transcription. To ensure the ethics of the research any names of your company or your name or any colleague names that maybe pop up – nothing will be appearing in the final paper. I will code your name so you won't be kind of, uh, disclosed. Any personal information won't be disclosed.

01:25 I-11: OK, don't worry.

01:33 Vaida G.: OK. And I will introduce myself firstly, then I will ask like very short introduction questions to you to get to know you a bit better. Your context in this field mainly. And then we will go to the main 7 questions. I have shared them with you yesterday on LinkedIn. And after we close, in a couple of days, I will send you on LinkedIn like a summary of findings for you to confirm. Because this is important that the interviewee validates. That, you know, this is your words, not like my subjective opinion.

02:12 Vaida G.: This is what you told me that I didn't add anything additional. OK, so my name is Vaida. Nice to meet you again. I'm studying at Vilnius University, Lithuania, and I'm doing research on team psychological safety, and to be more precise how project managers foster psychological safety in virtual teams.

02:47 Vaida G.: So I'm focusing on coaching side, but when I will be asking you the questions, you don't have to think like whether what you do is coaching or not just... You can share plainly what you do, how you act and react in different situations and then I will analyze.

03:08 Vaida G.: I am analyzing the work, the data according to the International Coaching Federation competencies and practices, as well as Edmondson's article questionnaire about psychological safety. So Edmondson is a researcher in Harvard University who has been delving deep into psychological safety topic for a very long time.

03:41 I-11: Should I have to be feeling worried about it? Not it was not really, just kidding...

03:45 Vaida G.: I I don't think – it will be a fun conversation, I am sure. I want to kind of hear and also learn from you because I'm a coach myself. So it's like – let it be just like a conversation. I want to hear from your experience what you do, and again, you may not want to disclose some information. It's fine. You may don't have answer for some questions. It's also completely fine.

04:16 Vaida G.: And so yeah, could you tell me a bit about your context as in a project management field overall like year-wise or industry-wise?

04:30 I-11: Yeah, actually right now or do you you mean my expertise about it or?

04:37 Vaida G.: Like how long are you in the field and and what industry?

04:42 I-11: Ohh... Yeah. Let let me try to make it short version of my experience because I I've been dealing with project management roles and other roles in between. I graduated on 1987, so that's around 35 years ago. Wow. My goodness. That was longer than what I thought, and I worked at the beginning as a hardware engineer, then service manager. Yeah. And in-between as a project manager for a fiber optic project along fiber optic project and a oil refinery in Venezuela for a couple of years. In that role my my...

05:33 I-11: My main activities were dealing... Not only dealing with the external contracts, but internally with the evaluation of routes, with the permissions, with all the other fields, just to understand what to do, where to do and when to do it, and with the providers to understand the products, I mean the fiber optic, how to handle, how to deal with that, how to decide who is gonna be working with that.

06:19 I-11: So I was responsible in that year... 1991 for a \$10 million project in a couple of year, that's a lot of money at that moment I was dealing with the project.

06:49 I-11: But I was dealing with all the operational things, meaning working with quite different teams at the same time. One professional team for the fiber optic installation, one I can say... How do you say in English? Well, is the people who was working. The digging, the

digging.. So there was like a construction team building, so it was completely different at the moment. I at the moment I I didn't have any skills regarding coaching and performance, but more as a project manager. After that project, I was dealing with the service operation and then after that I I went back to several projects.

07:47 I-11: I also worked as a project manager in a data center environment for making an upgrade on the fiber optic backbone on the data center.

08:11 I-11: The data center was making a like a a rollout for the for the improvement of the data center. So they needed a person with experience on fiber optic and installation, designing and networking environment on the data center to deal with the ongoing operation. Because the data center was on production at the moment and dealing how to make the the upgrade the the new installation and then upgrade on the go, I mean you cannot say the customers: "OK, we're gonna shut down everything for three days because we need to do this." So you have to to work in between. So at at that moment I had more experience dealing with customer, with the stakeholders.

09:07 I-11: And skills on coaching at at the moment I was already certified as a business coach, so I was representing the company internally with the, with the, with the providers and dealing with the external and internal stakeholder.

09:42 I-11: What will be the best period of the of time to get the interruption to make the changes, letting them know that this is an improvement for them and we are looking for them to to be the the first customer to experience this improvement at the same price with more benefit? I mean, the other thing that I learned... The theory of the hamburger. The theory of the hamburger says when you are dealing with that situation, a difficult situation, you you say three things: like the bun, the meat and the other bun.

10:27 I-11: So just start with something soft that give some some good feeling for the other side. And then you go with the strike with something hot, something that is the break point on the situation. At the end, you end with the say that as a summary and that's why you are getting better.

10:51 I-11: So that was a very good opportunity because with the customers, I was telling them we are performing an improvement and upgrade on our system for improvement. The speed of connection and the ability and the feasibility for new project and this will be used not only for all the customer, but we are dealing first with our main customers.

11:31 I-11: But we are dealing with this. We have some contingency plan, so they were really the happy even though they were getting some interruption on services that were critical for them, including banks and other services that were working 24/7. So they say, OK, and after I remember because I got the president of the company by my side when I had on the main board making the presentation.

12:03 I-11: And what did she say? “Ohh you convinced me. Why? How do you do that? How do you tell them that you're gonna put them down for a couple of hours and they feel good with that?” Well, that's that's how you sell the message. It's not what you wanna do, is how do you sell the message. After that I've been dealing with as a project manager in several projects: one in in Kazakhstan with the infrastructure on telecom, with people dealing with people in different nationalities in different places of the world, people from Korea, South Korea, from India, from Kazakhstan, from Russia, from the United Kingdom for America, Italy.

12:54 I-11: France. No, Germany. So dealing with all of them was a really stressful but very good experience, different dialects and accents, but not only that...

13:17 I-11: And I improved. I must say that I'm improving on that because... When you deal with people from different cultures, you need to understand that each person need to be treated in their own way. If you want to have that as an an alliance, you need to to make them feel that you understand them. It's about empathy. It's about the many other things, so it's not only listen to them, but it's understanding what they are gonna do, what they are really telling you. It's is about understanding and making the right question.

14:19 I-11: For example, if you speak with people from India, if you don't do anything while you are making a conversation and you don't interrupt or tell anything, they think that you're not interested in the conversation.

14:41 Vaida G.: And we would talk about this. Yeah, if if there's time. But I just wanted to interrupt you. Sorry. We are growing out of time for the topics. But you mentioned about your experience. And also coaching, business coaching specifically. Moving on, I wanted to ask how you understand like what is psychological safety in a team? What does it mean to you?

15:10 I-11: It's quite a new expression to tell you the truth. If you are able to make them feel safe during a conversation that that they can speak friendly, openly with you. That's that's it.

15:54 I-11: I don't know if I am right or not, but I'm pointed to that to that side because one of the things that I experienced here in Spain or here in, in, in Europe, it that is is very respectful that the conversation with others. A... I mean, uh, I came from Venezuela, South America, Latin America and in Latin America.... Hey, it's not an easy conversation with your boss or with some hierarchical team to speak openly and friendly and say something that probably they don't like to to listen,, but here this is respectful.

16:52 I-11: Thus, they respect that if you're, if you're my boss or you're the director of what on the upper level, and I say "I don't agree with this because how you are talking is not respectful." If I tell you, if I talk to you that way, you say "OK, sorry." And we can have an open discussion and that's something that I would say that that's water under the bridge after we finish the conversation. That's not personal, because conversation here, I'm not really personal.... It's not about people and that's when we are talking about a physical safe.

17:39 I-11: Of sorry, psychological safety, I mean that means that there is no impact when we are talking about something because at the end it's not a discussion person to person. It's a discussion on the business and one of the things that I learned before from some other people is that we can agree to disagree. That's good. That's a... That's an early point that that means we are moving forward. But if we if we cannot disagree, that means I don't feel safe making a conversation with you. That means that the environment is not safe for anybody.

18:30 I-11: So I I cannot provide a better response or better performance, because the area or the team in which I am working with, it's not supporting me. Is not gonna be helping me because we don't trust each other. Umm, it's not gonna be easy to find solution at the moment. Right now, the team that I'm supervising right now, we are four persons. One is from the Netherlands, the other is Spain, the other one is Argentina and I am Venezuelan, so four different cultures by itself, even though three of us speak naturally, the mother language, the mother tongue is a Spanish. But a different Spanish. The Spanish from for Argentina is completely different from the Spanish from Venezuela and for the Spain.

20:27 I-11: Sorry. Sorry, say if you want, if you want me to go shorter, let me know please. Sorry.

20:35 Vaida G.: Yes, yes, sorry I'm just looking at the time not to waste more of your time than we agree. Yes. So yes, so and thanks a lot from what you already shared. So we have 7 topics to discuss yet. I will be like jumping into these main questions right away. So there are these seven situations. The researcher I mentioned to you – Edmondson - did lots of work on

psychological safety, defined 7 statements about situations that show whether we feel psychologically safe in the team or not.

21:21 Vaida G.: I'm going to like, say the statement and then ask you how you as a Project manager act and react in these situations. To repeat on the topics, we will talk about problems, mistakes, conflicts, risks, help, respect and recognition. To be in time, if you could share one to two examples in each area, it's completely enough. We would start with issues or problems in the team. If I'm feeling safe in the team, I am able to bring tough problems I cannot like tackle and I talk openly. I talk openly about those issues.

22:09 Vaida G.: So umm overall like how do you ensure that the atmosphere in the team is that people can bring like tough issues? That they can speak openly about those problems?

22:38 I-11: Yeah, actually that's a good moment, because recently on my team... To make it shorter, the the one from the Netherlands is the most experienced team member, because he has been working with the company five years. And the other two: one started on October last year, the other on February, and I started on April.

23:24 I-11: So it's around one year... So that most senior team member has deep knowledge and one of the things that he used to come frequently with me is like claiming some behavior or some result from... Or blaming about the the lack of the results from the other two members, because he says: "It's not possible that we we hire them to do this and they they fail with this and this and this." And I said: "Well, they are learning, they are learning and they're learning from you. If we lose them, we bring some other two that we don't know."

24:13 I-11: "And teach them from the scratch. Uh. Or the other thing is we can use our time to teach them, but if if they are good as I know and as you know, we should spend more time with them, and you are the guy, you are the person who has the knowledge. So you have the empowerment and probably what we need to create is like an open list of subjects to review and blah blah blah blah blah..."

24:42 I-11: So giving him like the ownership, and I enforce him that he has the result on his own. I'm supporting him and I normally tell him that this is a technical matter: "You are the owner of the technical matter. I am not, so I can help you and guide you, but you have to deal with technical issues. And if they if they disagree with you we have to find out..." As I said before we can agree to disagree, so we have to find out what is the the situation and try to

move forward. “Even though you are much more efficient than them that doesn't mean that you have always the right position.”

25:26 I-11: “Ohh yeah, yeah, you're right. You're right. OK, so let's move on.” And right now it's much better, because he has open mind to this situation with them. And they are also dealing with him, because normally they say “Ohh he has really deep knowledge, but he doesn't share the knowledge, so we have to dig for information somewhere else...” And then he says “No, that's not the the right place to go.”

25:56 I-11: “But if you don't tell us how, how can we learn?” And then that's the open discussion that I have with them.

26:04 Vaida G.: Thank you. Thank you. Moving on to the second topic. When mistakes happen in the team, like in a psychologically safe team, I should feel like safe to not be perfect, to make mistakes, as you said, learn. Do you do anything to either create the atmosphere for this or how you...

26:29 I-11: For that I have a couple of sentences that I learned before... And I normally when I start at a job or a team supervision, I share with them. One of the the boss that I had before he told me: “I prefer you think 10 time before acting to acting 10 time before thinking”. Uh that's one, and the second one is that I – that's a decision that I made: I encourage my team members to make mistakes because if they make mistakes that means they are trying; if they are trying, they are learning. But what we have to be focused on is that the mistake must mean two things: one it shouldn't be repeatedly on the same issue, so they have to learn obviously.

27:28 I-11: So there is a a saying that say they... I don't know how do you say in English, but you like “You don't trip on the same rock twice” or something like that. But so you make mistake that means you are trying, but try to to learn. And the other thing is I encourage them it to take accountability, take risk, because if you come to me every time asking for permission, asking for guidance, that means....

28:02 I-11: It means one of us is not needed. It's not needed because if I have to reply and I have to respond everything to you... That means we are we are having two persons doing the same job. So OK “I give you example, I give you ideas. Take your chances. Take the chances by yourself, with some limits and the limits is about organization. So I am not asking you to

buy this hardware for \$1,000,000, no no no. No, but you have to to to deal with somebody else. You don't have to find me to get permission, and do it.”

28:58 I-11: And that's good because in the past on some other jobs that I had making mistake is not... Is not being well received, but here I say to my team: “Making a mistake is a matter of expertise”. You take some risk on some level, and which level? Well, your experience and your your view or the criticality of the service that you're providing will let you know if you can do it or not.

29:41 I-11: And that's it. And I think that gives them ownership and the ownership is the first step for them to grow.

29:50 Vaida G.: Yeah. OK. Thank you so much for sharing specific examples, for being very exact. Umm, could you remember, if it's possible for you to share this... Some kind of conflict on when people were, you know, quarreling, not agreeing, not accepting each other's opinions. How did you like act and react?

30:18 I-11: Several times actually on this team... Repeated times. We have twice a week open discussion of the team, even though we are working remotely, we have an update, an update calls Tuesday and Thursday to see the our progress on activities, the project and responsibility and roles. In some of them, the person from the Netherlands, said to the Argentinian: “I don't agree with this because you are not doing right...”. And the other guy say: “But tell me why?” The first would reply then: “Well, we should do as the standard.”

31:01 I-11: The second says: “Where is that written? Because I need to understand what is the, what are the rules?” The other said: “No, no, no, no. This is a common sense because this is a best practice we have.” OK. But he repeatedly said: “OK, what is that the best standard? Because if we have the best practice, let's try to share it”. And they open that discussion for 5 to 10 minutes. I give them the chance to show their position for each other and at the end they say: “OK, let's discuss that tomorrow, because we need more information”.

31:38 I-11: After this, I will provide my my insight, but I don't want to take position, because it's not about who is right, who is wrong: it's about how you are dealing with this. And they got surprised because it was communication with videos and then you could see their face and they were surprised, because it's not dealing about the topic by itself – is how do you handle; because if you handle properly you will have the psychological safety. I talk with them so they know that we are discussing a topic – then we are not discussing people. So they

feel safer. It's not because you are taking something personally with me; it is about the topic, not the people.

32:27 I-11: So I'd say: "You have some good point at the at the moment, but you also have good moments." A good point because these and these reasons. But we have to deal with this because if we don't go over this today, we will repeat that in a week, in a month or two months and there will be deeper... It will break the team, so we need you both to support this and together get alignment and and get that solution. If you need my help, it's not because I'm taking the decision for you. It's because I'm I'm trying to be sure that you are respectful for each other dealing with this." And they said: "OK, we will handle that".

33:13 I-11: We ended the conversation, the four of us, and the other day in the afternoon, we called again and they said: "OK, we got an agreement and we had the discussion. Thank you very much, because you gave us a different point of view. How to handle this." And that's the idea.

33:44 Vaida G.: Yeah.

33:44 I-11: Not always works. Let me tell you the truth. That's not working every every time from anywhere, for everywhere, for everybody. It's not working everybody every time, because it it depends on the maturity of the peers, the people you're working with.

33:59 Vaida G.: OK, thank you. Moving on to the 4th topic. The statement is when I am feeling psychologically safe in the team, I feel safe to take risks. What I mean is like kind of challenging status quo, maybe being innovative, experimenting.

34:27 Vaida G.: Have you had anything like that and how you encourage people like they can they can take risks in the team?

34:36 I-11: Actually the one from Spain, one of the the work-in-progress that I'm having with him is is about a topic right now... Yes, because I think he's very, from technical point of view, he is very wise. It's a very wise person, very intelligent, the way he approached the situation, but... How does he handle the ownership of the topics he handle? This is quite different situation... From time to time he said: "OK, they don't want to do it. Well, that's it." No.

35:16 I-11: I say: "Uh, who is the owner of the service?" "They are" "Why? Explain this to me why." And then he's making explanation and say "I sorry I don't agree because look at

this page. Look at this information.” “The owner – we are the owner” “And who from our team?” “No, no, no. We as a team are the owner, and if you are responsible to deal with others, you are the owner. But they need to, they need to feel that you are the owner. If you don't feel you are the owner, they cannot do it.” And I spoke with him regarding the way he writes some memos or some details: ‘That doesn't seem to be that you are in control of what you are asking for.’”

36:11 I-11: “So don't worry”, that's what I said to him. “Don't worry if you made a mistake, but you have to... I say: “You have to feel and own what you do and what you know, because you have very good knowledge. You are smart. You are wise and you know what to do. If they don't agree, ask them why. Show why is this the way to do it? So and we need and we need some so highlight here and to cross to milestone and you're responsible for that’.”

36:52 I-11: “Can you do it or we need to do someone else to do it?”

37:00 I-11: “No, no, no, no, no, no. I can do that and much more.” “OK, so I understand that. Actually I encourage you because I understand that you have the, the ability and the quality and the skills to do it. So let's do it.”

37:16 Vaida G.: Yeah. You really appreciate people's skills and also challenge them a bit so they think that...

37:23 I-11: I as much as they can grow up, I have the chance to do something else.

37:29 Vaida G.: Umm OK.

37:32 I-11: If I need to cover them for everything, I cannot do anything else. If I want to grow, I need the people that are working with me to grow with me because as much they can grow as much I can move to something else.

37:49 Vaida G.: OK.

37:56 I-11: It's about trust.

37:57 Vaida G.: Yeah.

37:59 I-11: It's about understanding the skills and the abilities and the weakness obviously. Because all of us have some weaknesses and if we have weakness, what we have to do to deal with them and to try to move them as an opportunity and to make them as a good skill and translate as a good skill?

38:20 Vaida G.: OK. Thank you for sharing. Now we have 3 remaining questions and so yeah, the first one is that we're going to now is help or collaboration within the team. So when I feel safe in the team, I can feel like I can ask help whenever I need or like I don't feel embarrassed. What do you do to, you know, engage people into collaborating, not working individually, when doing their tasks.

38:56 I-11: The that's a good challenge that I'm dealing with not only now, but I have been dealing in several positions, because that... I think that's the one of the point that not many teams want to deal with because engaging people on a team seems to be natural....

39:19 I-11: But as the culture and the weight of work for many people are quite different, is not about like having children in a playground... Where they all play together, because they like the same work. Here I have, for example, the one from Argentina... He is very smart also, and he normally works by himself, because he's very smart. He's looking for information, is searching and gathering information. So from time to time he avoids to ask question to others.

40:00 I-11: And when we have the whole team conversation, the other one, the most experienced one said: "Ohh come on, you're making mistake because this is not the way. The way we have to do is this and this and this". And there is a a clash between both of them because the Argentinian said: "Uh because I don't have that that information – you have it in your mind". I'd say: "OK what we have to do – we have to try to get the best of each other. That means if you have the knowledge, let's bring to the every other meeting we have on the week..."

40:41 I-11: "We want to share information with the others. Because this is an important topic for them to to catch up and learn. And others, please bring some topics that you you need to get more information just to avoid some holes and some so issues that will delay..."

41:08 I-11: "Our project and our results." What I have asked them is that the agenda is not being longer prepared by me. It's gonna be proposed by them. If they don't have any proposal, I mean, the call is cancelled, but after that I give them some assignment by myself.

41:33 I-11: So they can. They can decide. "So if you want to learn, you have to tell us; if you want to teach, you have to tell us. But if you don't say anything, you have to follow instruction. If you don't feel as mature as I understand you are, you have to follow instruction. You don't like to follow instruction? Please bring us topics. So you are mature, you are

experienced.” And they are making a good engagement right now because they understand they are in different levels, but the only way to to engage is for one going down and for the other going up to be at the same level.

42:18 Vaida G.: Mm-hmm. OK. Moving to the respect topic. I remember you mentioned a bit about the mistake topic that you try to facilitate the conflict to make sure that they take the decision, but you make sure that everything is in respectful way. Also, you mentioned different cultures that you need to adapt so that people feel, you know, respect. So this uh, second to the last question was like how do you ensure respect in the team that no one’s effort gets diminished? The statement is that I can feel psychologically safe in the team when I know that no one's undermines, you know, disrespects my efforts. Me as a person in the team.

43:04 Vaida G.: So besides the different cultures and respect in conflicts, is there anything else you would like to add to this respect topic?

43:17 I-11: When I see that... I remember one sentence that I read before that... “The good things you just say in public and the bad things you say in private”. When I see the bad behavior from one of the one of the people or they are umm, not respectful for others, I try to stop the conversation , but in a nice way. In that case, after we end the call, I get on 1-2-1 call just to try to get deeper into that. I say “The way you handled this is not good. Is not being respectful. If I work this way with you, you won't feel very well. Even though I can say that I am on the right position, but that doesn't mean that I have to be not respectful with you.”

44:35 I-11: “So the way you just spoke with him on the last conversation, I don't think that it's creating bridges – that's breaking bridges, and that's not the way that we work. We are a small team. We need to be cohesive and we need to be a team work. We are not just people working together. We are team work...”

45:12 I-11: “Let's try to do something else, but we are not here to be not respectful.” I think when being direct in private with the people, they agree with that. I think that's well appreciated, because it is about the hamburger: the bun, the meat, that other bun. That's the way that I ended that dialogue: “You are much more than that. I know that you can do more. Probably you had a bad day, but he is not the responsible for your bad day, so you can you can do much better” .

46:17 Vaida G.: Yeah. Thank you so much. It was like very good connection with the very last topic of recognition. So you mentioned you talk publicly when you want to say good

things, like maybe recognize people or appraise them. So the last statement is that I feel safe when my skills are well utilized and overall I can be seen like a valuable team member. So any particular examples how you do this, how you recognize people, and we will close after this.

46:52 I-11: Well, actually in several ways, not only telling them what is the situation, but I am sharing that information with my supervisor, with my director. And I have normally a weekly conversation with a weekly presentation with the updates, with the updates of the of the performance and normally with some project it's being closed.

47:17 I-11: I put the name of the person who made the highlight and that and I share the presentation with them in the in with the other day, then in our call I say: "OK, I had this conversation with this and this, and this is the presentation. These are the highlights. You are the responsible for this great work, not me".

47:56 I-11: So I have to share performance with managers for them to shine, because they're here to shine. They're here to perform, for all others to know that they are the experts. I'm here as a director. I am the orchestra director. But they are those that do the great work, the performers. They are here to shine.

48:26 Vaida G.: OK, that's lovely. Uh, and you really used to like visual language! Thank you so much. As we have to wrap up, this was a really lovely conversation. I appreciate every example you shared. What I'm going to do right now is to summarize, then send you like the whole summary of what I found – the main findings for you to validate.

48:47 Vaida G.: Thank you so much

48:50 I-11: Thank you.

Academic research interview with I-12

Transcript

00:00 Vaida G.: Hi again. And now I start and I need your confirmation, once again, if you could confirm that I can record.

00:15 I-12: Yeah, sure you can record.

00:20 Vaida G.: Nice to see you. How are you?

00:25 I-12: I'm good. Good. How are you?

00:27 Vaida G.: Quite OK. Actually umm it's pretty stormy here. It's snowy, so winter has come here, yeah.

00:35 I-12: We we don't have a good weather either, so, yeah. It's snow and we got like strong wind and I it can even hear like through the windows, you know, like the sound. Like the wind is very.... Yeah. So I feel you. Yeah.

00:42 Vaida G.: Again, thanks for joining. Thanks so much for for taking the time. Before I introduce myself quickly, we're going to take around 45 minutes, not more than 50. I added 50 in case of any technical issues, if we have, but this should be enough. But so I wanted to remind again that recording is used for transcription purposes and then deleted immediately.

01:34 Vaida G.: Yeah, and yes, I will transcribe, if not on Friday, then on uh weekend. And so to introduce myself – I am a student of of Vilnius University, Lithuania, and I am representing and writing my thesis on the topic of team psychological safety when working remotely. Uh, I found the niche, by basing my research on Amy Edmondson. She is Harvard University researcher, she has been researching team psychological safety of different teams. Not necessarily projects. It's not related. That's where I found my niche. But she studied different teams and psychological safety in teams for decades. And I took her questionnaire, so to say, or 7 situations, 7 topics around psychological safety.

02:37 Vaida G.: And what we're going to do, is to go deeper into those. But but first I'm going to... We're going to introduce ourselves. So I will ask a couple of introductory questions to get the context of your experience in project management and coaching. How you got familiar to it. And how you understand psychological safety. No theory is needed, like no

kind of theoretical answer, and then we will go to those situations. After we finish and I do the primary analysis, I will send you like a short summary of the findings. So you can validate. It's important for research validity that you confirm that I have not added anything from my side as a person and coach.

03:19 Vaida G.: And so I'm going to analyze my research in accordance to International Coaching Federation competencies and practices. So I'm very open to hear whatever you do and when I ask you these questions, you don't have to think like if it is coaching or teaching, or managing people. Just share how you act and react and then I will, you know, kind of categorize what are different practices et cetera according to International Coaching Federation. So examples are welcome as long as you feel comfortable giving those examples, and if any names pop up, like if I say your name in the recording, I will code you as an interviewee with your unique number.

04:04 Vaida G.: Also, any company names or anything that would show your kind of uh personal details would be coded and anonymized, or if it is other people's names. Any questions before we start?

04:15 I-12: No, let's go.

04:18 Vaida G.: So yeah, I wanted to ask you about your experience as a project manager like year-wise and industry-wise. In a couple of sentences... How long you are a project manager and any particular industry?

04:33 I-12: Umm, OK, so next May it's gonna be 10 years since I work as a project manager. Yes, and it's it has been always IT. But I've been working on different projects. Some of them were related to pharma. Some of them were related to like voice assistance and chat bots, like customer support, kinda industry. We can say that also there was ecommerce and now in this company that I work currently, I work in a product that is business automation workflows. So basically it's like everything: a lot of different integrations, complex UI and automating processes. Also, the e-signature solution is integrated, the PDF editing and different other document editing parts are there as well so...

05:34 Vaida G.: I just noted down, if you don't mind. Yeah. So that looks like you have really in-depth and very various experience, right? And with coaching... How much familiar are you? How did you start doing it?

06:09 I-12: Umm, so I do read a lot of stuff. I am.... I have the SAFe Scrum master certification. Yeah. So I think Scrum master it's kinda, you know, into this categories of like coaching and kind of training and, you know, facilitation, all of that... Uh. So I I would call this as as a proven kinda, you know, record, but also throughout my career I used to have... I was very active in like peer to peer coaching. So let's say like someone joined the company, let's say on the same position or there was like associated to project manager position.

06:59 I-12: You know, I would be that person to navigate to, to help this person to achieve the results. And I do have a few success stories. Uh, where I left the company and this person would become, you know, like among my peers would be like a manager or something like that. So it was quite successful, and, you know, it's like collaborative success, I would call it. So yeah, and in general in my approach, I do follow all of these agile methodologies... And I'm not. You know, I'm not, like, just managing the project. I'm trying to manage the people, so I think a lot into that goes. Like how you approach the person, how you you find like different motivation.

07:45 I-12: In my understanding, that's part of the coaching, you know, helping people to become the better version of themselves in this working environment as it is.

08:01 Vaida G.: Thank you so much for the background and before we dive into those situations, could you share how you understand psychological safety?

08:14 I-12: Uh, in my understanding, it's like when everyone in like in the group in the team is safe, feels safety; is safe enough to share his or her thoughts to voice their opinions, you know, to provide feedback, to be like, open to have this space to grow professionally.

08:42 I-12: And like personally, I would say umm yeah... So it's actually, I think like psychological safety is one of the key elements of like building like healthy team. You know, the team that can achieve results. So. So yeah, so that's my kind of understanding.

09:02 Vaida G.: OK. So, and that's perfectly fine. I'm noting down again, I'm asking this question each and every interviewee. Yeah, I really want to hear. It's not that I'm going to compare it to some theory, but just to align as well before we jump into the questions that we understand it similarly... Like, what to expect in next questions. So thank you for sharing your understanding about what is psychological safety in the team.

09:47 Vaida G.: It takes a lot into into account, and we are probably going to go through all of these examples you mentioned. As I wrote you yesterday on LinkedIn, we're going to cover seven situations or topics around psychological safety. It is going to be problems, mistakes, conflicts or differing opinions, risks, help, respect and recognition. So, uh, we're going to start with the issues or problems in the virtual team. I will firstly say the statement from the researcher I mentioned - Edmondson. So one of the situations is problems. So when I feel psychologically safe in the team, I feel safe to bring tough issues, problems that I cannot tackle myself and and.... And I can talk openly about that.

10:39 Vaida G.: So basically how you ensure that you you have this safe space in the team when people can speak about issues and and when actually the issues happen.

11:03 I-12: OK regarding how do I ensure so... If it's like a a new group of people that like, let's say... I've joined, you know... I tend to do this first step of showing vulnerability and showing the example that I am kinda... I'm not perfect. I don't know how it like, for example, how it was done before. I'm OK to learn and I'm always seeking the navigation from the group if I'm the one who joined. And this has put me in a very....

11:36 I-12: I would say traditionally not great position, because like usually when manager comes in, you know, like you supposed to know everything, and when you show this vulnerability that you don't know, that you are OK to adapt to the group, that you OK to learn from the group, usually group feels more like engaged and motivated, and then they are voicing opinions and starting to say like that was how it was done.

12:02 I-12: But then another person would say that they didn't like it, you know? And they, like, try to engage. Instead of, you know, me going and like, talk one and one - which I do... But like it's from different point of view... But for the group, when I ask for them to navigate me to kind of onboard me on how things were working and simultaneously to share and maybe suggest some improvement... Then they feel this like force, that they are in control. So it's basically both like me showing vulnerability because like, from my my expert side, I would usually would need to be like, you know, coming strong. But then me not coming strong and giving this power, it's not power but giving this...

12:51 I-12: Ability to to them... Like they are basically in control. And you know, when in control, it's kind of part of the like, the safety, like the ground. Like you can control what's going on like the narrative and all of that. And then also what I practice is... Usually I have this meeting which is like an informal meeting when we share some things. Why it's

informal... Because usually we work with the remote teams like... I have to, after Covid, at least me.

13:26 I-12: That's my experience. We have this call where we answer the same question. For example, we share what like superpower would you like to have, just like something so random. Not related to the work. But when you share those things, you know, like the connections are built or like... Questions like "What was your dream", "Who you wanted to be when you were a kid?"

13:52 I-12: Also some some wanted to be... I don't know... Like a car racer or something... And so interesting to see the dreams of people and they see, like this connections and maybe some of the hobbies that match, and then they are more willing to learn more about each other and work together... And this also opens this, I would say safe space. And on these calls usually... Now when you do a few of them, I'm not the one who starts the party, but at the beginning I am the one. And when I do, I always share something like super simple, you know, to like to open it. Like, not that I I don't know... Not something complicated, but something that everyone can relate to. You know, I don't know.

14:31 I-12: That I wanted to be a cat, you know, cause like everyone likes cats. And you can pet them, and they do nothing. So something like... Maybe it's a bit silly, but it's like sets the room like this. Like safety and connections and that's what I like. And, also, when someone is being like sharing something that is maybe controversial, maybe not OK to somebody else. Like, OK, so let's say there's one person who shared that he doesn't like that he's always responsible for something...

15:12 I-12: And I wouldn't put aside this person and say: "Why did you share it? Why didn't you come to me?" I'd be like: "OK, I'm glad that you said that. I'm glad that you said that I would like... Action on this request". You know, I would ask the group, you know, so maybe someone can help and something like that. And then on a 1-2-1, I would ask, for example, if the person felt comfortable saying in the group this or like... Because different people have different approaches. So I would make sure that it was comfortable for the person to say so if it wasn't OK situation, because sometimes it happens too.

16:01 I-12: I would still like, you know, do the kudos: "Thank you for sharing. Thank you for bringing it up." But then on 1-2-1 I would say like: "Maybe there was the other situation that you could approach that; maybe it wasn't like the perfect situation... Like what do you think,

how do you think the group took it?” And I would address with the person to make sure the context is also important.

16:23 I-12: But overall, I think that is better to handle this situations when like someone is sharing something, you know, not in the context, rather than nobody is like sharing anything, you know, because they don't feel safe. This is way harder to handle, so so that's why like my opening statements they... You know, they are like... “Here I am. I'm vulnerable. Let's be vulnerable with me. Let's all share, feel safe . Like, let's let's do that together.”

17:02 Vaida G.: OK. That's that's really nice to hear. Thank you for sharing openly. Anything else you wanted to add before we moved to other topics? Anything problem-related.

17:28 I-12: So when the issue pops up, I'm OK to like to face it. I'm always grateful for the person to bring in it up, because I see it as an opportunity for us as a team to become better, and I encourage the team to see it this way, for me to become better, for this person to have this better environment around this person.

17:47 I-12: So I like... I always thankful, even if it's something, for example, that like maybe I did wrong. You know, maybe this is like some sort of feedback that can hurt me personally. I still always come from the person that is giving that feedback, who's making that statement. First of all, to solve like how this person is feeling, why is this like... I know, like sometimes it's conflict, right? But sometimes, I would say like, in my career, there were even times when some people are just kind of destructive, they they like to to... To provide this kind of destructive energy, and that's OK also, because if the person is doing that, it challenges the group. And I'm always still thankful, I'm staying thankful.

18:39 I-12: And then I'm adressing this either with the group, if it's something that concerns everyone. If not, then I would say: “Let's take it offline. Let's take it 1-2-1”. And then I will try to understand why the person is coming from that perspective, because like... And I would say in my, in my understanding, in most cases this is the result that this, this conflict that is like happening or the opinion that was voiced – is the result of something...

19:06 I-12: Maybe the person is not getting enough recognition, maybe not enough responsibility. Maybe something else, you know... And I'm trying to understand... Why? Why? Why? Why? I use that 5 Whys technique, and then... When I understand that, then I can solve the root cause and then like the issue is resolved, you know.

19:24 Vaida G.: OK. Thank you so much for sharing. Uh, it's it's been really interesting to hear you and also see your energy. Uh, it looks like you really enjoy what you do.

19:37 I-12: Yeah, I do. OK.

19:39 Vaida G.: And I hope this interview also helps to kind of reflect of how much you're doing actually, I mean in terms of coaching.

19:49 I-12: Because you know you don't ask these questions to yourself every day. You just go to work and that's it.

19:57 Vaida G.: So I'm I'm glad to to hear that you have so many different examples to share. Moving to mistakes. So maybe something will already apply to what you told, these different practices. So with mistakes, when I'm safe in a team, I can make mistakes basically and not feel ashamed of it.

20:24 Vaida G.: So how do you create that space? Maybe if there are additional practices or how you specifically act and react when people make mistakes.

20:39 I-12: OK, so you know there are two states, and it's like: when the person made mistake and we are still in this mess; and then if the person made the mistake, and now we can talk about it, you know, because we are not in that mess anymore. So when we are not in that state of mess, that's pretty straightforward. We just reflect. If that's OK for us to do together, we do together. But some people they need time to reflect by themselves. That's also OK. I provide that space. You can go reflect and then we can, you know, check in and maybe we can generate some lessons learned. Maybe some of the lessons learned are just for us, privately. Maybe they are for the team.

21:21 I-12: If they are for the team, we gonna share, of course. Also, when the mistake was made, I ask so... You know, some some mistakes, when they are made... Like everyone knows about it. But then others that... Not everyone knows about it, even in the team. So I ask, if it's relevant... I don't share it just like... The mistake was made, so like the next day I go and like: "This is the mistake, and that person made the mistake. Oh my gosh, how we can live with it."

21:51 I-12: No, but I ask this person: "Is it OK that like, for example, I share it? Or do you want to share it with the group? Because this is the mistake that everyone can have." You know, if that's the case, it's not all of the cases, but sometimes it is the case. And if the person

feels safe and that's OK, and the person feels supported in this process of making mistake, this person will come up to the group and say: "This is the mistake I made. I didn't think about it. That was like stupid of me. Or maybe I was just stressed or whatever, so make sure you don't do the same, because that was paid to solve this". But it's not in all of the cases.

22:33 I-12: Uh, when the mistake was made and we are still in this process... I never push the person to think about the mistake right away. I always like... My first reaction is: "That's OK. Do you have a plan? What we have to do, how we can solve it? Do you need help? Maybe do you need help from someone?" And sometimes it can be that help is needed, but the person is too stressed to address the other person, and now I would be this facilitator, I would be like: "There is no worries. It's OK. It happens with everyone." I would even kinda devalue the mistake... Not but just like, you know, lower its importance just because we have to solve it now.

23:19 I-12: But then when we solved it, I would go back and like... "Let's think about it, let's reflect." But if the person... Because like sometimes we are dealing with uh, you know, like some people, they take it very personal and they can like take it like too much, you know... And then my role would be like more like supporting like saying that that's OK. But you can totally see it like the body language and how the person reacts. If the person is stressed already, I would never put like additional stress. I would try to calm down because it's just a mistake. It's not like like... Let's say you're working for, I don't know, for a year and you make one mistake.

24:01 I-12: Like seriously? It just like 200 or whatever working days and just let it happen once. Like it's OK, like it's still human factor. But in other cases, for example, there are people that would say like: "That wasn't my mistake." If that's the case, then I would take like a different approach by saying like: "But who's mistake was that? Who was responsible for that? Who is accountable for that? Like if that was no one's mistake... Like no one made this mistake, then like how we can be sure that next week or next day, we're not gonna have the same situation again?"

24:40 I-12: So I will kind of try to drag this person to responsibility, like to accept it. But if the environment is safe like this would not be the problem, of course, because the person would feel OK to share that.

24:54 Vaida G.: OK, OK. Umm, I'm looking at the time. We still have around 20 minutes. So the third topic is conflicts or differing opinions when people cannot agree you. If you feel

comfortable sharing, I'd be thankful. So again the statement is that I'm not rejected for having a different opinion for being different.

25:29 Vaida G.: So how to make sure, like you know, make sure that everyone's opinion is welcome, but still we have a conflict and somehow have to move on. So anything you remember on conflicts, either personal conflict or task-related conflict.

25:42 I-12: So in my current team there are like... 12 people. There is one person who is very vocal, and like sometimes even I don't know if that's a support or it's the opposite. Because this person has very strong opinions. And I know that not everyone coming into discussion, I wouldn't even say like conflict, but coming into discussion, feel like this is discussion. Most of the people, when talking with this specific person, they feel like there is a conflict, like right away. It's very a very emotional and vocal and all that stuff.

26:18 I-12: So if like, from from my experience, I I know that for someone this can be triggering, so even some people can think that this is discussion and they feel safe, and other people kind of feel threatened: not that they don't feel safe in the group, but they kind of feel threatened by this person. And sometimes it just Like my role is to go to each person, talk, and to provide the feedback, for example, to this very vocal person is to provide the feedback that: "Have you ever noticed that when there is discussion with you that people, you know, tend to just go like, they just like step back." And like, you know, to talk about it with that person. And like usually this person would understand, like this like, you know, small elements like yeah...

27:06 I-12: "Yeah, maybe there's something that happened." OK. And I would just address like: "There is nothing wrong with having different opinions. Nothing wrong, but what about how you deliver it, what can you do about about it?"

27:18 I-12: "The emotions... How loud you are, if you interrupt someone and something like that". And I try to work with that with the person who has these issues and also with the person who has, like, let's say, insecurities and is not that vocal, you know, and it's kind of like shy and I will like try to like:

27:39 I-12: "But do you think if you were like being shy like everyone will hear you? Like whom you you prefer to hear the super shy person that it's hard to understand or someone who is vocal? And maybe you will try to lean a bit to the being more vocal" And stuff like that. So basically, in this case, I will just try to work on the delivery by each side. And in most

cases it would resolve this, let's say conflict, like how they don't understand each other. Because they don't only agree on the question but also how they understand each other... How they like kinda.

28:16 I-12: Uh, sorry, I forgot the word, but how they accept each other? They would not accept like the statement and also like how it is delivered. Yes, but if it's more if, let's say, like both parties are on the same level of like delivery, you know, and it's just like purely conflict on the question, in the statement, in the approach. Then I would try to facilitate that. Umm, depends on the...

28:42 I-12: How big is the conflict? Because usually you can invite the expert, you can try to facilitate, you know, because, like, not all of the things I can facilitate. Usually if that's like something that I have to take decision on, if it's two equal statements, I'd say: "Let's make a test. Like, for me that's totally fine. Let's test." Sometimes people in my group they like... Maybe they say they want to do sprints. There's no problem with that. Let's do that. Let's try for like 3 sprints and see how it works out for us. If it's not, that's OK. Will switch back. I'm like, OK, we're testing cuz first of all, it's not me who works in the project, it's the team and it has to be like good for them.

29:25 I-12: But if there is like some personal conflict, you know, then it's like there is a problem, because this would require more time to resolve. Like to understand why? Why? Why? And if I come to this that this is like personal - someone doesn't like someone. Then I'll try to with like this person look at this other person. Like: "What do you think this person brings to our team? What do you value? What is hard for you to work with?" And maybe we can identify a few things that are super triggering. And again, maybe... The same as with delivery. Maybe I can go to that another person and just ask to work on these things.

30:05 I-12: If the person agrees, you know, cause if the person does not agree like there is no way it's gonna work, cuz you cannot make someone change their behavior if they do not agree with that behavior. So first of all, you have to understand... So yeah, that's basically the approaches that yeah, that I do.

30:35 Vaida G.: That sounds very interesting. Thank you for sharing as well. And the 4th topic is risks. So when I feel safe in the team, I I'm safe to take risks. By risks I mean experimenting, challenging status quo, being innovative in the team. What do you do to ensure these activities?

31:11 I-12: Yeah, I I think I I'm very open to like the team members to take the risk, but they work on some scope or like some process or like whatever...

31:23 I-12: We just have a time limit, you know? So you can do that for like up to one day like... You can if you have this idea and you think this is amazing. I'm OK with you taking one day cuz one day, honestly, it doesn't change the whole world. Now you take that one day and you work on that idea. Usually what happens is the person takes Friday to work on that and then work Saturday and Friday, and then on Monday it's like: "Here's the whole new feature." And I do have this example with ChatGPT: one person was very interested in integration and he brought the integration and how you can generate in the editor like different forms and stuff. And our people loved the idea. And then we implemented the whole thing.

32:11 I-12: Because like he just tried, you know, like this small piece and, like, presented and everyone loved it. Another person also did. Our product is like in English, but then with ChatGPT you can translate it like into two different languages. You don't have to go line by line. And, also, it was just like POC of that. What we would have is the agreement that if you want to do that I'm not the one who's stopping you. It's just you: if you have done your work, and usually we have this buffer in a capacity for like additional kind of things. It's not one day, of course...

32:52 I-12: It's like, I don't know 2-4 hours, but if you are motivated enough, you can pretty much close the work sooner and then you can go and work extra, of course within your reasonable timelines. And I think that's it. Like we do recognize the effort and we do like give kudos for this person, you know, that's that's great. But you know, it's not for everyone, but I think for those who like doing that, that's perfect. But not everyone is creative and wants to be creative, and that's also OK. So we don't, like... There is no expectation that everyone has to bring something. Everyone brings it's own value, and somebody's value is this innovation and risk taking and all of that. And others can be just pure executors, which is, you know, also great.

33:43 I-12: So that's OK.

33:45 Vaida G.: OK. OK. Thank you for sharing. We have remaining 3 topics. So talking about the fifth topic – help or collaboration. So when I feel safe, I can ask for help; it's not difficult to ask for help in the team. So and you mentioned these getting to know and and small talks and informal chats and and vulnerability.

34:38 Vaida G.: Is there anything else?

34:42 I-12: Uh, yeah, just two other things. So you know how we have like a daily stand up when we share like what was done with the regular stuff. On Tuesday we have... It's kind of a different format. We only share the problems that you have, so if you don't have any problems, that's good. You're just there to listen, but if you have some issues, this is the safest place to bring them, because that's like basically the agenda why we are on this call. And then on, I believe, on Thursday or Friday, we have agreed to have meeting like... I have like in Jira the plan, like basically the whole scope for the Sprint, and we are going item by item. So on one item, usually it's not just one person working, but a lot of people working, you know.

35:30 Vaida G.: Yeah.

35:30 I-12: We go from the most important to the least important, and, as we move, if someone is not doing something within time, which is OK because things happen, the other people that know that they are not that, umm, engaged or like occupied at the moment, they would offer help.

35:50 I-12: They were like: "Ohh actually I can help with that." You know, because we are like... My question is when I go through this like plan, I say: "So this is feature A, and feature A is in testing. Is there anything we can do to speed up or optimize its stage? Like right now, maybe we can allocate more resources. Maybe someone can help. Any ideas?" And this opens conversation and someone who knows he's doing something, maybe not that important...

36:17 I-12: To say like: "Ohh actually I can help, you know." So we are, we are working on... But then on this one stand up, we are actually looking at the whole picture, and it brings us up to our collaborative result that we have to show, and you, you can cannot just stand aside when you see that someone is struggling and when this is an important item that we are working on...

36:44 I-12: So it's more like hoping that you will you join, you know. Maybe not from the first time, but eventually if it's happening every week, you will have this, you know, that you can join something else, you know, yeah.

36:58 Vaida G.: OK. Thank you. Uh, thanks again for sharing so many examples and it really shows you are very passionate about about your work. One of the last topics remaining - respect. And let's look at it in this way. So the statement is when I am feel psychologically

safe in the team, I'm sure that no one will undermine or decrease my efforts. Everyone is basically treated equally.

37:35 Vaida G.: And here again, what do you do to ensure that respect within the team?

37:43 I-12: Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's a... I will... I'll try to be a short on this one. You know, I I am Ukrainian. I am in Ukraine and in the company that I work in, we do have people from a different places. In particular, we do have people from Russia and we do have people from Belarus, and in my team we do have one person from Belarus. And for some people it might be very triggering, basically because of the situation we have. And in the company we have this tolerance policy that we do not discriminate based on your nationality and blah blah blah.

38:22 I-12: And for some people, it's still can be very, you know, provocative. And what I tend to do is to address the elephant in the room right away. This person joined us when the war was already in action. And before this person joined, I said that this person is joining us and this is the important part of it, that the person is from Belarus, and this person's also it's a language, you know, this person speaks Russian and maybe will not understand all of the moments in Ukrainian. And that's OK just for you to understand. Like if you have any questions, let's address them from the beginning.

39:07 I-12: You know, I wouldn't ask this person who is she supporting or something like that. But what I'm trying to like to refer to is to... Maybe try to talk slower in Ukrainian, you know? Maybe try to make sure in the end of conversation that the person did understand everything that you were saying. You know, cause like the language can be a barrier and... I think it's like... So what I'm trying, you know, under different circumstances, I wouldn't address the person's nationality, but in this context it it can trigger a lot of things.

39:47 I-12: You know, just a lot of things and even, you know, when we were on the call, and there was like a siren that, you know, there is like attack something bad and, you know.... And you can say you can be like very emotional in that, you know, you can be on the call and you can be like: "Oh my gosh, those people again, blah, blah, blah." This might be disrespectful to that person, because, like, it's still this person's nationality. We don't know how this person associates with the nation...

40:19 I-12: It's not our business to know, just let's all be mindful, you know? So I like, I would say like I always address this question, just like openly, I never say like: "Ohh my gosh again we hired like another person from this or this country."

40:36 I-12: No, I'm staying super neutral despite my own beliefs and I think this is kind of like leading by example. That if I can be neutral, a lot of people can be neutral, and we can be like neutral, because like you know, understanding like right now, just in this context... Being neutral is being respectful, you know. Because if you are... But not like neutral to the war, but neutral to, you know, like not to offend the other person, you know, because if you're thinking about it then you're mindful and you don't like show disrespect to something like that.

41:10 I-12: So yeah, this is like my example, which I know it's kind of what you asked but more complex, but you get the idea. Also, I had the person with a not traditional orientation in the group, you know. And there was like group of all guys, nine guys and us 2 girls and... I would also be kinda neutral. I would... When I would refer to something like to my family. I also would say like "my partner", you know, I wouldn't say like "my husband". I would keep it neutral, you know, by showing the example like... I'm keeping a neutral, the girl keeping it neutral, and then other people also. It's just like something that you practice.

41:52 I-12: You don't specifically have to talk about it, but just practicing this, even the words... That they are neutral in a conversation also to set you know the the, the room, their environment.

42:05 Vaida G.: OK, I hear you. Thank you so much for sharing such, you know, sensitive and specific examples here and and showing your stance around that. And yeah, we are moving to the end. We also have like 3 minutes left. So just like besides what you told about... Because the last topic is recognition, you mentioned a couple of times that you give kudos. So maybe you can a bit elaborate how you do it – publicly or privately. Like what means do you use and anything else you do. As in the statement... That if I feel psychologically safe, I know that my skills are valued and utilized accordingly a, and I'm an important part of the team, I'm valued.

42:51 I-12: So two things. I provide, like I set the room for everyone to give kudos to everyone at the retrospective. For example, we have this additional column where we just show our gratitude or thanks to someone. And usually people... Cuz I don't know who

interacts with whom, you know, they are working as bees, and usually people share like amazing examples of someone helped them with something.

43:22 I-12: I'm like: "Oh my gosh, this person has that skill." Like it's even like for me, it's like something that is new. And we are also kind of in a way learning about each other. And then... Well, like for me, I I never provide negative feedback on public. I always do it in private. About the recognition – it depends, because sometimes if it's like a group of people that work together on something, I would recognize that they are part of the team. But I would recognize them in front of the whole team. Either it's in chat or on the call cuz they basically show collaboration and... Maybe... It's just depends the case. Maybe I would additionally go to each one and say like: "This is amazing and you did good job."

44:12 I-12: But I think in more like regular approach I would like... If it's part of the group, I would recognize that publicly. If it's one person, uh, it really depends. Umm. On the call, most likely I would. It's it's just like a part of the news, you know, like something we did, something we achieved, blah blah, blah. And then in the end of iteration, during retrospective, I can just highlight a few people that played like enormous role to the result. But I would think about the words that I'm using in order not to offend the rest of us, you know, because like we did all great, but just some people, they went extra mile.

44:56 I-12: Uh, in most of the cases, I would think if it's individual contribution, individual result, I would cover it during 1-2-1. And also what I do is, you know... No person can be perfect 100% every day. So sometimes we do have bad days and sometimes you know that someone is struggling or something like that. And in that case I also would go to the person and recognize the effort, because I think it's important.

45:28 I-12: I would say: "You are doing great job despite the result, you are putting all of the efforts. I see it and I value it. I'm thankful for it." And usually this would, you know, even like motivate person to, you know, to get better. Or another thing is that when someone is not this perfect team player but has like one thing that they do good, I would do...

45:59 I-12: So let's say let's this person that is very vocal in the discussion, so I know he has great characteristics, but being the shy and super respectful is not one of them, because he is pretty loud. So when I would see the situation when he kind of did not 100% of his loudness, but like 50%, I would immediately go to him. I would say like: "I'm amazed how great you handled this situation." You know, even he maybe he didn't do 100%, you know. But he did

like a progress, and he's gonna try next time, because he saw that someone saw it. And if there is a progress there, so even like small things...

46:43 I-12: But I have a plan for each team member of the things that we are kind of working on. You know, just like two or three things. And these are the things that I'm looking more closely. But overall on the job, how well you did in a group or individually... I'd really share it on 1-2-1s.

47:17 Vaida G.: It was really interesting. I could listen to you like hours and hours. I wanted to thank you so much. I will get back to you after my primary analysis of the main findings for you to validate. So I really appreciate it, thank you.

47:46 Vaida G.: I'm really glad that we managed to see each other and talk. It was very, very interesting and I wish you all the best in your career and let's keep in touch then.

47:56 I-12: Thank you and sorry again for me and missing previous calls. Sorry, just went crazy, but I'm I'm really glad to to help you, yyou know, if you need anything just let me know.

48:09 Vaida G.: You shouldn't worry at all. I I myself wasn't sure how long the interview process still will be taking, and I I really appreciate you could make it and I it means a lot. Also, if you would be interested, I could present results around the spring time. When I have summarized everything.

48:39 I-12: Amazing. Thank you. Thank you. OK. And yeah, happy upcoming holidays. Thank you. Bye.