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TARPTAUTINĖS PROJEKTŲ VADYBOS PROGRAMA

Justinas Kulys

MAGISTRO BAIGIAMASIS DARBAS

TVARUMO VADOVŲ LYDERYSTĖS ĮTAKA PROJEKTŲ VALDYMUI – LIETUVOS ĮMONIŲ ATVĖJO TYRIMAS	**EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SUSTAINABILITY MANAGERS LEADERSHIP IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF LITHUANIAN COMPANIES**

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SUMMARY

VILNIUS UNIVERSITY BUSINESS SCHOOL

INTERNATIONAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

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EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SUSTAINABILITY MANAGERS LEADERSHIP IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF LITHUANIAN COMPANIES

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While extensive research has delved into various aspects of sustainable project management in the past, there is still a gap in research on the links between sustainability managers' leadership and project management. This thesis aims to fill this gap. This research delves into the experiences and insights of sustainability managers and their views on the influence of sustainability managers on project management and explores the role of leadership in shaping this dynamic relationship. The problem addressed is the influence of sustainability managers' leadership on project management practices.

The main objective of this study is to understand how sustainability managers leadership influences project management practices by looking at the case of Lithuanian companies. Main tasks: (a) to analyse existing research, relevant articles and statistics; (b) to adapt the research methodology to meet the requirements of this study; (c) to conduct interviews with sustainability managers working in Lithuanian companies and to subsequently analyse the collected data; (d) to present the main findings of the analysis, highlighting the main ways in which sustainability managers' leadership

influences project management practices in Lithuanian companies; and (e) to make recommendations to sustainability managers on how to optimise the influence of their leadership in their organisation's projects.

These objectives are pursued using semi-structured interviews and narrative analysis. For this study, nine interviews were conducted with sustainability managers from Lithuanian or foreign-owned companies operating in the country. The research revealed nine thematic fields, each containing at least one narrative code based on the interviewees' thoughts. The study showed that although sustainability managers do not fundamentally change project management's theoretical and methodological aspects, they significantly impact practices by contributing to project management in organisations and influencing the products and services developed by companies. In this relationship, leadership plays an essential role in enabling the contribution of sustainability managers to project management and strengthening their influence.

SANTRAUKA

VILNIAUS UNIVERSITETO VERSLO MOKYKLA

TARPTAUTINĖS PROJEKTŲ VADYBOS STUDIJŲ PROGRAMA

JUSTINAS KULYS

TVARUMO VADOVŲ LYDERYSTĖS ĮTAKA PROJEKTŲ VALDYMUI – LIETUVOS ĮMONIŲ ATVĖJO TYRIMAS

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Anksčiau, atliekant išsamius tyrimus gilintasi į įvairius darnaus projektų valdymo aspektus, tačiau vis dar išlieka tyrimų spraga, susijusi su ryšiais tarp tvarumo vadovų lyderystės ir projektų valdymo. Šiuo darbu siekiama pildyti šią spragą. Šiame tyrime gilinamasi į tvarumo vadovų patirtį ir įžvalgas, jų požiūrį į tvarumo vadovų įtaką projektų valdymui, taip pat tiriamas lyderystės vaidmuo formuojant šį dinamišką ryšį. Darbe nagrinėjama problema – tvarumo vadovų lyderystės įtaka projektų valdymo praktikoms.

Pagrindinis šio tyrimo tikslas – suprasti, kaip tvarumo vadovų lyderystė daro įtaką projektų valdymo praktikoms, nagrinėjant Lietuvos įmonių atvejį. Pagrindiniai uždaviniai: a) išanalizuoti esamus mokslinius tyrimus, temai aktualius mokslinius straipsnius ir statistiką; b) pritaikyti tyrimo metodiką, kad ji atitiktų šio tyrimo reikalavimus; c) atlikti interviu su Lietuvos įmonėse dirbančiais tvarumo vadovais ir vėliau išanalizuoti surinktus duomenis; d) pateikti pagrindines analizės metu gautas išvadas, pabrėžiant pagrindinius būdus, kuriais tvarumo vadovų lyderystė daro įtaką projektų valdymo praktikoms Lietuvos įmonėse; e) pateikti rekomendacijas tvarumo vadovams, kaip optimizuoti jų lyderystės įtaką jų organizacijų projektams.

Šių tikslų siekiama naudojant pusiau struktūruotų interviu ir naratyvų analizės metodus. Šiam tyrimui atlikti 9 interviu su tvarumo vadovais iš Lietuvos ar šalyje veikiančių užsienio kapitalo įmonių. Tyrimo metu išryškėjo 9 tematiniai laukai, kuriuose buvo bent po vieną naratyvinį kodą, paremta tyrimo pašnekovų mintimis. Tyrimas parodė, kad nors tvarumo vadovai esmingai nekeičia teorinių ir metodologinių projektų vadybos aspektų, tačiau reikšmingai veikia praktikas – patys prisidėdami prie projektų vadybos ciklų, darydami įtaką įmonių kuriamiems produktams ir paslaugoms. Šiame santykyje lyderystė vaidiną svarbų dėmenį įgalinant tvarumo vadovų indelį į projektų vadybą bei stiprinant jų įtaką.

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Introduction

Research novelty and relevance: Oxford Learners Dictionary describes sustainability as "the use of natural products and energy in a way that does not harm the environment" (Oxford Learners Dictionary, 2023). Cambridge Dictionary defines sustainability as "the quality of causing little or no damage to the environment and therefore able to continue for a long time" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). Merriam-Webster dictionary describes sustainability as "of, relating to, or being a method of harvesting or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged" (Merriam-Webster, 2023). The topic of sustainability is so broad that it even has its own "Dictionary of Sustainability", released by Routledge in 2017.

One of the primary reasons why sustainability is increasingly pivotal in our daily lives is the growing concern regarding climate change or the climate crisis. As the Pew Research Centre (Pew Research Centre, 2023) reported, most U.S. adults (54%) view climate change as a significant threat to the country's well-being. Although this percentage has decreased slightly from 2020, it remains higher than the levels observed in the early 2010s. The 2022-2023 European Investment Bank Climate Survey (European Investment Bank, 2023) indicates that 66% of all European respondents endorse stricter government measures to promote changes in personal behaviour related to pollution and other unsustainable practices. According to the global Ipsos survey findings (Ipsos, 2023), 70% of individuals worldwide believe that if everyone were to make minor adjustments in their daily lives, it could yield a substantial impact in addressing climate change. Simultaneously, this survey (Ipsos, 2023) reveals that 59% of the global population concurs that businesses in their respective countries failing to act against climate change promptly would neglect their responsibilities to employees and customers.

A survey conducted in Lithuania revealed that 77% of Lithuanians discuss sustainability and environmental friendliness within their families (Lrytas.lt, 2022). Another survey indicated that 73% of Lithuanians express concern about sustainability and actively strive to lead sustainable lifestyles (Delfi Press Release, 2022). The emphasis on sustainability is notably pronounced among the younger generation. An ISM University of Management and Economics survey encompassing nearly 4,000 students revealed compelling insights. According to the survey (ISM University, 2021),

75% of high school seniors (grades 9 to 12) believed contemporary businesses should prioritize sustainability. Additionally, 48% of respondents indicated that profit should not be the primary objective of present-day organizations, while an equal percentage (48%) asserted that businesses should actively address global challenges. These findings underscore the increasing importance of sustainability topics within society. Businesses, public entities, and institutions must adapt to this societal shift. Many international and local companies are sharing their sustainability strategies and positions. Leading Lithuanian enterprises have come together under the Lithuanian Responsible Business Association, which unites over 30 Lithuanian businesses, state-owned companies, and institutions committed to sharing sustainable business practices. Furthermore, a prominent Lithuanian online news outlet, Delfi, has launched a dedicated news project called "Sustainable Lithuania," focusing exclusively on sustainability issues. These are just a few examples of the growing importance of sustainability in Lithuania.

The push for businesses, public institutions, and other stakeholders in the climate crisis is evident as global perspectives change rapidly. One effective way to steer the business towards sustainability is by integrating specific sustainable goals into the overall business strategy. Having a sustainability plan can benefit businesses in several ways. It can boost brand value and give a competitive edge. It also aligns with customer preferences, improves efficiency, attracts talent, and opens up new opportunities for the future (Rafi, 2021; Chladek, 2017). As a result, there is a growing demand for personnel focusing on sustainability to execute these strategies. Various sustainability-focused roles have emerged within the job market, including Chief Sustainability Officer, Sustainability Manager, Sustainability Projects Manager, and Director of Sustainability. Regardless of their titles and positions within a company's hierarchy (often, Chief/Director roles are among the top management positions), these positions share a joint mandate: analysing the environmental impact of business operations, addressing issues such as carbon footprint, social responsibility, and various other sustainability concerns.

With more and more attention from societies around the globe, sustainable practices are becoming increasingly incorporated by many businesses. Sustainability objectives have a more minor or considerable impact on most business activities, including project management. Realizing sustainability in projects is not just about

environmental concerns. It also involves human rights, fair treatment of workers, social fairness, gender equality, ethical business practices, and various other aspects. These require a range of different skills and knowledge. The issues tackled through sustainable thinking are monumental, and the challenges organizations encounter when integrating sustainability into their operations can be formidable, too: "If you thought that the disruption caused by digital has been far-reaching, just wait to see how companies struggle with transforming their businesses to become truly sustainable." (Nieto-Rodriguez, 2022)

Research problem: The problem that this thesis addresses is the question of the impact of sustainability managers' leadership on project management practices. Extensive research has delved into various aspects of sustainable project management practices, the functions of sustainability managers, and the influence of sustainable leadership on organizations. However, there remains a gap in the research concerning the interplay between sustainability managers' leadership (as a tool of influence) and project management practices. It is important as the study that inspired the idea of this thesis shows that the sustainability officers' support is not highlighted as a belief having a more significant impact on the project manager's intention to address sustainability in the project board. (Silvius and de Graaf, 2018) It raises questions about the impact sustainability managers have on project management. In this case, leadership is included as a factor that might strengthen the influence and show new, not necessarily direct, connections between sustainability managers and project management practices.

Research subject matter: The primary focus of this paper revolves around examining the intricate relationship between sustainability managers and project management practices: it delves into the experiences and insights of sustainability managers, looking into their perspectives on the impact of sustainability managers on project management as well as exploring the influential role of leadership in shaping this dynamic relationship.

Research objective and tasks: Therefore, the primary **objective** of this research is to gain a comprehensive understanding of how the leadership of sustainability managers influences project management practices by looking into the case of Lithuanian companies. Several **key tasks** have been identified: a) Analyse existing research studies, other topic-relevant scientific articles and statistics; b) Adapt

and customise established research methodologies to suit the specific requirements of this study; c) Conduct interviews with sustainability managers employed in Lithuanian companies and subsequently analyse the collected data; d) Present the key findings derived from the analysis, emphasising the principal ways in which the leadership of sustainability managers impacts project management practices within Lithuanian companies; e) Provide recommendations for the sustainability managers to maximise their leadership impact on the projects in their organisations.

Research methodology: The research methodology of this study depends on two main parts: semi-structured interviews and narrative analysis. Nine semi-structured interviews (from the pre-planned 12-question questionnaire, at least seven questions were asked, leaving space for adjustments as the sectors represented by the respondents differ) with the sustainability managers were done. After conducting the interviews, the thematic analysis was used to analyse them, code them, and form them into the overall narrative presented in the research part of the thesis.

Research structure: The thesis will be organised into three main sections to accomplish the primary research objective and tasks. First, the theoretical part will comprehensively explore existing theories and research on leadership, sustainability and project management. This section will delve into the historical evolution of leadership concepts, the distinctions between two fundamental leadership paradigms – transformational and transactional leadership, the role of leadership in project management, sustainable leadership, and the interconnections between sustainability and project management. The second part will focus on the methodology for this research, detailing how the interviewees were selected, how interviews were analysed and how the research results will be presented. The research part will deliver the results and recommendations. It will be written as an overall narrative following the analysis of the conducted interviews at the very end, presenting the recommendations for sustainability managers.

Research difficulties and limitations: The study faced two main challenges. The first challenge was that the large number of enquiries from different higher education institutions in the country made it difficult to convince sustainability managers suitable for the study to participate. Of the requests sent, only 1/3 of the potential interviewees identified at the initial stage agreed to answer the survey

questionnaire. The second challenge was the considerable amount of literature and studies that had to be examined due to the broad scope of the research topic. An essential limitation of the study is the relatively small and still developing demand for sustainability managers in Lithuania. In contrast to the same markets in Western European countries, some Lithuanian companies have small-scale teams working on sustainability. Therefore, the practices discussed in the study may be less advanced than those reported in foreign studies and are subject to possible fast-track change shortly with the sector's development. Setting concrete requirements for the interviewees' selection is difficult in the developing market. From the methodological point of view research is also to some extent is limited as thematic analysis is: "(…) fundamentally an interpretative research approach, relying increasingly on the researcher's subjectivity and personal insight to interpret data for theme development." (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019) In the future research with the same objective could be repeated using quantitative methods.

1. Theoretical Aspects of Leading Sustainability Projects

There are many descriptions of what leadership is. An American professor and one of the leading researchers on leadership, Barbara Kellermann, said: "I heard that there are approximately 1,400 different definitions of the words leader and/or leadership" (Volckmann, 2012). These numbers might be exaggerated but coming from one of the top leadership researchers shows how difficult it is to have an exact definition of leadership. While discussing the concept of leadership, it is helpful to understand how it changed throughout history and the primary and most simple distinctions of leadership types. The historical or philosophical side of leadership developed quite different concepts.

1.1. Historical and Philosophical Leadership Perceptions

The Chinese philosopher Confucius created one of the first philosophical concepts of leadership discussed by many authors. Research (Seow Wah, 2010) found that leadership attributes such as benevolence, sympathy, forgiveness, friendliness, trust, fulfilment, harmony, learning, loyalty, righteousness, and humility are all results of Confucianism and that Confucian leadership is built on a foundation of moral character and exercised through virtuous examples. In modern times, a Confucian leader considers all stakeholders' interests while engaging in corporate management and displays humanistic behaviours toward the stakeholders that align with five Confucian virtues (Chou & Cheng, 2020): benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and fidelity. Research conducted in China, a nation where Confucian philosophy holds significant prominence, concludes that: "The Confucian ideal is that a virtuous leader draws his/her moral authority from the social imperatives to truly nurture the overall moral character and attitudes of organisation members." (Yuan et al., 2023, p. 128).

To the Greek philosopher and "Father of Philosophy" Plato: "Leadership is a duty of philosopher kings who acquire the techniques and skills for the art of ruling" (Lüdert, 2017). Plato's concept of leadership depends on two key pillars: 1) virtue focuses on an agent's character and knowledge more than principles; 2) the worst leaders are those who lack knowledge and use persuasive speech for unjust ends (Bauman, 2018, p. 252). The moral psychology of leaders is time-resistant and does not

change massively: "Plato's ancient model offers modern business leaders a framework for becoming virtuous leaders who can create just organisations." (Bauman, 2018, p. 271) In the current times, Plato's ideas about leadership can be adapted to the change management in the organisation: "Under the Platonic worldview, the psychological analysis of all participants to change can be applied for the appropriate selection of their motivation." (Georgiadis et al., 2021, p. 163).

Another Greek philosopher, a student of Plato, Aristotle's books' key concepts about leadership included experience, sound decision-making, humility, friendship, happiness, and being calm (Nelson, 2015, p. 1). Philosopher highlights that what makes leadership better is working for the led and not the other way around (Stern, 2021, p. 59). According to Michael Nelson, Aristotle's idea of leadership is important in times of stress situation: "During stressful situations, seeking ways to stay calm and to find a resolution or answer to a problem is critical. Followers would rather work for an individual who is calm and composed instead of angry all the time." (Nelson, 2015, p. 3) Notably, among the students of Aristotle, one stood out as an illustrious figure in the annals of history: Alexander the Great, the ancient Greek monarch renowned as one of the most formidable leaders of all time.

Niccolo Machiavelli, an Italian philosopher and one of the earliest political scientists, formulated one of the most renowned leadership philosophies. 'Machiavellian leader' has become synonymous with a particular leadership style. According to Christopher Cosans and Christopher Reina: "Machiavellianism generally exhibits three interrelated values that drive behaviour: 1) an openness to using manipulation to bring about desired results, 2) a distrustful view of others, and 3) prioritizing results above morality (i.e., the ends justify the means thinking)." (Cosans and Reina, 2018, p. 266-267). While some of Niccolo Machiavelli's leadership insights may appear severe, it is crucial to acknowledge that he was contemplating how one could govern in the perilous circumstances of Renaissance-era Italy. (Cosans and Reina, 2018, 296). Nevertheless, his theories are alive nowadays, too. Even in current times, some studies, like one conducted in 2022 (Genau et al., 2022), found empirical evidence that Machiavellians tend to be successful transformational leaders if they also have excellent political skills.

In the 19th century, historian Thomas Carlyle and others developed The Great Man Theory, which put forth the idea that the world's history is nothing more than a collection of biographies belonging to great men. Great man theories assume leadership capacity is inherent – those great leaders are born, not made. The term "Great Man" was employed because, during that era, leadership was predominantly associated with masculinity, particularly in the context of military leadership (Malos, 2012, p. 414). According to David Carl Wilson, one of the paradoxes of Th. Carlyle's leadership theory is that his ideas come from a series of lectures where the words leadership and leaders are barely mentioned, and it is focused on "what man has accomplished in this world." (Wilson, 2018, p. 373). According to D.C. Wilson, Th. Carlyle's main idea why we should focus on The Great Man is inspiration: "By understanding their thoughts, we understand the history of the world, so that we too may be inspired to greatness." (Wilson, 2018, p. 373). Not all thinkers agree with this theory. For example, Russian writer Leo Tolstoy argues that the illusion of the great leader's pervasive influence persists because it is built into the narratives we tell about events they participated in (Mouton, 2019).

Following World War II, the leadership theory transformed, shifting from the notion that leadership was solely an inherent personal trait to an understanding that it encompassed a process of influencing others. A compelling post-World War II illustration of this shift can be observed in the case of Winston Churchill. Despite being regarded as a vital leader during the war, Churchill faced electoral defeat just three months after the war's conclusion. The British populace perceived him as unsuitable for overseeing the country's post-war reconstruction. (Silva, 2016, p. 3).

One of the leading scientists in this field, Ralph Stogdill, defined leadership as: "(…) the process (act) of influencing the activities of an organised group in its efforts toward goal setting and goal achievement" (Stogdill, 1950, p. 4). According to him, the minimal social conditions which permit the existence of leadership are a group (of two or more persons), a joint task (or goal-oriented activities) and differentiation of responsibility (some of the members have different duties) (Stogdill, 1950, p. 4). This expands leadership beyond one person. According to R. Stogdill, leadership is 1) not a static quality but something likely to build or improve over time; 2) something that influences or motivates the team members or the ones who are led; 3) does not mean setting the objectives for the members only, but also chalking out the strategy or plan

to achieve them (Malik & Azmat, 2019, pp. 21-22). As per R. Stogdill, a leader typically surpasses the average group member regarding intelligence, scholarly attainment, dependability in fulfilling responsibilities, activity level, social engagement, and socio-economic status. Furthermore, it is noted that the qualities, characteristics, and skills essential for leadership are often contingent on the specific situation at hand. (Stogdill, 1947, 63).

According to another leading leadership researcher, John Kotter: "Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles." (Kotter, 1996, cited from Bruçaj, 2019, p. 17) He defined leadership as: "the process of moving a group (or groups) in some direction through mostly non-coercive means" (Kotter, 1988, cited from Silva, 2016, p. 2). J. Kotter differed leadership from management. He said, "Leadership and management are two distinctive and complementary systems of action" (Kotter, 2000, p. 3). This distinction is essential, having in mind the topic of research. For Kotter, management is about coping with complexity; leadership, by contrast, is about dealing with change (Kotter, 2000, p. 4). According to J. Kotter, there are critical differences concerning people: "Management controls people by pushing them in the right direction; leadership motivates them by satisfying basic human needs" (Kotter, 2000, p. 7). He says that the vital distinction between leadership and management is between attributes and behaviour, as management focuses on delivering high-quality products or services on time and budget, and leadership focuses on vision, empowerment and producing beneficial change (Kotter, 2013). J. Kotter also highlights the need for flexibility and the need to be transformational as a leader: "Of course, you did need to change over time, you could not just sell the same things in the same ways forever." (Kotter & von Ameln, 2020)

To B. Kellerman, leadership is: "(…) an equilateral triangle in which no single side is more important than the other two. One side is the leader, the other side are the followers, and the third side is context." (Volckmann, 2012). B. Kellermann reminds of N. Machiavelli and argues that leadership can be non-coercive. Citing Leo Strauss's experience, she said: "(…) our leadership experts seem to have forgotten capricious, murderous, high-handed, corrupt, and evil leaders are effective and everywhere - except in the literature of business leadership." (Kellerman, 2004). She continues her argument: "Some leaders achieve great things by capitalising on the dark sides of their

souls" (Kellerman, 2004). B. Kellermann also sees leadership as an industry: "(…) what happened is that people started to believe that leadership could really be taught to large numbers of people simultaneously. To feed this urge to learn how to lead and learn how to manage, you ended up having a growth industry, consisting in part of thousands of so-called leadership experts." (Volckmann, 2012). She is somewhat critical of the leadership industry, saying that all of its activities have not translated into leadership betterment, at least not on a sufficient scale and if the leadership industry wants to succeed, it has to reimagine the leadership concept by broadening the conception of how change is created (Kellerman, 2016, p. 93). Talking about leadership in modern times, B. Kellermann argues that leadership standards declined in both – public and private – sectors. According to her, in some recent cases, business and political leaders have been operating with virtually no standards, at least not as clearly defined. She claims that leaders need knowledge to lead: "Clearly, leaders in government and business should be required to provide some evidence that they have been educated to lead or trained to lead or developed as leaders." (Kellerman, 2019, p. 29). Nevertheless, some academics argue that in their research, indications prove that leadership training has a positive impact and might be worthwhile (Jacobsen et al., 2021, p. 128).

1.2. Transformative, transactional, and adaptive leadership

One of the vital theoretical distinctions we must understand while researching leadership is the difference between transformational and transactional leadership. This basic concept divides leaders into two different categories. James Burns studied this concept in his research on political leaders: "Burns distinguished between ordinary (transactional) leaders, who exchanged tangible rewards for the work and loyalty of followers, and extraordinary (transformational) leaders who engaged with followers" (Burns, 1978 cited from Hay, 2006, p. 2). According to Bernard M. Bass: "transformational leaders uplift the morale, motivation, and morals of their followers, transactional leaders cater to their followers' immediate self-interests." (Bass, 1999, p. 9).

According to a leading researcher in this field, Bernard Bass, transformational leadership refers to the leader moving the follower beyond immediate self-interests through idealized influence (charisma), inspiration, intellectual stimulation, or individualized consideration (Bass, 1999, p. 11). According to him, transformational

leadership encourages the altruistic side of the followers: "It elevates the follower's level of maturity and ideals as well as concerns for achievement, self-actualization, and the well-being of others, the organization, and society." (Bass, 1999, p. 11) Bass says that transformational leaders bring higher levels of commitment and performance than transactional leaders, as transformational leaders ask followers to look beyond their self-interests and focus on the big picture (Weese, 1994, p. 180).

Looking at the organisational culture, Bass and Bruce Avolio argue that in a transformational culture, there is generally a sense of purpose and a feeling of family (Bass & Avolio, 1993, p. 116). They also say that in transformational working culture, company superiors serve as mentors, integrating members into the culture, not because they are expected to do so but because they see it as their obligation (Bass & Avolio, 1993, p. 118). A transformational leadership mindset encourages organisations to innovate by involving all stakeholders (Asbari, 2020, p. 52). Transformational leadership culture is essential for scientific teams: "By engaging in team-centred transformational leadership behaviours including emphasising group identity, communicating group visions, and encouraging team building, scientific team leaders can enhance innovation and learning" (Asbari, 2020, p. 52).

It is also worth mentioning that there is a connection between transformational leadership and the culture of the country in which it is implemented, as it is observed that the effectiveness of transformational leadership is influenced by both cultural congruency and cultural difference mechanisms (Crede et al., 2019, p. 151). Research conducted in 34 countries showed that cultural values and practices moderate the transformational leadership and employee performance relationship. The relationship is much more robust in countries whose culture is incompatible with transformational leadership. The findings of this research suggest that the value of transformational leadership behaviours may be limited in developed economies such as Western Europe and North America. In contrast, transformational leadership is most effective in Africa, the Middle East, South America, and Southeast Asia (Crede et al., 2019). It is also thought that transformational leadership supports successful projects in Australia and Europe, while transactional leadership only supports projects in Africa (Damayanti et al., 2019). For the Asian region, one prominent leadership type supporting project success cannot be found. However, the style of leadership that could have a potentially high impact on project success in the Asian region is transformational leadership

(Damayanti et al., 2019, p. 372). Researchers also argue that transformational leaders are more effective in developed countries with innovative features because of their charismatic and simulative characteristics than in group-oriented and depressed cultures (Poturak et al., 2020). For example, a study conducted in Indonesia shows that transformational leadership significantly affects job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and teachers' work performance (Andriani et al., 2018). These findings were confirmed a few years later by another study of transformational leadership in Indonesian schools, showing that this kind of leadership positively impacts teachers' performance and self-efficacy (Muliati et al., 2022).

It is worth mentioning that transformative leadership can work not only with high-level leaders who work with the organisation on the strategic level. Results of research conducted in hospitals suggest that lower-level transformational leaders can influence organisation members' performance by enhancing their work engagement through day-to-day interaction. Lower-level transformational leaders, who have more daily contact with their colleagues, might have more opportunities to promote the organisation's vision and collective goals with their subordinates and offer emotional support when members feel frustrated or help them overcome complex tasks with new solutions right away (Lai et al., 2020). Research also shows that followers can be more productive, better use their strengths and take more personal initiative under transformative leadership: "When leaders are idealised, show individual consideration, and/or are motivating and intellectually stimulating, they inspire their followers to use their strengths and take personal initiative. This helps followers perform well because they are able to mobilise the energy and enthusiasm to remain focused." (Bakker et al., 2022, p. 8)

However, another researcher argues that transformational leadership cannot considerably impact work performance when it is intervened by organisational commitment and cannot directly impact work performance (Eliyana et al., 2019). Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the research was conducted just in one company. Also, there are arguments that transformational leaders fit the American Psychiatric Association classification for narcissistic personality disorder. Real transformational leaders lead by their healthy amount of self-confidence and a willingness to take measured risks. However, some might prove to be "pseudo-transformational", leading organisations by taking outsized risks, exploiting others,

overclaiming credit for success, blaming others for failure and taking unnecessary risks (Chatman & O'Reilly, 2020). To mediate this risk, certain practices should be in place: "These centres on getting regular input from others, especially subordinates, and holding narcissistic leaders accountable for their behaviour." (Chatman & O'Reilly, 2020, p. 19). There are arguments that: "there is virtually no evidence for transformational leadership causing organisational effectiveness if effectiveness is defined as goal attainment and measured objectively." (Andersen, 2015, p. 772) The theoretical assumption of this type of leadership is also criticised for not paying enough attention to the tasks, as "(…) there is no management unless there are tasks to solve." (Andersen, 2015, p. 773)

Returning to B. M. Bass, transactional leadership relations could be defined as: "followers agreed with, accepted, or complied with the leader in exchange for praise, rewards, and resources or the avoidance of disciplinary action" (Bass et al., 2003, p. 208). He also highlighted that transactional leaders clarify expectations and offer recognition when achieving goals, which can contribute to higher performance and effort (Bass et al., 2003, p. 209). According to another influential researcher in this field, B. Avolio, transactional leadership is "largely based on the exchange of rewards contingent on performance" (Avolio et al., 2009, p. 427). Also, he argues that allocentrics were found to react more positively to transformational leaders, whereas idiocentrics reacted more positively to transactional leaders (Avolio et al., 2009, p. 439). As Natalie Kahn illustrates, transactional leadership is: "It is commonly used in education in the relationship between instructors and students. Students are required to complete projects, assignments, or tests, and if they perform well, they will be awarded good marks or the ability to pass" (Khan, 2017, p. 179). Results of research conducted in Pakistan show that the transactional leadership style affects employee performance in a positive manner more than the transformational leadership style. However, the transformational leadership style also positively affects employee performance (Kalsoom et al., 2018).

However, other research in Denmark suggests that transformational leadership and one component of transactional leadership, namely verbal rewards, are positively associated with innovative behaviour (Hansen & Pihl-Thingvad, 2019). Researchers argue that: "Verbal rewards may be used as a signal that employees are working towards achieving the vision. Conversely, the absence of verbal rewards may leave

employees frustrated and with fear of taking risks, thereby reducing their innovative behaviours." (Hansen and Pihl-Thingvad, 2019, p. 935). The research of non-profit organisations in Italy argues that the positive impact of transformational leadership on work engagement, affective commitment, and organisational citizenship behaviour is stronger than the positive impact of transactional leadership. The results imply that transformational leadership in the non-profit organisations' context in Italy better predicts employees' attitudes and behaviours. It also warns that, because of their management practices, transactional leaders may limit employees' development and personal growth as it is more complicated for them to trigger positive attitudes and behaviour in their team members (Aboramadan & Kundi, 2020).

Research also shows no considerable animosity between the two leadership types, as training leaders in the combined use of transformational and transactional leadership has the most significant positive effects on employee-perceived leadership behaviour (Jacobsen et al., 2021, p. 117). This research on leader training also found more connections between these two leadership types, as results showed that transactional leadership training is associated with increased transformational leadership. It also showed that transformational leadership decreases among leaders who receive transactional treatment (Jacobsen et al., 2021, p. 123). Criticism of transactional leadership practices also emerges within the context of studying followership. Research conducted in China showed that transformational leadership is positively correlated with transformational followership and transactional followership and that transactional leadership is negatively correlated with transactional followership (Li et al., 2020). As they found that leadership style influences followers, there is no correlation in vice-a-versa situations: "(…) followership has little effect on leadership. Thus, the traditional way of promoting people based on their followership style and competence may be invalid. When one is promoted to a higher position in the organizational hierarchy, his or her leadership style is less likely been predicted by followership." (Li et al., 2020, p. 641).

Adaptive leadership is also an important concept that must be addressed, as it is seen as a more modern and well-developed version of transformative leadership. As the name of this theory implies, adaptive leadership is focused on how leaders encourage their teams and their organisations to adapt to new realities and new trends by facing the existing challenges, problems and opportunities and dealing with them: "Adaptive

leadership focuses on the adaptations required of people in response to changing environments" (Northouse, 2019, p. 392). There is a key distinction between the challenges leaders face in this field. Only by understanding the challenge can a leader intervene. The technical problems have a clear definition and solution (if the management are experts or at least have experience in the field managed), and the leader's focus is on the authority. Technical and adaptive problems have a clear definition, solution finding requires learning, and leaders must focus on both their authority and stakeholders. An adaptive challenge is when defining and solving a problem requires learning, and the leader is focused on stakeholders. This is important as understanding and defining the challenge is vital to a successful adaptive leader if he or she wants to intervene in addressing a problem or challenge. As leading theoretics of this discipline, Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky described it: "Keep your hand on the thermostat. If the heat is too low, people will not make difficult decisions. If it is too high, they might panic." (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Adaptive leadership focuses less on the leader's personality and traits. It portrays the leader as a collaborative team player who assists others in dealing with a change. His or her role is more of a facilitator rather than a directive manager: "An adaptive leader challenges others to face difficult challenges, providing them with space or opportunity they need to learn new ways of dealing with inevitable changes in beliefs, attitudes, perceptions and behaviours that they are likely to encounter in addressing real problems." (Northouse, 2019, 392) Adaptive leadership focuses on more shared leadership, gaining all the possible knowledge from different stakeholders inside the organisation's ranks despite their position in a formal hierarchy. In this model, every person who works for the organisation can be utilised as a leader in addressing a specific problem or challenge: "An executive team on its own cannot find the best solutions. But leadership can generate more leadership deep in the organisation." (Heifetz et al., 2009)

In this model, leadership shifts from a standard leader-follower relationship towards: "(…) a dynamic leadership development and evolutionary process where individuals co-construct their identities as leaders and followers via distinct patterns of social interaction. Through this leader–follower identity construction process, individuals co-construct leading–following relationships, and these relationships become the basis for the emergence of group-level leadership structures (centralized,

distributed, shared, void). Although these leadership structures can be stable over time, they can also be quite dynamic as the pattern of leading–following interactions in a group changes." (DeRue, 2011) Research showed that adaptive leadership, with its focus on collaborative problem-solving utilizing multiple perspectives, can make a massive impact in large organizations faced with solving complex problems involving many stakeholders: "Moving away from the adjectival descriptors, behaviours, and situational contexts within which leaders have to operate, adaptive leadership provides an alternative approach that focuses on diagnosing the complex issues and collaboratively exploring the technical and adaptive elements embedded in the problems in order to construct an appropriate response." (Nelson and Squires, 2017)

Researchers says that there are five fundamental principles, that defines what adaptive leadership is, when used in the time of crisis: 1) ensure evidence-based learning and adaptation (teams and organisations need to constantly assess their actions, analyse them and change accordingly and constantly) ; 2) stress-test underlying theories, assumptions, and beliefs (focusing on the possible future scenarios); 3) streamline deliberative decision making (decision makers at different levels need to be clear about what they are basing their assumptions and hypotheses on and be clear in explaining it to the interested stakeholders); 4) strengthen transparency, inclusion, and accountability (leaders must admit that mistakes can be made and should lead with transparency, maintaining a mutual trust with stakeholders and showing accountability); 5) mobilise collective action (coordination, partnerships, dialogues – all the possible streams of communication can help to build a better understanding and mutual trust) (Ramalingam, 2020) Yet, adaptive leaders should keep in mind three important things: 1) they must motivate teams and followers, focusing on the task at hand while monitoring the levels of stress within the team and of each team member; 2) adaptive leaders should not be afraid to transfer ownership to followers as they become more capable, recognising challenges when to step back. 3) an adaptive leader should listen selectively to balance the collective views of the group (Doyle, 2017)

A behavioural perspective is also essential when defining what an adaptive leader is. According to P.J. Northouse, there are six main behaviours for an adaptive leader: 1) getting on the balcony (stepping off the fray and finding perspective during challenging situations); 2) identifying adaptive challenges (leader must differ adaptive challenges from technical ones, analyse and address these complex problems); 3)

regulating distress (adaptive leader needs to monitor the stress people are expecting and experiencing and keep it within a productive range or regulate); 4) maintaining disciplined attention (the leader needs to encourage people to focus on the challenging work they need to do); 5) giving the work back to the people (leaders need to curtail their influence and shift problem solving back to the people involved); 6) protecting leaderships voices from below (adaptive leaders have to be careful to listen, and be open to the ideas of people who might be at the fringe, marginalised, or even deviant at the organisation) (Northouse, 2019).

1.3. Leadership and Project Management

As mentioned by a few leading leadership researchers, one of the things that connects leadership with management is that despite the differences, both doctrines are aimed towards success. As J. Kotter said: "We need superb management. And we need more superb leadership. We need to be able to make our complex organizations reliable and efficient. We need them to jump into the future – the right future – at an accelerated pace, no matter the size of the changes required to make that happen." (Kotter, 2013)

Leadership is undoubtedly an essential trait for project management – rarely does a project depend on one person only. The project manager should be able to motivate, inspire, and convince those around him or her of the need for successful project implementation. There are a lot of different project leadership styles, yet a few of the most popular styles are bureaucratic (the bureaucratic project manager leads with a set of pre-determined set of procedures and strict rules), laissez-faire (the laissez-faire project manager does not demand any policies or procedures and allows team members to work on their own), democratic (the democratic project leaders are transformational leaders who value the team member's ideas and most of the time look for their input in decision-making), autocratic (the autocratic project leaders are often well-organized and controlling transactional leaders who take on full responsibility for the project), coaching (the coaching project leader helps the team to work together, establishes goals, and assesses results while also focusing on improving everything: his/her leadership, every team member skills, project management practices etc.), and strategic (the strategic project leader has the ability stay ahead of the curve by anticipating change and motivates an entire company to adapt to it). (Cunningham, 2015)

Other research also includes other project management leadership styles as coercive leadership (project manager centralizes all decisions, regulations, measures, and policies), affiliative leadership (project manager tries to create a harmonious atmosphere and build an emotional bond with his/her subordinates), pace-setting leadership (project manager demands perfection from his/her subordinates, sets high standards and provides examples to subordinates) (Thoha & Avandana, 2020); others focus on the already described transformational and transactional leadership styles (Holzmann & Mazzini, 2020) Research shows that industry has an impact on preferred project manager leadership style. For example, research conducted on three different industries workers in the United States showed that the healthcare industry preferred strategic and coaching best, the finance industry preferred strategic and democratic, and pharmaceuticals preferred strategic, coaching, and democratic styles almost equally, one style – bureaucratic leadership – was proven to be the least preferred style across all three industries (Cunningham, 2015)

In academia, there are many debates about whether leadership impacts the success of a project. For example, the research showed that trust and knowledge sharing are crucial for the success of an IT project. The same research conducted in Indonesia also showed that different leadership styles employed by the project manager can impact the project's success. In this research, it was found that the affiliative leadership style and democratic leadership style had positive effects on the project management team's performance. In contrast, the pace-setting leadership style negatively affected the project management team's performance (Thoha & Avandana, 2020). Other studies also show that different leadership attributes contribute to the project's success by increasing trust and knowledge sharing (Imam & Zaheer, 2021). In this research, authors indicate that sharing leadership among team members is significantly related to cohesion in IT teams. Other research results showed that emotional intelligence has a direct positive impact on the success of projects, project managers' competencies have a direct impact on project success, and project managers' transformational leadership behaviour has a direct positive impact on project success (Maqbool et al., 2017). According to the authors, these results remind us that: "(…) success of a project is not just all about state-of-the-art equipment or the latest inventions, but it is also about people and their behaviours as well as competencies, which are the main driving forces behind success." (Maqbool et al., 2017, p. 63)

Different soft skills (this time including leadership) can also significantly contribute to project success factors and hence project success (Zuo et al., 2018). Different theoretics talk about different leadership traits that positively impact project success, with some of them being managing resources, self-awareness, critical analysis, sensitivity, and teamwork (Zuo et al., 2018, p. 437). The research conducted in Poland showed positive empirical results on the influence of project managers' leadership competencies and their emotional and managerial skills on project success (Podgorska & Pidlach, 2019). They also conclude that: "(…) it is also important to raise awareness of senior managers (to whom project managers are directly subject) in the context of the identified relationship between project managers' leadership and the project success" (Podgorska & Pidlach, 2019, p. 882). It is worth mentioning that other soft skills like team building, motivation, communication, influencing, decision-making, political and cultural awareness, negotiation, trust building, and conflict management also contribute to project implementation success (Zuo et al., 2018).

Humble leadership (when leaders clearly understand their strengths and weaknesses) is also positively both directly and indirectly related to project success (Ali et al., 2021). Researchers argue that in the building sector, humble leadership should be encouraged. As a result, it will: "(…) produce a working project climate encouraging team-building practices like project goal setting, role clarification, interpersonal relations, and problem-solving techniques" (Ali et al., 2021, p. 557). Research on inclusive leadership practices showed that inclusive leadership could enhance project success through psychological empowerment and safety (Khan et al., 2020). This approach could include several practical practices of inclusive leadership: "First, it is important to train project managers to cultivate a culture of respect to each employee, while second is to appreciate the contribution of employees, and third is to listen attentively to issues brought up by employees. Besides, if employees do mistakes, the approach of project managers should be forward-looking instead of evaluating only the past performance." (Khan et al., 2020, p. 1087)

Adaptivity and continuous learning are keys to every person who wants to be a successful project manager. Successful project managers may not be effective leaders, but project managers can develop leadership skills to become effective leaders (Kumar, 2009). According to Victoria Kumar, the key thing connecting the concepts of project management and leadership is performance results: "The common aspect of project

management and leadership is the yardstick by which the performance of both the project manager and the leader is measured. The performance of a project manager and the effectiveness of a leader are both measured in terms of the performance of the followers—the performance of the team." (Kumar, 2009). In modern times, managers and executives must be able and willing to adapt to an ever-faster changing business environment and continually review managing practices to be successful leaders (Klus & Müller, 2020).

It is imperative to have in mind the innovations that come with the more global and virtual world: "For managing virtual teams and structuring new processes in both physical and virtual workspaces, our research advises that it is not sufficient to have proper communication and organisational skills alone, but that executives also need to be able to motivate employees to implement changes and innovations." (Klus and Müller, 2020, p. 26) Research (Henkel et al., 2019) also shows that the situational leadership approach (adapting leadership styles to challenges that occur) is better for successful project completion than a one-type leadership approach. Successful project leaders must be flexible because no single leadership model is appropriate throughout the project's duration (Nixon et al., 2012). Adapting to different situations is also illustrated by the fact that even if the project manager's leadership is an important factor for the project's success, depending on the type of the project, its success is influenced by other competencies too (Podgorska & Pidlach, 2019). Also, it is worth mentioning that top management support could add to project managers' leadership and positively impact project success (Ali et al., 2021).

However, some studies show that leadership or certain practices and project success have a low direct correlation. Some researchers (Damayanti et al., 2019) explain that: "This situation happens because contextual factors of project type and the country of project location influence the role and style of leadership in the success of the project." However, this research also concludes that transformational leaders with managerial and emotional intelligence support project success in construction projects. Therefore, emotional intelligence is the main attribute that could contribute to the project's success in non-construction projects. So, even if the correlation between project manager leadership practices and project success is not substantial, it still exists. (Damayanti et al., 2019)

1.4. Sustainable Leadership

With the growing sustainability research scope, the idea of sustainable leadership also emerged. It grew so big that some universities, including world-leading institutions like Cambridge, Harvard, Oxford, and others, have programmes or separate institutes focused on the topic. According to the Ben Laker commentary for the leading worldwide business outlet Forbes, there are six main ways to be a sustainable leader: 1) set goals and measure the progress – sustainability-focused agenda needs planning too; 2) be flexible and experiment with your sustainability goals – there is no one-size-fits-all solution; 3) make sustainability a part of your brand; 4) communicate your efforts both to the internal and external stakeholders; 5) lead by example and inspire others for change; 6) continuously strive to improve your sustainability practices over time (Laker, 2022). Leadership in project management can also be important in breaking two key myths about sustainability goals, them being: 1) green and sustainability involve a zero-sum trade-off with growth (in reality, many projects associated with sustainability save money, even in the short term); 2) green and sustainability results can be achieved without significant changes, investments, or resources (while in fact, changing the roots of how an organization operates, produces, and sells requires a significant shift in resource allocation) (Nieto-Rodriguez, 2022)

Seven universal sustainable leadership principles that apply to both public and private sector organizations seeking sustainable development or the transformation into a sustainable organization can be distinguished: 1) sustainable leadership creates and preserves the long-term sustainable activities of an organization; 2) sustainable leadership promotes long-term progress; 3) sustainable leadership strengthens the management of others and develops new leaders; 4) sustainable leadership is socially just; 5) sustainable leadership encourages the development of human and material resources and does not just waste them; 6) sustainable leadership encourages the creation of a diverse environment and develops skills of community members; 7) sustainable leadership actively impacts the environment where the organization is located (Streimikienė et al., 2019, p. 155). Eight critical features of a sustainable leader, willing to incorporate the described principles into his or her daily work, can also be distinguished. As per the research conducted by Lithuanian scientists, the essential attributes of a sustainable leader are sincerity, determination, focus, personal

involvement, cooperation with people, communication, desire to achieve objectives and improvement (Streimikienė et al., 2019, p. 164).

The researchers further delved into the behavioural aspect of sustainable leadership, examining the essential competencies and behaviours that follow from it. According to the research, sustainable leaders have a few essential behaviours, including developing expertise, impressing people, establishing rapport, valuing individuals, generating ideas, challenging ideas, conveying self-confidence, etc. (Knight, 2015). Some of the mentioned behaviours can look universal and be found in the already discussed leadership styles. However, some like impressing people and establishing rapport, showing how important it is for sustainable leaders to reach their followers, as the challenges addressed by the sustainable mindset are overreaching. As one of the participants of the previously described research commented: "Most people do not even want to think about the global challenges we face, because it is too frightening. I believe we need to frame these issues differently, to give people hope and empowerment." (Knight, 2015, p. 12)

Researchers argue that one of the key things for sustainable leadership is that businesses and other institutions should shift emphasis from a traditional singular focus on finances to a view that organisations are contributors to broader environmental and social influences, paying closer attention to things like relationships between leaders and followers, need to develop reflexive and participative leadership models and other (Gerard et al., 2017). In this case, sustainable leadership is also closely interconnected with the training of leaders and followers as well as company culture as a whole: "If there is not a culture of development and conservation within an organisation, then the underpinnings of sustainable leadership are crucially missing." (Gerard et al., 2017, p. 123) Therefore, the authors also highlight that the definition of sustainable leadership is highly dependable on the context and the environment, as it might require different skills or traits: "(…) context must play a pivotal role in how an organisation can operationalise the concept (…)." (Gerard et al., 2017, p. 123)

Some scientists argue that sustainable corporate leadership should prioritize the concerns of sustainable development over its interests and objectives while striving to meet the expectations of all stakeholders equally (Tien et al., 2019). This is a challenge for developing countries: "This is a great challenge for sustainable business leaders in

developing countries who used to think locally instead of globally as they do not have adequate experiences and exposures to act consistently and in line with changing global sustainability issues." (Thao et al., 2019, cited from Tien et al., 2019, p. 701) However, research in Vietnam, one of the fastest-growing Asian economies, showed that these ideas are becoming more and more important not only in developed economies but also in developing countries. As the study authors added: "Organizations that want to survive in the market and achieve strong corporate financial performance in a long run must adopt strategy embracing economic, social, and ecological dimension in a sustainable way." (Tien et al., 2019, p. 703).

One of the leading theoreticians on sustainable leadership, Andy Hargreaves, together with Dan Fink, developed seven principles of sustainable leadership, focusing on the education sector. According to them, sustainable leadership: 1) creates and preserves sustaining learning; 2) secures success over time; 3) sustains the leadership of others; 4) addresses issues of social justice; 5) develops rather than depletes human and material resources; 6) develops environmental diversity and capacity; 7) undertakes activist engagement with the environment (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003). They added why sustainable leadership matters: "Most leaders want to do things that matter, to inspire others to do it with them and to leave a legacy once they have gone." (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003, p. 10). Higher education institutions are critical drivers of change in addressing sustainability issues. They play a pivotal role in imparting knowledge to younger generations, often serving as their first destination after high school. Research on them in Pakistan and China examined how sustainable leadership can assist higher education institutions in reaching a highly sustainable performance. Researchers found out that 1) sustainable leadership significantly influences social innovation in educational institutions; 2) social innovation has a significant impact on the sustainable performance of higher education institutions as well, and it partially mediates the relationship between sustainable leadership and sustainable performance (Iqbal & Piwowar-Sulej, 2021).

The Dutch scientific team has formulated a comprehensive theoretical framework known as the 6C model, representing sustainable leadership's fundamental components. These six dimensions of sustainable leadership are interconnected with established or emerging business concepts. The critical components of sustainable leadership are categorised alongside prevalent business principles as follows: 1) context

(recognising interdependence, complexity, ambiguity and other constraints, etc); 2) consciousness (mindsets, beliefs, world views, etc); 3) continuity (long-term horizon, change process, etc); 4) connectedness (serving needs of all stakeholders; both long and short term influencing; fairness; trust, etc.); 5) creativity (innovation for sustainable shared value creation and new value measurement models, etc.); 6) collectiveness (scale up for collective impact, etc.) (Tideman et al., 2013, p. 25).

Simultaneously, the team undertook a comparative analysis of the sustainable and transformational leadership models introduced by B. Bass, as previously outlined in this thesis. According to the research team, Bass's definition aligns with four of the 6Cs, with context and collectiveness not explicitly addressed. Nonetheless, the researchers argue that sustainable leadership provides contemporary leaders with a more comprehensive framework, both in terms of its scope and depth (Tideman et al., 2013). They also sum up that sustainable leadership recognizes the disruptive and transformational changes that occur in business and society today, not the current status quo of both – business and society. Because of it, sustainable leadership is focused on changing: "From this it follows that future leaders will need to take up practices through which they can discover and adjust new mind-sets, beliefs and attitudes and develop the relevant skill set for the unprecedented transformational sustainability journey ahead." (Tideman et al., 2013, p. 30).

The capacity for change, which encompasses embracing digital transformation, is a pivotal factor in sustainability. The study on connections between digitalisation and sustainability showed that digital transformation is a driver and a forerunner of sustainability, arguing that it is why companies require enhancing their digital capabilities and weighing their economic, environmental, and social impacts to endure the digital revolution, meet markets' expectations and build intelligent and inclusive societies (Gomez-Trujillo & Gonzalez-Perez, 2022). In these processes, leadership also plays a pivotal role as: "(…) through digital transformation and automation companies can find new business opportunities that will create responsible business leadership." (Salminen et al., 2017 cited from Gomez-Trujillo and Gonzalez-Perez, 2022, p. 20) It is important as the research shows that sustainability-driven digitalisation greatly impacts the economic performance of organisations and countries.

A study comparing European Union countries has indicated a positive correlation between higher levels of digitalisation and various aspects of economic development, including increased competitiveness, innovation, and entrepreneurial activities. Furthermore, countries with higher digitalisation also tend to exhibit higher GDP. Significantly, not just economic development benefits from digitalisation, but also the social dimension experiences positive effects. More importantly for this thesis, it was proven that digitalisation significantly correlates with the sustainable development components (Jovanović et al., 2018). However, the difficulties posed by the climate crisis are so complex that even digitalisation itself is starting to become a challenge as it is counted that the IT industry has a carbon footprint the same size as the entire airline industry. (Griffin, 2019)

These and many other already described principles, competencies, and traits can be important for project managers who seek to be successful, sustainable leaders. While finishing this sub-topic, it is also worth noting that project managers who consider themselves sustainable leaders should encourage people to have an open mind and challenge the way organisations work: "Following the principle of transparency and accountability, leaders of sustainable projects communicate proactively and openly about the project and its social and environmental impact." (Nieto-Rodriguez, 2022)

1.5. Sustainability and Project Management

Inevitably, project management must adapt to the newest trends and tendencies in the world, reaching for more sustainability. Project managers and their project management knowledge might be crucial in reaching sustainability goals. In this ambiguous landscape with certain limitations like a few sustainability experts (it might become a bottleneck in the future), keeping the right business financial gains – sustainability balance, keeping track of sustainability-related data, limited control over suppliers or sub-contractors "(…) project management and project leaders play a critical role in the achievement of more sustainable practices." (Nieto-Rodriguez, 2022)

One of the first and broadest definitions of sustainable project management was presented by A.J. Gilbert Silvius and Ron P.J. Schipper: "Sustainable Project Management is the planning, monitoring, and controlling of project delivery and support processes, with consideration of the environmental, economical and social aspects of the life-cycle of the project's resources, processes, deliverables and effects,

aimed at realising benefits for stakeholders, and performed in a transparent, fair and ethical way that includes proactive stakeholder participation." (Silvius and Schipper, 2014, p. 79). According to these scientists, there are three primary shifts in sustainable project management: 1) scope shift (managing social, environmental, and economic impact); 2) paradigm shift (having a holistic perspective on managing change); 3) mind shift (taking responsibility for sustainable development) (Silvius & Schipper, 2014). Further research by these academics showed expected positive relationships between sustainability and five examined project success criteria, namely: 1) the stakeholders of the project are satisfied; 2) the project prepares the organisation for the future; 3) the project is executed in a controlled manner, 4) the project's deliverable is fit for purpose; 5) the business objectives or goals of the project are realised (Silvius & Schipper, 2022).

Another and newer definition proposed by the Italian scientists includes a broader view of the relationship between project management and sustainability: "Sustainable project management is the managerial practice aiming at pursuing project objectives by maximizing economic, social, and environmental benefits through the proactive involvement of stakeholders, the consideration of the extended life cycle of resources, processes, and effects, and continuous organizational learning" (Armenia et al., 2019, p. 2664) One of the key factors these researchers included is a discussion about the need for more research on the extended product life cycle management taking into account not only the product or service development itself, but also all the products and services needed to begin project and the future impact of product or service after the project is finished. Nevertheless, scientists are arguing that there is a need for continuous work on the definition of sustainable project management as there is a big contradiction in the scope of time in projects and the time perception when we talk about sustainability: "This confusion can be attributed to an apparent contradiction between a project being considered 'transient', 'temporary' and 'time constrained' when the core elements of sustainability are 'long term', 'future orientated' and measured against a 'triple bottom line' of current and future success criteria." (Moehler et al., 2018, p. 13583)

The systematic analysis of nearly 300 relative publications on the connection between sustainability and project management showed three different categories of interpretations of the role of sustainability in the current state of research. They are 1) sustainability as a constraint (sustainability is seen as something that hinders the actual

project goal or as a potential, primarily external, risk and as such, sustainability has a negative connotation in this regard); 2) sustainability as instrumental value (sustainability is seen less as a constraint that needs to be satisfied and more as an instrument that supports the actual project goal, creates new opportunities and possible benefits); 3) sustainability as intrinsic value (sustainability is interpreted as a genuine goal, interpretations in this category go beyond the conventional project management by focusing on multi-dimensional economic, environmental and social sustainability goals in the project). (Friedrich, 2023). This research demonstrates that there is no consensus on what sustainable project management is and what role sustainability plays and will play in project management now and in the near future. It is crucial to remember as we further discuss the various attributes of sustainable project management under research.

With a broad scale of problems tackled through a sustainable mindset, the indicators for sustainable project management also differ. For example, the research on the integration of sustainability indicators into project management focused on the case of the construction industry showed that there are 82 sustainability indicators related to project management practices in construction projects: 27 economic-related indicators, 18 environmental dimension indicators and 37 indicators were included in the social/management dimension. (Stanitsas et al., 2021) The authors also added that there can be many different measurable indicators that could be used to measure the high-level indicators, and such measurable indicators may be affected by culture and region and might not be universally accepted. (Stanitsas et al., 2021) For example, European tourism has a set of 43 core sustainability indicators and several supplementary indicators that, according to the researchers, have had limited instrumental and symbolic use so far. At the same time, their conceptual role, related to the social learning process resulting from their implementation, can be considered a pre-condition for other roles to emerge. (Gasparini & Mariotti, 2023) They add that in this case, sustainability indicators remain important as: "(…) the indicators' role within policy-making is closely linked to the specific governance context, influencing and being influenced by it." (Gasparini & Mariotti, 2023)

The need for a broader view of the project and the scale of issues tackled through sustainable strategies indicates a need for cooperation between different stakeholders. The case study on infrastructure maintenance projects, carried out by Swedish

researchers, shows how robust collaboration can have a central role in sustainable project management. In this case, it showed that 1) the duration of the collaboration strongly influences the capacity for organizational learning, an important aspect of sustainable project management, since it facilitates a shift in focus from projects towards processes that promote continuous improvements; 2) the intensity of the collaboration is important for a single-organization mindset and the joint problem-solving and planning as the joint planning and continuous project meetings facilitate effective use of resources; 3) both deep and wide collaboration is important for stakeholder engagement as joint decisions based on various kinds of knowledge and a single-organizational mindset have been enabled by the high degree of collaboration and engaging multiple hierarchical levels has been important for the implementation of the new practices and organizational strategy. (Larsson & Larsson, 2020, p. 585) The study on the practical ways of how sustainability can change interaction with stakeholders in project management showed that there is a need for change in the three main stakeholders management areas, namely: 1) identifying stakeholders (focusing more on the project stakeholders' interests through project life-cycles and triple-bottom-line approach); 2) assessing stakeholders (to classify every interest under the importance of this particular interest for the stakeholder and the type of interest, trough sustainability lens: economic, social or environmental); 3) planning stakeholders engagement activities (adding the already described analysis into the planning and execution of the engagement activities). (Silvius & Schipper, 2019)

It is also worth noting that even the projects that have no direct connection to the sustainability goals of the company can have sustainable elements in them incorporated by well-educated project managers like promoting the use of recycled materials, green energy, sustainability-conscious vendors, less water-intensive and energy-consumptive processes, and a plan for end-of-use protocols or decommissioning of the delivered products. (Nieto-Rodriguez, 2022) Different project-related staff members play different roles in more sustainable project practices. As per findings from Indian researchers who have devised an integrated sustainability model for projects, it is evident that the three primary project management team levels possess distinct objectives for enhancing project sustainability: 1) the management of the project company should frame policies for evaluation, execution, and control of sustainability in projects and lead on the stakeholder management; 2) project manager should take

care of the training and development of the project staff as well as for sure project planning, execution and control; 3) project staff should know and understand the significance of sustainability and achieve sustainability in the project. (Chawla et al., 2018). In this case, feedback also plays a crucial role in a successful process, as: "(…) the feedback component should be added at each level of the project management organization and the feedback may be taken for each decision, action, and process and furthermore, the feedback should be assessed and reviewed judicially by the organization, stakeholders, and customers so as to take corrective action in view to achieve sustainability into the projects." (Chawla et al., 2018, p. 165).

Last but not least, despite high levels of digitalisation and focus on innovation like artificial intelligence, the human factor still plays a crucial role in project planning and implementation. According to the research that includes interviews with 21 respondents and surveys with 134 respondents, in factors to identify the factors that project managers perceive as influencing their intention to discuss sustainability with the project board, there are 13 most salient factors. They are: 1) opinion of friends and family; 2) my ability (knowledge and skills); 3) right thing to do (ethics); 4) impact on project results; 5) impact on project success; 6) possibilities for sustainability; 7) reputation impact; 8) relationship with project board; 9) possibilities for sustainability; 10) sustainability part of strategy; 11) opinion of the organisation; 12) opinion of the direct manager; 13) opinion of the project board. (Silvius & de Graaf, 2018) The factor close to making this list was support from the sustainability officer. This belief will be researched deeply from the perspective of the sustainability managers in this thesis.

To sum up the theory part of this thesis, the theory of this work can also be put together in a conceptual framework that allows a visual summary of the theoretical concepts discussed in the work. It clearly shows the close links between leadership, sustainability and project management. The increasing importance of sustainability also allows for the development of new concepts, such as sustainable project management or sustainable leadership, that include ideas from existing concepts.

Figure 1 Conceptual model of the research theory, Source: compiled by the author.
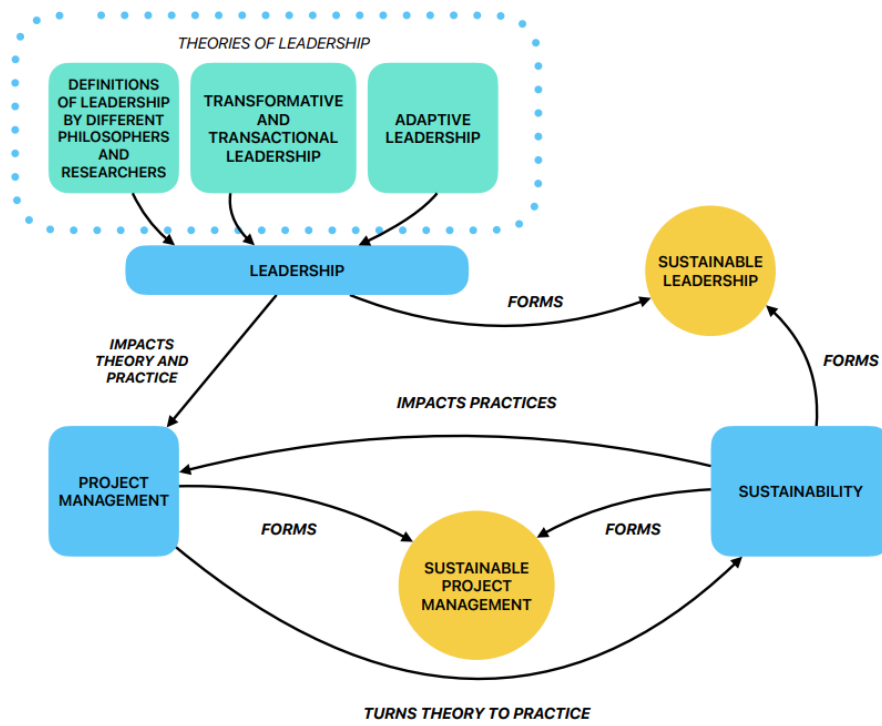
2. Research Methodology

The research methodology of this study depends on two main parts: semi-structured interviews and narrative analysis. A semi-structured interview can be described as: "the researcher has a list of questions or series of topics they want to cover in the interview, an interview guide, but there is flexibility in how and when the questions are put and how the interviewee can respond. The interviewer can probe answers, pursuing a line of discussion opened up by the interviewee, and a dialogue can ensue." (Edwards & Holland, 2013, p. 29) This method looks like the right one as in contrast to structured interviews, which offer limited room for interviewees to express themselves freely, semi-structured interviews strike a balance by providing a framework for consistency across participants, but at the same time keeping flexibility in conversation (Edwards & Holland, 2013). It looks like the most appropriate method for this research as in-depth interviews are seen as the most appropriate method for situations in which the researcher wants to ask open-ended questions that elicit a depth of information from relatively few people as opposed to surveys, which tend to be more quantitative and are conducted with more significant numbers of people (Guion et al., 2011). Nowadays, interviews can be conducted in person, via mail, phone and virtual platforms like Skype or Zoom.

The initial list of 20 potential interviewees was compiled in two ways: a) by looking at the most prominent companies operating in Lithuania and their communication on sustainability issues; b) by approaching companies belonging to the Lithuanian Responsible Business Association, which have a clear sustainability element in their public positioning. In this way, a list of twenty contacts was collected. The list was expanded to find additional references, with some companies still waiting to respond. However, the selection of the interviewees was based on two criteria: a) The potential interviewee is a sustainability manager or sustainability project manager or works in another position directly responsible for sustainability in the company; b) The potential interviewee's company is either established and operating in Lithuania or is foreign-owned, but operating in Lithuania. All interviewees in the study met these two characteristics. In the end, 29 requests for participation were sent; 9 answered positively and participated in the research. A sample size of six or more has previously been identified as adequate to reach data saturation in an in-depth interview study

(Guest et al., 2006). Shari L. Dworkin argues that: "(…) an extremely large number of articles, book chapters, and books recommend guidance and suggest anywhere from 5 to 50 participants as adequate" for the in-depth interviews (Dworkin, 2012, p. 1319). A systematic review of four databases showed that 9–17 interviews in qualitative research studies reached saturation (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). These researchers confirm that the study sample of nine interviewees should bring a credible result, making the research sample and its results representative.
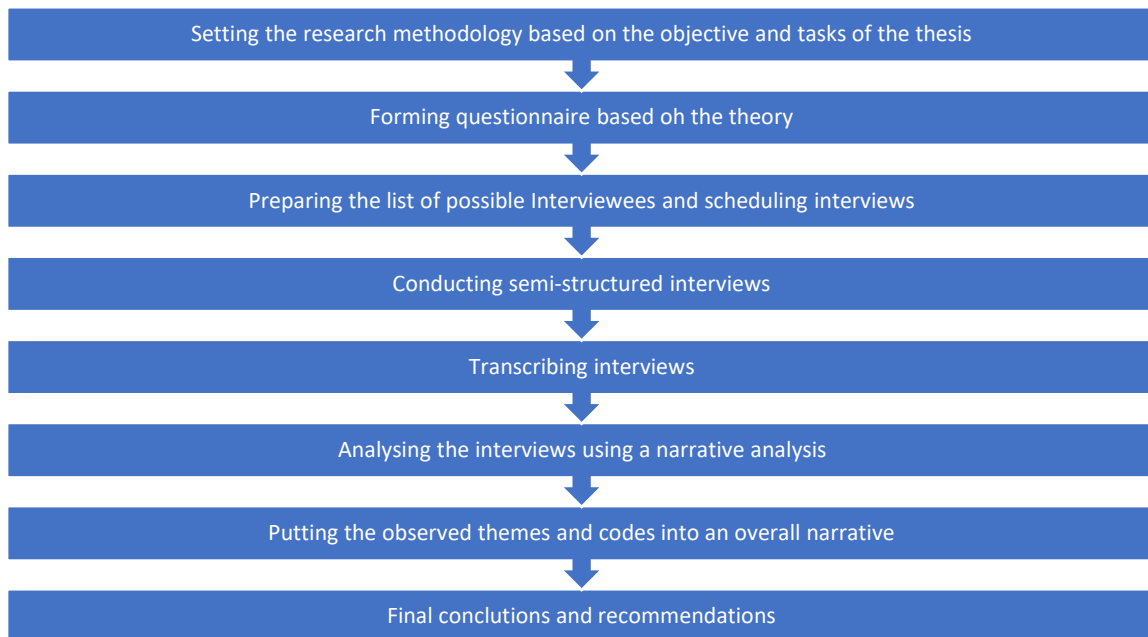
Each interview included 12 pre-prepared questions. From the pre-planned 12-question questionnaire, at least seven questions will be asked, leaving space for adjustments as the sectors the respondents represent differ. These questions will ask about the interviewee's job as a sustainability manager (or similar roles), how it connects with project management, the relationship between sustainability and project management, the importance of leadership from sustainability managers in project management, and how this leadership affects the products or services delivered through projects. The complete pre-prepared research questionnaire (Appendix I) can be found in the appendix of this master thesis. As already mentioned, some extra questions may follow up from conversations. Every interview lasted up to 35 minutes and was conducted online via Google Meets, Zoom or MS Teams platforms. Only the sound recordings of every interview were saved and transcribed solely for the use of this research. However, considering that some interviewees are top-level executives in their companies, some interviews were to be conducted not orally but in written form, leaving room for extra questions after the formal questionnaire was provided. The written interviews were offered to create better chances to get an interview from the top sustainability managers in the country. All the interviewees can introduce themselves with their name and surname but are also reminded that they can choose not to do it. Anonymity was left as an option out of respect to the research ethics and freedom of choice for interviewees. Only the interviewees who agreed to be cited with their names will be cited not anonymously.

After conducting the interviews, the thematic analysis will be used to analyse, code, and form all the interviews into an overall narrative. As Chad Lochmiller describes: "Thematic analysis is a fundamentally question-driven exercise that depends on clearly articulated lines of inquiry to frame the scholar's interpretation of the data" (Lochmiller, 2021, p. 2030) Thematic analysis is a valuable method for this research

because it assumes that the memories and experiences shared by participants are valuable and worthy of exploration, synthesis, and in-depth description, especially when dealing with interviews or focus groups (Lochmiller, 2021). Mojtaba Vaismoradi and Sherrill Snelgrove described the thematic analysis as: "(…) fundamentally an interpretative research approach, relying increasingly on the researcher's subjectivity and personal insight to interpret data for theme development." (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019)

In practice, the interviews will first be transcribed, observing meanings and patterns that appear, looking for first similarities and differences between interviews. After that, the initial coding for data will be created. The first round of the analysis of transcribed interviews will decide this coding. After that, transcribed interviews will be analysed again, trying to connect the different quotes from them with the initial codes. If needed, new codes will be added after this round of transcript analysis, adding excerpts with similar meanings. Codes will be collated with the supporting quotes using the Microsoft Excel program. Once the data is collated with codes, all the data and the codes will be revised. After this, the codes will be combined into themes that connect all of them. After this grouping, the themes and codes will be revised again, ensuring that all themes are distinct and have enough data from the transcribed interviews to support them. After the revision of the themes, the final narrative will be prepared as the main result of the analysis. The narrative will present the main findings in every theme with supporting and vivid quotes. Findings and citations will be made with the name, surname and company represented by the people who agreed to be cited with this information; for others, only the number of interviewees and their designated business sector will be mentioned.

Figure 2 The structure of the research, Source: compiled by the author.

Setting the research methodology based on the objective and tasks of the thesis
Forming questionnaire based oh the theory
Preparing the list of possible Interviewees and scheduling interviews
Conducting semi-structured interviews
Transcribing interviews
Analysing the interviews using a narrative analysis
Putting the observed themes and codes into an overall narrative
Final conclutions and recommendations

3. Research results and discussion

In total for this research nine semi-structured interviews were made with the sustainability managers and sustainability project managers working in the companies operating in Lithuania. Four of the interviewees agreed to be cited with their name and surname. Of nine interviews only one was done in a written form. All list of the respondents to be cited in this research:

Table 1 The research interviewees list, Source: compiled by the author.

No.	Name and Surname / Number	Company	Sector
1.	Guoda Lomanaitė	Lietuvos paštas	Logistics
2.	Interviewee II	-	Retail
3.	Greta Petrošiūtė	Luminor Group	Finance
4.	Interviewee IV	-	IT
5.	Interviewee V	-	Production
6.	Anton Nikitin	Vilnius City Municipality	Public
7.	Interviewee VII	-	Finance
8.	Interviewee VIII	-	NGO
9.	Indrė Bimbirytė - Yun	Telia Lietuva	Telecommunications / IT

The interviews were entered into the matrix prepared using the Microsoft Excel application, connecting the patterns that appeared with the supporting quotations and them moving them under united codes, later connecting codes were grouped under topics. In the end the nine topics appeared every with at least 1 topic (it happened with one topic were a lot of people mentioned the same argument that could not fall under any other topic) under it:

Table 2 Themes and codes found during the research phase, Source: compiled by the author.

No.	Theme	Codes
1.	Sustainability managers connection to the project management from the structural perspective	• Sustainability manager as curator of compliance (certificates, regulatory laws, EU directives). • Sustainability manager as initiator and manager of change. • Sustainability manager as curator of individual initiatives.
2.	Sustainability manager as a leader	• Leadership is essential for a sustainability manager to create change. • Support from higher management – an important factor in the leadership of a sustainability manager. • Sustainability manager can bring together many different and important stakeholders through leadership.
3.	Sustainability manager as a communicator	• Sustainability manager as intermediate in simplifying complex aspects of sustainability. • Company culture and strategy as an important factor for a sustainability managers communication.
4.	Sustainability Manager influence on the internal company processes	• The role of the sustainability manager in prioritisation and mainstreaming sustainability into routine processes. • The role of the sustainability manager as an internal consultant.

		• The role of the sustainability manager as a part of the external stakeholder evaluation.
5.	Sustainability Manager influence on the products and services the company develops	• The role of the sustainability manager in integrating sustainability into the product and service development cycle. • The role of the sustainability manager in adapting products for the circular economy. • The role of the sustainability manager in increasing the focus on the social dimension.
6.	The relationship between corporate profit and sustainability and the role of the sustainability manager in this relationship	• Company profit as an enabling factor for sustainability changes. • Sustainability as a factor creating additional financial benefits.
7.	A vision for the future – sustainability as an integral part of everyday activities	• Sustainability as a standard part of operations without requiring a sustainability manager.
8.	Challenges for the sustainability managers	• Lack of habit or systematicity in incorporating sustainability management into processes. • Perception of sustainability as an additional task by other departments.
9.	Recommendations	• Sustainability manager needs to see the big picture and understand priorities. • Sustainability manager must continuously maintain strong

		internal communication and ensure education.
		• Sustainability manager should support bottom-up initiatives.
		• Sustainability manager should be creative, led by example and always improve his/her knowledge.

Some of the topics are very much interconnected so in the final narrative will be presented grouped together.

3.1. Sustainability Managers and Project Management

One of the interesting findings of the research that on very methodological part, most of the interviewees think, that project management is not influenced by the sustainability topics or the invention of the sustainability manager role. As G. Lomanaitė from the Lithuanian Post noted in her answers: "Perhaps in this area, it is important not to reinvent the wheel but to integrate it into standard management practices and identify what is essential to do to move sustainability initiatives forward. For example, we have initiatives from different departments, but it is not clear what goals we are aiming for; maybe the activities contradict each other. Therefore, we need a coordination mechanism to include the activities in an integrated plan, which we will check every quarter. Then, it is easier for colleagues to coordinate with each other and consult clearly with whom." Yet, project management can be impacted by sustainability managers and their leadership on at least three levels. First and foremost, introducing the sustainability manager role changes the company structure and functions in it. Following that, it impacts the company's internal procedures and the outcomes of these internal processes: services and products.

On the first topic, of the sustainability managers connection to the project management from the structural perspective, three codes were identified, each having either a direct or indirect impact on the possible functions and roles of project management staff in the organisation. First and mostly mentioned function of the sustainability manager was his or her **role as curator of compliance (certificates,**

regulatory laws, European Union directives). This is an important role as certain sustainability topics are covered by national laws, EU directives and other laws, that companies must follow. Also, companies can aim for a sustainability related certificates for their production, that formally recognises the high-quality of the product. As the Interviewee II, working in the retail sector, described her role in overseeing the compliance: "At the same time, care must be taken to implement it correctly. For example, in retail there are certain laws that apply to us, the company implements them, but it is my job to see that everything is really alright." The next important thing mentioned in this topic code is that the sustainability managers work on the sustainability reports – often an annual document presenting the company's sustainability strategy and actions it took to complete the goals outlined. It is arduous work that combines input from different company departments working towards the final document. As described by Interviewee IV: "This includes many tasks and probably smaller projects because that strategy is always based on good practice - it should also be found in materiality assessment when significant directions or material topics are established after identifying the positive and negative environmental, social and governance impacts created by the company." This indicates that it requires project management staff to also add to these reports by collecting specific data or by including particular goals in the projects planned that could contribute to the final company sustainability performance. As mentioned by a few interviewees, the sustainability reports are also external documents; at the very end, they also include project managers working with communication to reach the relevant audiences and stakeholders.

The last narrative under this code overlaps with the last code under the topic, as it highlights the importance of the sustainability manager acting as coordinator and head of specific separate initiatives inside the company to reach compliance goals. For example, when sustainability managers work towards the certification of specific products or the company itself, these certification procedures can be seen as separate projects managed by the sustainability managers. "Then, there are separate projects related to sustainability, such as the various sustainability certificates that a company wants to be certified with. These are for the companies, like EcoVadis, for example, and furniture raw materials or the furniture itself. These are like separate certification projects.", Interviewee V highlighted. As for this, sustainability managers are also the

ones who often coordinates the setting of the internal sustainability goals and plans, on how to reach a certain standards.

As sustainability or certain certification standards often requires taking action and make changes in how company operates or what it produces, the sustainability manager is also seen as **an initiator and manager of change**. It is a two-sided relationship with other internal stakeholders. On the one hand, sustainability managers could act as a link between different divisions or departments inside the company, helping them connect their knowledge and use it for better decision-making, as well as help to identify where the positive change towards sustainable change can be made and together make sure that the selected project it a success. As G. Lomanaitė said: "The sustainable development project manager is the connecting link. It must help colleagues understand which areas of their operations need change (to support sustainability goals) and how to achieve it." To put it in practice, I. Bimbirytė-Yun, sustainability project manager from Telia Lietuva, provided an example of how a sustainability manager interacts with other departments when sustainability goals are integrated part of the company strategy: "I may not be directly responsible for a particular project, but together with the project team, if that specific project, let's say, contributes to the achievement of some particular set KPI or that target indicator, then we will follow it together, the team will report, we will monitor change, and we will look for opportunities together to ensure that that particular project contributes to the achievement of the goal." On the other hand, a sustainability manager can initiate the change, initiating projects or initiatives that follow the analysis or strategy of the company's activities. Interviewee VIII was a leading force behind the whole idea of focusing on sustainability in her company and said that her initiative, after some time, turned from an idea to a real action: "Sustainability was self-evident, but we wanted to systematise, have strategies, and see where we could go further. It was my function to start this file, this thinking, in the first place. On the one hand, we need to conduct an audit to assess how we are currently operating to create a strategy for what we aim for. Then, observe, communicate with all departments, and implement our plans." This is an excellent example of how a sustainability-focused initiative can make a structural change in the organisation.

This leads us to the next code under this theme: sustainability manager as **curator of individual initiatives**. As already showed in the one of the previous codes,

an important part of the sustainability manager role is leading projects and initiatives. Both roles – manager and owner – were mentioned during the interviews. It is also connected to the fact that in some companies the sustainability managers are titled as sustainability project managers or sustainable development project managers. Sustainability manager can be a project owner, as described by the Luminor Group representative G. Petrošiūtė: "There are different roles, so I am directly the owner of one project; it is entirely related to sustainability data, and the requirements for that project come from me." On the other hand, sustainability managers can act as project managers planning, implementing, and reporting for projects. Some of those projects can be certification projects (already described). Others can follow the company sustainability strategy, as the sustainability manager needs to ensure that goals are reached, and theoretical plans are turned into real action. According to Interviewee IV, after the company does a materiality assessment and sees where the most significant progress regarding the sustainability goals is needed, they can act by initiating and coordinating projects aimed at those goals: "After such an exercise, the company's strategy and strategic goals are created, which we would like to achieve in the respective areas of sustainability. Well, my role is to foresee those areas and develop what projects and initiatives could be implemented. I basically have to coordinate smaller projects like this, involving other teams as well."

Analysing the codes under this topic, we can see that even though sustainability managers do not directly impact the theoretical models of project management, they have an indirect role as sustainability managers sometimes act as project managers and project owners initiating, coordinating, and overseeing projects. Further impact can be seen under the topics of sustainability managers' impact on the organisation's internal processes and outputs.

3.2. Sustainability Managers Impact on the Processes

With the introduction of the sustainability manager role, every organisation's structure inevitably changes. Everything described above demonstrates what functions change as the sustainability manager steps into the organisation, so we can call that a macro level. But it is also worth looking at the micro level – how sustainability managers influence the internal company processes. There are three closely related codes under this topic.

First, the sustainability manager is vital in **prioritising and mainstreaming sustainability into routine processes**. The sustainability topic is extensive as it covers many sub-topics – from environmental to social issues. Different companies have a different impact on these issues and methods, as materiality assessments and many others help identify the critical material topics the company should focus on. As described by the interviewees, sustainability managers here play a key role in identifying and addressing these topics. This role is crucial, as defined by G. Lomantaitė: "I think it is essential to look at where the company's impact is most significant and what areas are prioritised because that's how the greatest value is created for the organisation." It is a primary and essential role for sustainability managers working in big companies with many projects, as the priorities might get lost as the scope and topics of the projects differ. It is even harder to coordinate everything if a sustainability manager is responsible for a group of companies. Interviewee VIII, with a long experience as a sustainability manager in different companies and sectors, talking about the traits needed for the sustainability manager, highlighted – that it is critically important to see specific needs in the particular organisation and, based on the specific need prioritise the most critical sustainability initiatives: "And, of course, the ability to negotiate and understand how quickly those significant investments can be directed to a specific area. Then, in each company, we prioritise what is most important to us, whether CO2 reduction and other related departmental activities, whether waste reduction is significant to us, whether reducing food waste is essential to us or some additional stream of actions that falls under that umbrella."

When priorities are set, there is a need to make sure that those priorities are addressed in the organisation's activities and processes. It goes in two ways, depending on the role of the sustainability manager – if he oversees sustainability only in one company, it means they have to coordinate activities; if a sustainability manager oversees sustainability in a group of companies – they has to coordinate that sustainability goals are being projected in all the group companies. Looking at the internal coordination here, the sustainability manager plays an already described role of a change manager or initiator and coordinator of change. Yet, when a sustainability manager has to oversee a group of companies or organisations, things change as the coordination is more on a macro level than on a micro level. For example, Anton Nikitin, Administration Advisor and Sustainability Manager at the Vilnius City

Municipality, responsible for the sustainability of the city and the companies accountable to the municipality, described his role like this: "My main task is to coordinate the topic of sustainability in the city, which means the sustainability of the whole town is a little broader than the topic of sustainability of the organisation itself. This means – initiatives, projects, programs, or activities in which the municipality or a group of municipal companies operate. It is their coordination and integration into a shared city vision, strategies, etc." As he is the first and, at least for now, the only sustainability manager at the Lithuanian municipal level, he also added an exciting caveat on how this role and its co-ordinational function shows the city's dedication to the sustainability: "I would say that the creation of my position is just as important a sign of the city's position that that area is essential, and we will try to implement; I would not call it sustainability indicators, but rather sustainability topics at all possible levels, we will try to do so in all areas."

The sustainability manager can also play **the role of the internal consultant**. It is an essential factor as, according to Statista information, the management consulting market size in the United States alone was valued at approximately 329 billion U.S. dollars in 2022 (Statista, 2023). When improving internal processes, providing services, or producing products, a sustainability manager can be seen as an internal consultant adding sustainability expertise to other stakeholders' projects or initiatives. For example, Interviewee VII described the packaging upgrade process led by the logistics team and the sustainability team's role in it like this: "It started from the fact that we brought a company-wide goal: how much per cent reduction is needed, how much plastic to replace, what the final packaging should be, and how many years the change will happen with our private label brand. This is precisely how we consulted on the types of materials to be chosen, on the process, working with stakeholders, suppliers, material sellers, and manufacturers. Yes, it was entirely the job of our, shall we call, in-house consultants to make that product more sustainable than it was." It was also mentioned that sustainability managers could be proactive in proposing to their colleagues to come and talk about how the projects, products, initiatives, and processes can be made more sustainable.

The last change, identified by a few interviewees, that the sustainability manager role brings to the organisation is that the sustainability manager can be **a part of the external stakeholder evaluation process**. External stakeholders' identification,

analysis, and management were always key priorities in project management, and sustainability managers, according to themselves, can also play a role in this matter. For example, a company can decide to work only with ethical vendors. This decision might impact many projects related to the relations with external vendors, and the sustainability manager can play a crucial role in preparing these rules. Interviewee IV described this practice: "Our goal is to prepare that code of ethics for third parties; it is the easy part. Later, we have to develop a procedure for third parties to sign that code. In our case, these will be significant third parties in terms of the *financial obligations (note: added by the author for the clarity of translation)* amount and country of residence of those third-party companies, as different countries have different risks in the context of labour law, and we stick to one such index." Sustainability managers can also add specific metrics to the collections of metrics used by other specialists in the organisation to add the sustainability part to the standard external stakeholder evaluation procedures. An example of such a possible addition in the financial sector was described by G. Petrošiūtė: "(…) In banks, there are so-called relationship managers who also meet with the client, but they are not sustainability experts - they are financial experts. They know how to calculate credit risks, and they know how to calculate the profitability of that loan, so they need to be given tools and told how to collect information and assess whether, along with profitability, it is also a sustainable company and a sustainable investment."

Minor changes were also mentioned, but these three groups were often mentioned. They are closely related to the whole project cycle (in the case of the sustainability manager role in setting company priorities and observation role), project planning alone (where the sustainability manager can act as an internal consultant during the development stage and even later) as well as the external stakeholders management (were sustainability manager can serve as actor bringing the sustainability standards to the evaluation). It is clear that the connection between the project management staffs and the sustainability manager is relatively close and gets more critical if the company provides its staff with a structure where the sustainability manager can play all the roles mentioned here or even more or if sustainability managers take these roles themselves demonstrating leadership and proactive interaction.

3.3. Sustainability Managers Impact on the Products and Services

Inevitably as sustainability managers takes their roles in company structure and impacts the internal processes, outputs are impacted as well. In this matter output of the company can be whatever it provides – whether it is a services or products. Under this topic three main codes can be seen.

First, and possibly the most important, is the role of the sustainability manager in **integrating sustainability into the product and service development cycle.** This comes from minor changes, like one mentioned by the Interviewee working in retail, adding the information about the recycling on the packing of products sold to the systematic inclusion of the sustainability manager and sustainability criteria into the product development cycle. A solid example of the systematic inclusion of the sustainability criteria into the designing of furniture was provided by Interviewee V: "So, for example, when it comes to sustainable design, it is talking about our main product, which is furniture. We have a long-term goal; it does not happen in a few months but incorporates sustainable design principles into the development of every new product. They are the use of recycled materials, durability, the possibility of renewing the furniture, picking it out, sorting it, using renewable resources, using raw materials and so on. This is now, let us say, a process in the making, as every piece of newly developed furniture will have to go through these points. And maybe in some cases, it will be decided that furniture X does not comply with those sustainable design principles as it has some other purpose, to be perhaps I don't know - to be cheap, to be accessible to a large number of people, to be quickly developed and it will not be maybe very sustainable. But the next piece of furniture will be chosen to apply there, I do not know, the five sustainable design principles." It shows how the expertise of sustainability management can become a part of the standard procedures in the company.

Secondly, closely related to the first code under this topic is the role of the sustainability manager in **adapting products for the circular economy**. It can be argued that the first and second codes could be connected. However, they can also be kept separate as sustainability managers can have this role when discussing items that a company does not produce but retails. One of the examples of this case was provided by I. Bimbirytė-Yun, as Telia Lietuva, despite being one of the leading

telecommunications companies in Lithuania, does not produce any of the equipment and instead plays the role of an intermediate between the producer of the equipment and the final user of it. Despite its role as a retailer, Telia Lietuva found a way to ensure that the equipment it sells to its clients falls in the circular economy cycle: "We do not manufacture the equipment ourselves, but we sell it, and some of that equipment is also necessary to use our services. This is one aspect, for example, the equipment that comes from us, the end-client equipment, whether routers for wireless internet or set-top boxes, are not new in many cases. There are some new ones, but we often reuse the same equipment. As a customer, you have ordered a service and received some router, so it will probably not be new, but it will have been used by someone else. So, I think that is one good example."

With the coordination of the sustainability manager, some companies can create systems and algorithms on how the equipment used by the company extensively can also be put into a circular economy. An example of this kind of system in the IT sector was provided by Interviewee IV: "Also, another work from the environmental area is to create a procedure to ensure that the servers we have and the significant parts of them are sorted correctly when they are no longer used or are resold on the secondary market. It was simply a matter of setting up a system to identify the coverage of our servers, in general, to look at who is utilising those servers most often. We have simply set up a procedure so that when those servers are no longer useful to us, they are picked up by vendors that are suitable for us, who give us the statistics of how many of them have been resold or sorted, and in what parts, at the end." As both companies described here work in the telecommunications and IT sectors, these procedures are essential to their services. But the same algorithm can also work in organisations in the non-governmental sector. An example of it was provided by Interviewee VIII describing her role in adapting the circular economy principles in the preparation of art exhibitions: "In general, as I said at the beginning, it is also about efficiency - we spend money on something and have to dismantle it, so let us see if we can reuse it afterwards. And there are things we create that we know we cannot reuse, which is always in the back of our minds. At the end of the exhibition, we have a list of companies and organisations, whether kindergartens or whatever. But all the time, the thought is: okay, we will create something - who will we give it to?"

Last but not least, the role of the sustainability manager is to **increase the focus on the social dimension**. As sustainability always puts a more significant emphasis on social issues, inclusivity and other vital topics, sustainability managers can be the ones flagging these issues when talking about the products or services provided in their organisations or companies. One of the most mentioned examples of this kind of change was adapting the services so I would be accessible for people with disabilities. G. Lomanaitė from Lietuvos paštas said that attention to the accessibility changes requirements for the company's infrastructure: "Analogously, we have the infrastructure, such as post offices or post machines. We aim to make the infrastructure accessible to people with physical disabilities, so introducing simple criteria changes the choice of locations or the choice of premises." Physical infrastructure and how you provide services for people with disabilities should be adapted to their needs. Sustainability managers can play their role here, too, by adjusting employee training to reflect the needs of people with disabilities. Interviewee II, who works in retail, provided an example of this: "For example, I try to bring the message about how people with disabilities should be served. For instance, if there is employee training, ensure that the training program includes information on how to serve customers with disabilities."

This theme adds to the previous themes on how sustainability managers influence how their companies and organisations work, organise internal processes, and the output the company makes. In this theme, it can be seen that project management, when focused on managing products or services, can be impacted by sustainability managers. It may be affected by sustainability managers taking the initiative and leadership to add certain sustainability activities such as extra design principles, algorithms for recycling used equipment, additions to infrastructure planning, or employee training.

3.4. Sustainability Managers, Leadership, and Communication

Through interviews, it was demonstrated that leadership and communication skills are essential for sustainability managers in their daily work and their pursuit of the company's strategic goals. These two soft skills are very much interconnected as the topic of sustainability is only now gaining momentum in Lithuanian society, and the position of sustainability manager is still developing. Because of it and clear connecting

patterns, two topics, sustainability manager as a leader and sustainability manager as communicator, can be connected in this research narrative.

As described under other topics, the sustainability manager is vital in initiating and managing change. Because of this role, **leadership is essential for a sustainability manager to create change**. Interviewee VII was a leading force behind the systemisation of sustainability in her organisation, and one of the key reasons behind that was her traits and her leadership: "Maybe I have this common trait of just initiating things. I mean, we see that there is a problem, we want to do something in a certain area, very often I am the person who says: okay, I will start this." This is an example of how one person can be a leading force behind a significant change in organisational relation to sustainability. Sometimes sustainability managers have to go an extra mile for their ideas to become reality and take leadership even when it might be not up to them to do it, as described by Interviewee V: "But more broadly, sustainability is a topic that success in a company depends very much on the involvement of people. If you can show leadership and ignite and inspire people, you have a better chance of making it happen. Maybe sometimes you shouldn't take on leadership formally, but you take it; you take on a little bit of leadership informally and try to make it work.".

Yet, sustainability managers were also described by a few interviewees as activists who put forward sustainability-related proposals and advocates for their implementation in an organisation. G. Petrošiūtė described them as "corporate activists" and said that it is essential to show that sustainability-related changes are valuable not only as environmental or social changes but also make sense from the business perspective: "The main thing is change because there is no "okay, let us continue the way we have been doing things". It is all about change. That needs to be sold, that change is not only good for the environment, for the society, and so on, but it's also good for business, whether it's maybe a new revenue stream, whether it's a further obligation to comply with a regulatory or an investor's expectations, or whether it's a reduction in costs. At the end of the day, whatever those reasons are, we need to go out there and argue for that all the time." It was also several times added that this constant leadership is vital as for an effective change, every related stakeholder in the company needs to be included – the sustainability management team can never alone make ground-breaking changes. In this case, leadership helps to ignite change and reach essential stakeholders. Sometimes, as described by G. Petrošiūtė, sustainability

managers need to take leadership and get different stakeholders, even if topics of sustainability are uncomfortable: "That may be why that leadership is much more material and feels so much more because those sustainability people have to be so fully activist. Of course, in activist leadership, that kind of fearlessness, going out, speaking, arguing, bringing people together, maybe those who are not comfortable speaking out, is the one thing you need to do." Bringing together different stakeholders will be also covered as separate codes under currently described topics.

Leadership might not be enough to bring that change, especially as the spectre of topics covered by sustainability is broad. Here arises the importance of sustainability managers being good communicators, too. According to the interviewees, a sustainability manager should act as **an intermediate in simplifying complex aspects of sustainability**. It plays a vital role as different people and specialists will understand sustainability topics differently, but they all might be necessary for the needed change. That is where sustainability managers might step in and put the correct information into the proper context. "Within the company, we have a micro-society that also reflects the fact that there are different colleagues, both at the geographical level and at the level of the diverse, perhaps, layers of society. Therefore, when it comes to sustainability, you also have to be able to simplify because, as in any field of expertise, whether it is IT, engineering, I don't know, biology - I don't understand specific biological terms in the same way - I can't expect people to understand the precise words that are used in the sustainability lexicon. Naturally, one has to know how to explain, to share in a way that is also understandable, and maybe even, I would say, to rephrase in a way that is understandable in a specific context." I. Bimbirytė-Yun said.

In certain circumstances, it can be more difficult. As described by Anton Nikitin from Vilnius City Municipality in the public sector, explaining sustainability topics might be a little bit more challenging, as the audience communication is aimed at is very broad and very diverse: "In a city context, we have to understand that the audience is all residents and visitors to the city, presumably because if we are forming public opinion, it may not necessarily be only those who live in the city. Those people are very different because of the many different stakes. Whether it is income level, whether it is education level, whether it is daily habits, whether it is a place of residence or something else. Then it is impossible to speak the same language to everybody, and communication skills are fundamental here."

Sustainability manager can **bring together many different and important stakeholders through leadership**. As it was already explained that sustainability is a broad topic and change in this field requires an input from different stakeholders inside and possibly even outside the organisation, sustainability manager can lead in bringing those important people to one table. Interviewee IV provided example of sustainability report as one project where sustainability manger is required to show leadership for a successful result: "I would say that the same projects are quite varied, but for example a project like the sustainability report, a communication package that we are launching to the general public, is really a leadership job, because you have to involve a lot of different internal stakeholders, different teams, different people from different parts of the business to present information, to check, to write, to design. It is a very complex job." Having many different stakeholders naturally means that you have many different interests and competences that needs to be mediated. As I. Bimbirytė-Yun told, that is also important to remember that it will also require negotiations skills: "Because achieving the objectives has to involve many teams, many other colleagues, it means you have to find compromises and solutions together. These are probably the essential qualities that are needed, this inter-team work, finding solutions, prioritising."

In this case, communication also plays an important role. Yet, it was so closely interconnected with the current code under the leadership topic that it could not be divided methodically as a separate code under the sustainability manager as communicator code. Yet, a sustainability manager can only lead with many stakeholders with good communication skills. As mentioned by Interviewee IV, sustainability managers cannot know all the details about the specific technical aspects of the product or service they want to change. Hence, it requires in-depth communication with respective colleagues knowledgeable in the field. Sometimes, it might lead to the conclusion that change might be impossible, even if it looks upstanding on paper: "It is a communication skill, and it also helps you to prioritise and review the tasks themselves and make the best of them. Very often, it seems that we could do this, this, that and the other, and then you start talking about more specific cases, that maybe it would not work for us, that there are no possibilities to do this and that."

Finally, in every organisation, significant changes can only happen with the **support of higher management, and it can be seen as an important factor in the**

leadership of a sustainability manager. During the interviews, it was revealed that a sustainability manager can take leadership and encourage initiatives from other employees. Yet, for sustainability to succeed in the organisation, support from senior management is crucial. Especially, as for sustainability policies to be fully enacted, it has to be part of the organisation's strategic planning, whether sustainability is covered under a separate strategy or integrated into the common business strategy. As pointed out by G. Petrošiūtė: "It is not entirely about sustainability managers yet; it's somewhat related, but it is imperative to have buy-in from senior management. It is probably often heard, but this is very important. There is a common corporate strategy, and the drivers and the CEO, and to hear him mentioning in every town hall that this is important to us, what we are doing, and where we are investing in is very important." This point of view is also reinforced by I. Bimbirytė-Yun, who added that sustainability managers can enact smaller initiatives. However, the more extensive changes can only happen with senior management support: "It is essential to mention that you can make some minor changes, like the bottom-up movement, but the significant changes are still coming; watch as we like - from top to bottom."

Sometimes, communication is a part of sustainability managers enacting their leadership. Interviewee VII said that her interest in the topic mixed with communication through education brought positive results regarding sustainability: "I used to do a lot of intense work and education, and I would say that if you were to ask for feedback from certain teams or my former employers, I would also say that my interest as a person in these topics and what I call sustainability in the broadest sense, is both my job and my hobby and which I do after work as well, is leading to some, I think successful results." Anton Nikitin added that when talking in the context of a city and diverse group of companies and institutions under municipal management, organisational leadership is an important factor in the success of sustainable initiatives: "On the one hand, leadership is about understanding its need for and importance of for us as an organisation. Then, that leadership also becomes a leadership that goes from the higher management level to all areas, ensuring that the topic is essential and relevant. Especially since the city already has a history of moving towards that theme in one place or another, be it infrastructure development, other green initiatives, etc. They are already producing results - whether we have the duty and pleasure of hosting the European Green Capital Programme 2025 or aiming for climate neutrality among

the 100 European cities in the mission. To answer the question briefly, I would say leadership is undoubtedly essential and inevitable. But maybe it is just important to mention that this is not necessarily a question of personal leadership but of leadership as an organisation."

It is closely related to the code regarding the sustainability manager as a communicator. It was expressed a few times during the interviews that **company culture and strategy are critical factors for a sustainability manager's communication**. These factors come twofold. On the one hand, having a strategic view of sustainability issues helps connect theory with practice and address the most pressing and significant sustainability topics, enacting practical action from the theoretical framework. It allows for communication as it sometimes combines complex sustainability theory and other research models focused on the materiality assessment or different sustainability-related methodologies with a practical action required from separate organisation departments or companies. To some extent, it can be said that it also makes sustainability a part of employee's everyday duties. "If that goal has already been set and approved, you may end up liking it or disliking it, but you are still obliged as an employee of the company to contribute to it and to deliver." Interviewee V said. On the other hand, company culture matters, too, as companies with a more flexible work culture can be seen as more adaptable to change required by sustainability. Interviewee VI observed it: "Perhaps that resistance or enthusiasm is also partly due to the culture of the company - whether the company is inclined to innovation, to innovate - and I think it's easier for companies like that to incorporate sustainability into their day-to-day operations, into their strategic goals."

To summarise these two closely related themes, sustainability managers' leadership is vital in their daily work, enacting change and achieving sustainability goals. Yes, it has limitations regarding the level of support from the company's senior management and their engagement, company strategy and culture. Yet, there is space for their initiatives in case of internal processes (like linking different stakeholders needed for change) or initiating various sustainability initiatives from bottom to top (this aspect will be covered in a separate theme). Communication here is a crucial tool that can help enact sustainability managers' leadership and support the sustainability initiatives, turning them from theory into practice.

3.5. Sustainability and Business

One of the additional themes that were seen during the research is the relationship between corporate profit and sustainability and the role of the sustainability manager in this relationship. As was already discussed in the public, there is support for the idea that profit should not be the primary objective of present-day organizations. The interviewees debated how it looked from the business perspective.

First, it can be observed that a **company's profit can be seen as an enabling factor for sustainability changes**. Sure, sustainability-focused changes can be made without investment. Interviewee IV described two of these kinds of changes and initiatives that are interesting, sustainable related and do not require serious investments: 1) employees decided to turn off the ice-cream refrigerator in their office for the wintertime as it is not used and only waists energy; 2) the swap meet was organised for the employees to trade, and exchange used clothes and other personal belongings that can live a second life in a new home. Small initiatives like these are essential and integral to sustainability activities and education. Yet, the more prominent changes require serious investment. In this case, the organisation has to be profitable to ensure that it has the needed resources to support and invest in sustainable changes. Interviewee II said there should be a balance between organisational financial goals and sustainability: "From my point of view, a company's ambition should be to be profitable. It has to make a profit to eventually invest in sustainability, for example, in infrastructural changes, which are expensive. It is a company that must be profitable, which is fine. However, a company should not sacrifice sustainability for profit and vice versa. For example, if a company has a profitability of 5%, if it did everything in an unsustainable way, only in the cheapest way, and thought about the short-term effect, then maybe it could take its profitability to 10%, for example. That would be my view - if we can make some investments and buy more expensive, more sustainable materials or raise the workers' wages while keeping the company profitable, a rational number of some kind, then that is what we should do."

Secondly, sustainability can be seen **as a factor creating additional financial benefits**. Specific changes and initiatives focused on more sustainable products or services can also financially benefit an organisation. Interviewee V described an exciting example of a new furniture piece that uses leftover tapestry instead of non-

recyclable materials. This change is already bringing very positive retail results: "Now that we see that this product has been introduced at the end of 2023, we can already see that sales have exceeded expectations because customers are happy - they see that this is some kind of sustainable solution, it's interesting, maybe not many people are doing it at all, and then they go for it. There are also those moments where if you put in maybe a little more resources and effort and think about what can be done here, the return comes quite quickly." Also, the profitability of the sustainability-related changes and initiatives is an essential factor in its evaluation processes, as not all the senior managers have the urge to enact sustainable changes. As described by Interviewee VII: "Presenting cost-effectiveness in a particular way, for example, when working with a company's CFO, is an essential objective. Therefore, most sustainability teams are building up their data or data analysis competencies. It is only by bringing certain figures that the economic value is demonstrated if the people in that team do not have a common enthusiasm and attitude that by reducing CO2 in the end, the whole of humanity is not going to die, where I might come up with the idea of why do I need to be in the middle of this because, from a philosophical perspective, it is important for me as a human being. But unfortunately, it is not really important for every team leader in different departments."

It can be seen from the interviews that there is a twofold connection between the organisation's profitability and its sustainability. On the one hand, an organisation needs to be profitable to invest in sustainability; on the other hand, sustainable change and initiatives can create new revenue flows or make the existing processes more efficient.

3.6. Sustainability Manager Mission – Self-destruction?

One of the gripping ideas that at least a few interviewees mentioned was their thoughts on the future of the sustainability manager position. Even in this research field, it is interesting that the most often mentioned future scenario was the disappearance of this position. As was shown in the study, this position has an indirect impact on project management, e.g., not changing the theoretical framework but making a shift in the practice; the future of the sustainability manager position can also be related to the project management practices and especially competencies needed for a project manager.

The main reasoning behind the belief that, in the foreseeable future, the sustainability manager position will be outdated is a perspective of **sustainability becoming an integral part of the standard practices and processes in organisations**. If companies ensure that every aspect of the structure has sustainability integrated into their activities, all the sustainability-related topics will be covered by separate people in separate departments. Interviewee II explained: "Human Resources takes care of diversity, equal opportunities, and the employment of people with disabilities. The environmentalist takes care of everything - food waste, say, in his current position - and has time for everything. We have one person here now, and he cannot cover everything. If there is a transport department, it is enlightened and aware and tries to implement driving initiatives. Many people say this is a promising position, but I wonder how it will develop. I think it is probably viable from a ten-year perspective because there are no perfect companies, and there will not be, at least for some time, from a sustainability point of view. But after that, I think it will become this 'hygiene' thing that just everybody does." This view was also echoed by Interviewee VII: "The goal of the sustainability manager, in a general sense, is that his position will not be needed in the future, so that those sustainable processes will appear in every team, and it will be the backbone of the team." A few more sustainability managers interviewed for this research also mentioned the same or similar ideas.

It is an important and interesting finding as the position of sustainability managers in Lithuania is still developing. However, we are already looking forward to more global sustainability trends becoming integral to the organisation's strategic goals and daily activities. Suppose this trend becomes a reality. In the medium or long term, the responsibilities and knowledge attributed to the sustainability managers will be divided into different positions across different departments. In that case, project managers might also have to adapt to this by acquiring new competencies. Yet, as this study focus is not fully aligned with this theme and lacks more support for this topic to be described more deeply, it might be an interesting topic or a sub-topic for a future research on the sustainability topic in Lithuania.

3.7. Challenges for the Sustainability Managers

One of the other not-so-closely research topic-related yet important topics found during the research was the challenges that sustainability managers face. Under this

topic, two challenges the interviewed sustainability managers raised can also be connected to project management and the limitations for the sustainability managers to play any role in influencing it.

The first challenge for sustainability managers is a **lack of habit or systematicity in incorporating sustainability management into processes**. This occurs when the initiatives or processes that could greatly benefit from the sustainability perspective or add to the organisational sustainability goals do not include the sustainability managers in the initiative or process planning. This problem can be specifically problematic if an organisation is of considerable size, with many projects, but the sustainability team is small-scale. Interviewee II explained it when asked whether a project manager comes to consult regarding their project's sustainability: "It does not consult, but ideally should. I find out about certain things too late. (...) There are many projects in retail: assortment, staff, buildings, packaging, waste, etc. In a company, there are, in principle, many projects. Only the biggest ones that meet the criteria are tracked by the project management department. It would probably be impossible for me personally to catch all the small ones, let us say, and there is no habit in the organisation to involve, inform, think about so that a sustainability person could be involved." If there is a lack of inclusion in the big organisation, it limits the possibility of influencing projects for sustainability managers.

Other departments sometimes perceive sustainability as an additional task presenting challenges for sustainability managers. Suppose the ideal situation, shortly described in the previous theme, is not achieved, and sustainability is not an integral part of the processes and initiatives inside an organisation. In that case, it can be left on the secondary role as other employees and departments will focus on their primary duties rather than sustainability initiatives. This problem is understandable and might come from the limitation regarding time and other essential resources in an organisation. An example of a situation like that was presented by Interviewee VIII, where it still occurs despite motivated colleagues: "In general, all processes take quite a long time with sustainability because they are somehow in the background. You still want to do your current work first - the exhibition is due to open in a month. And you can write the guidelines after five months, but then there is another exhibition, and then the guidelines are delayed."

It is complicated to balance if there are processes that cannot be postponed because of their importance to the organisation's functioning. Interviewee V talked about these challenges when sustainability requires more attention from the employees whose primary duties are critical for the company's functioning. Yet, from this example, it can also be seen that despite the delays, it might not have a significant impact on the end product of the specific sustainability initiatives: "Very basically, every department and employee in the company, they have their routine tasks, their duties, what they are responsible for. If, say, last year and this year, we are really developing sustainability more and more in the company, then it is clear that some positions are given additional tasks, where perhaps an additional employee does not necessarily appear. Then, logically, it naturally follows that the employee is still motivated to do his daily mandatory tasks in the first place, which, if he does not do them, might stop production or, I don't know, the logistics chain might stop. If there is a sustainability project that is a little bit extra, like calculating CO2 emissions, where everybody understands that the company will not collapse if we are a month later in calculating CO2 emissions than we had planned, then it just naturally happens that sometimes the priority for the sustainability project is a little bit lower, because there are just more urgent things."

These two challenges are understandable – the organisation's main goal is first to do its primary duties and then try improving it by adding more sustainability (it was also mentioned in one of the previous topics). Yet, these challenges might sometimes limit the impact that sustainability management has on an organisation's projects. It can also be further investigated in other studies.

Conclusion and Recommendations

To provide the theoretical ground for this study and the questionnaire used for the research, more 100 different literature pieces were read and analysed. In the theoretical part, the theory of various leadership concepts, from the historical development of leadership definition to transformative and transactional leadership and adaptive leadership, as well as leadership in project management and sustainable project management, were analysed and synthesised in this thesis.

Following that, the research was based on semi-structured (at least 7 out of 11 questions from the pre-prepared questionnaire were asked in every interview) interviews, and later, narrative analysis was conducted. Nine sustainability managers and sustainability project managers were interviewed. One interviewee answered in written form; others were interviewed orally. Five out of nine speakers requested anonymity (A complete list of speakers can be seen in Table 1). Later, the interviews were transcribed and entered into a matrix with the themes and codes under them connected and analysed using the narrative analysis method. In the end, nine different themes with codes under them were identified (can be seen in Table 2) and turned into a common narrative written down as a research results part of this thesis.

The key findings under the themes closely related to the thesis topic are:

a) Even though sustainability managers do not directly impact the theoretical models of project management, they have an indirect role as sustainability managers sometimes act as project managers and project owners initiating, coordinating, and overseeing projects (in coordinating the compliance actions; being initiators and managers of change initiatives and generally – managing projects).

b) Sustainability managers can directly impact the internal organisational processes by influencing priorities in planning and mainstreaming sustainability into routine processes, working as an internal consultant and taking part in the external stakeholders' evaluation.

c) Sustainability managers can also directly impact the company's products and services by integrating sustainability into the products and services development cycle, adapting products to the circular economy and increasing focus on the social dimension.

d) Leadership (despite its limitations presented in the research) can be seen as a crucial competence for sustainability managers to create change and bring different stakeholders needed for sustainability initiatives. Communication is one of the essential tools for this type of leadership.

Secondary topics, not so closely related to the thesis topic but yet important in supporting it, are:

a) The relationship between business and sustainability is two-fold – companies must be profitable to enact and finance sustainability initiatives. At the same time, sustainability initiatives can generate new flows of profit. It is an essential addition to the challenges and possibilities for sustainability initiatives.

b) There is still an exciting field for research in the future sustainability manager position. Interviewees in this study discussed "self-destruction" as sustainability becomes a part of the standard procedures, not requiring separate managers. It is an important factor that, in the future, might impact the competencies needed for project managers.

c) Some challenges faced by sustainability managers were also identified, such as lack of habit or systematicity in including sustainability managers in the processes and perception of sustainability as a secondary task. It is an important finding as it shows certain limitations for the leadership of sustainability managers.

These study findings suggest that the sustainability manager position and their leadership indirectly impact project management, e.g., not changing the theoretical framework but shifting the practice. All the changes sustainability managers bring into the internal processes, products and services development directly impact the project managers related to it. The direct impact differs in different companies and different departments inside them. However, some effect on the project management in the company with the dedicated sustainability manager is unavoidable. In all this, leadership can be seen as one of the leading soft competencies needed for a sustainability manager. Communication is one of the critical tools to support it. As sustainability is a broad topic, the sustainability manager plays a crucial role in leading the implementation of sustainability initiatives, from setting the agenda with the sustainability strategy to its practical implementation.

Following this, four key recommendations can be made for the sustainability managers to maximise their leadership impact on the projects in their organisations and to make sure that their organisations are more sustainable:

First recommendation – the sustainability manager needs to see the big picture and understand priorities. This is important, as sustainability covers many topics, and it might be easy to get lost between them. "Focus on the substance, i.e., do not get distracted by small and irrelevant aspects, projects and initiatives unrelated to the strategic direction." G. Lomanaitė said. One of the tools to follow this recommendation is to have a sustainability strategy that will help you to see strategic goals that the organisation's higher management agrees with. "Have a strategy, a clear direction of where you are going. Then it's clearer for everybody if you get the message out there that we focus on people with disabilities; everybody in the organisation knows. Then, if there are questions, it's immediately: yes, maybe we need to consult." Interviewee II said and highlighted that having a strategy also assists with leading the sustainability initiatives and getting a clear message about sustainability priorities to other employees.

The second recommendation is that sustainability managers must continuously maintain solid internal communication and ensure education. This followed the first recommendation and was widely discussed under the themes of sustainability manager as leader and communicator. Sustainability is often about change, and as with any other change we want to make in our organisation or its processes, we must clearly understand the current situation, possible solutions, and what impact it might have. As explained by I. Bimbirytė-Yun, communication and education might be a crucial tool in initiating sustainability-related changes: "Because you cannot do something differently if you do not know what it is about and how it benefits you. That is probably the first step, which is what we are also working on a lot from the very beginning, and that is exactly the training inside the company – the talking, the educating." Interviewee VII also added that communication and education can help address one of the issues found during the research – making sustainability an integral part of the organisational system, not some added task: "In my opinion, this is one of the main things that a sustainability manager has to do, and to be able to educate all the departments in the company, that sustainability has to be part of their work as a systematic part of their work and not as a KPI in addition to all the other KPIs that they

already have. Because, unfortunately, very often, I find that it is one KPI on top of all the others, which are perhaps being pursued in an unsustainable way."

The third recommendation is that the sustainability manager should support bottom-up initiatives. People who work directly with specific organisational tasks, like logistics, design or production, can be the most knowledgeable about their respective processes. They can also be the ones who can offer the best ways to make their respective field more sustainable. Therefore, they should have an opportunity to express their ideas. Or, as described by I. Bimbiryte-Yun, be "sustainability ambassadors": "That is probably the main objective, so that, as you say, everybody who works in his or her field becomes, in a way, an ambassador for sustainability." It can also be connected to the previous recommendation, as described by Interviewee II, communication can also add to encouraging people to propose ideas: "If you communicate a lot in the company, there would just be a lot more of these people, with these ideas, and change would come much more naturally, there would be a lot more of them, and they would be executed more successfully."

The fourth recommendation is that sustainability managers should be creative, lead by example, and constantly improve their knowledge. This recommendation is rather broad and connects a few soft competencies. A sustainability manager should be one who can see possibilities for positive change and find creative ways to do it. As described by A. Nikitin: "But a sustainability manager also has to be creative to find those themes and convince people that it is important." Following education, sustainability managers have continuously improved their knowledge and provided the high-quality expertise needed for sustainability in organisations to succeed. As described by I. Bimbirytė-Yun: "What a sustainability manager can do is to educate his colleagues, educate his managers. And to show that whole value, whatever it is, not only in terms of values but also through the whole financial prism, the prism of compliance. To do that, you must also spend a lot of time and attention to understand all those changes and continuously improve yourself." Lastly, sustainability managers should lead by example, not only requiring the change but also being the change; this will help you ensure that sustainability becomes important in your company. "If a business has a backbone, sustainability must be one of its vertebrae. It cannot be an arm or a leg. In my view, what is very important is that integral approach, whether in terms of leadership, your soft skills, your professionalism and your perfect

knowledge of both business management and sustainability and the integration of these two approaches." Interviewee VIII said.

Despite these recommendations being somewhat subjective, as they come from the practitioners, they can be helpful, especially for those who want to begin their sustainability manager career in Lithuania. Also, they reflect some of the themes covered in this research, adding a more practical view on some of the more theoretical issues debated in the study.

As the sustainability sector in Lithuania is still developing, there are still many possibilities to repeat the same research after two or three years. It was also possible to observe the opportunity for research on the same topic from a different perspective by interviewing other sustainability-related stakeholders (like their senior management, heads of various departments, casual workers, etc.) or repeating the same research using the quantitative research methods. Also, further research on the future of sustainability managers and sustainability project managers professions can be an exciting and worthwhile research topic.

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Annexes
Annex 1: Research questionnaire

Bendrieji klausimai:

1. Jūsų vardas ir pavardė, atstovaujama įmonė (*Jeigu sutinkate, kad ši informacija būtų pateikta magistro darbo tyrime*):

2. Konkretus Jūsų pareigų pavadinimas:

3. Sektorius, kuriame veikia Jūsų atstovaujama įmonė:

Jūsų darbo ryšys su projektų vadyba ir lyderyste:

4. Kaip trumpai apibūdintumėte savo pagrindines užduotis Jūsų atstovaujamoje organizacijoje?

5. Kokį ryši Jūsų užimamos pareigos turi su įvairių organizacijoje vystomų projektų vadyba? Ar Jūsų veikla apima tik tiesiogiai su tvarumu susijusius projektus, ar prisidedate ir prie tiesioginių sąsajų su tvarumu neturinčių projektų planavimo, vykdymo ar įvertinimo?

6. Kokį vaidmenį Jūsų kasdienei darbo veiklai turi Jūsų lyderystės įgūdžiai? Ar Jums dažnai prireikia imtis lyderystės (prisiimant atsakomybę už didelius projektus, juos inicijuojant) įgyvendinant kasdienes užduotis?

Kaip dera projektų vadyba ir tvarumo temos

7. Nors visuomenės nuomonių apklausos rodo, kad ir Lietuvoje, ir pasaulyje nuosekliai didėja klimato kaitą ir kitus tvarumo iššūkius suvokiančių žmonių dalis, tačiau išlieka ir nemažai skeptikų. Dažnai kalbama, kad būtent dėl šios priežasties su tvarumu dirbantys žmonės privalo turėti puikius komunikacijos ir lyderystės įgūdžius, kurie leistų su tvarumo tikslais nesusipažinusiems arba jiems prieštaraujantiems kolegoms paaiškinti kylančius iššūkius, kompanijos tvarumo strategiją ir kodėl visa tai yra svarbu. Ar sutinkate su tokiu teiginiu? Kokia Jūsų profesinė patirtis šiuo klausimu?

8. Tvarią lyderystę tyrinėjantys mokslininkai ir praktikai teigia, kad projektų vadovai gali įnešti po nedidelę dalelę tvarumo į kiekvieną projektą tiek mažomis detalėmis, kaip kasdienis perdirbto popieriaus naudojimas, ar didesniais

planavimo sprendimais, kaip sukurtų produktų pritaikymas žiedinei ekonomikai. Kokius pokyčius dėmesys darniam vystymuisi įneša į standartinius Jūsų įmonės procesus?

Tvarumo vadovo įtaka projektų vadybai Jūsų įmonėje

9. Pažvelkime giliau į Jūsų įmonės atvejį. Kaip manote, kokią įtaką bendrai taikomoms projektų vadybos praktikoms Jūsų įmonėje turi tvarumo vadovas / tvarumo projektų vadovas? Ar kitų sričių projektų vadovai dažnai su Jumis konsultuojasi dėl to, kaip jų projektus padaryti tvaresnius?

10. Literatūroje ir tyrimuose apie tvarumą ir tvarią lyderystę neretai kalbama apie tai, jog pelnas neturėtų būti pagrindinis siekinys, jeigu jis neatitinka tvarumo principų. Kaip manote, kaip galima suderinti šiuos dalykus, vertinant įmonėje vystomus skirtingus komercinius projektus? Kokį vaidmenį čia atlieka organizacijų kuriami socialiniai projektai?

11. Kaip manote, kokie yra pagrindiniai 2 dalykai, kuriuos tvarumo vadovas / tvarumo projektų vadovas gali padaryti tam, jog jo atstovaujama organizacija kasdien dirbtų vis tvariau?