



**VILNIUS UNIVERSITY**  
BUSINESS SCHOOL

Tolmantas Dagys

Master's Thesis

**TEAM LEADER'S PRACTICES FOR OVERCOMING INEFFICIENCY IN A TEAM**

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## SUMMARY

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TEAM LEADER'S PRACTICES FOR OVERCOMING INEFFICIENCY IN A TEAM

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*A short description of the Master thesis:* Team leader is responsible for his team performance. He must know the main aspects, which make a team efficient and according to that use management practices to create an efficient team. If the team leader does not manage a team at a very early stage of a new project with successful practices, later it will be more difficult to do that. There will be more room left for inefficiency in a team to appear because of dysfunctional behaviour among team members. In a case of dysfunctional behaviour among team members, the team leader must react and apply successful practices that will protect the team from unwanted inefficiency to appear and decrease of team performance.

*Aims and objectives of Master thesis:* To define and investigate main aspects, which makes team efficient and according to that identify team leaders' practices to create efficiency in a team or in other words, practices to overcome the inefficiency in a team. The objectives are to analyse related literature, conduct interviews with team leaders, and collect practical suggestions and successful practices.

*Methods used in Master thesis:* An explanatory and discussing literature review was performed for theoretical chapters. For the research part, the qualitative research was conducted with 7 interviewed respondents. Information was grouped into sections around research questions, that information was interpreted and provided in the results part.

*Research carried out and results obtained:* Respondents confirmed aspects for the efficient team and implementation provided many practices from their own experience.

*Main conclusion:* Team leader needs to use successful practices and create efficiency in a team from the early beginning of a project and use those practices whenever there are changes among team members or dysfunctional behavior issues appear among current members of a team.

## SANTRAUKA

VILNIAUS UNIVERSITETAS

VERSLO MOKYKLA

TARPTAUTINĖS PROJEKTŲ VADYBOS PROGRAMA

STUDENTAS TOLMANTAS DAGYS

SĖKMINGOS VADOVO PRAKTIKOS ĮVEIKIANT EFEKTYVUMO IŠŠŪKIUS KOMANDOJE

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*Trumpas darbo apibūdinimas:* Vadovas yra atsakingas už savo komandos darbo rezultatus. Tam, kad užtikrintų sėkmingą komandos darbą, jis turi išmanyti pagrindinius aspektus, kurie lemia komandos efektyvumą ir pagal tai pritaikyti atitinkamas praktikas, kad sukurtų efektyvią komandą. Jeigu vadovas nepasinaudos sėkmingomis praktikomis ir nesuvaldys komandos ankstyvosiomis projekto stadijomis, vėliau tai padaryti bus tik sunkiau. Bus išsisknijęs efektyvumą griauantis elgesys tarp komandos narių. Tokiais atvejais komandos vadovas turi reaguoti neatidėliotinai ir pritaikyti sėkmingas praktikas, kurios apsaugotų komandą nuo neefektyvaus darbo, tarpusavio bendravimo ir prastų darbo rezultatų.

*Darbo tikslai ir uždaviniai:* Apibrėžti ir iširti pagrindinius aspektus, kurie lemia komandos efektyvumą ir atsižvelgiant į tai nustatyti vadovo praktikas efektyvumo sukūrimui komandoje arba kitais žodžiais, praktikas kurios padeda įveikti neefektyvumą komandoje. Uždaviniai yra susijusios literatūros analizė, interviu atlikimas su vadovais bei praktinių patarimų ir sėkmingų praktikų surinkimas.

*Darbe naudoti tyrimo metodai:* Literatūros apžvalga ir kokybinis tyrimas – 7 interviu su vadovais. Atlikus interviu, garso įrašai buvo transkribuoti, jų informacija buvo paskirstyta pagal temas, interpretuota ir pateikta rezultatų dalyje.

*Atlikti tyrimai ir gauti rezultatai:* Respondentai pripažino nagrinėjamus efektyvios komandos aspektus ir jų įgyvendinimui pateikė praktinius metodus iš savo patirties.

*Pagrindinės išvados:* Vadovams yra labai svarbu naudoti sėkmingas vadovavimo praktikas ir kurti efektyvią komandą nuo pat projekto pradžios. Taip pat vadovas turi naudoti šias praktikas kiekvieną kartą, kai būna pasikeitimų komandos sudėtyje arba kai išlenda komandos efektyvumą griaunantys poelgiai tarp esamų komandos narių.

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## INTRODUCTION

**Relevance of the topic.** Organizations rely on teams – their work and results show how successful is the organization. For this matter directors, managers, investors and all other people who are seeking maximum performance and profit out of the organization are interested in how to facilitate teams in every project more efficiently. The main job is on the team leader's shoulders. He is the main element in the team, who can make it work, or make it fail. Depending on his behaviour, acts, and practices he uses in his everyday work life, the team can be very efficient or it can be doomed for disaster. None organization wants to have inefficient or poorly performing teams.

There are many organizations, which at some point fail, bankrupt, or are in a much worse position than their competitors. In many cases, it's the fault of team leaders who fail to create efficient teams by not knowing, determining, and overcoming inefficiency problems in their teams. This leads to ineffective teams, which do not possess great performance for the organization. The team leaders must know aspects from which appear inefficiency in a team and know how to overcome them to successfully lead a team and bring high results from his projects to the organization.

**Problem description.** Team performance and results are the best when the team is fully efficient. However, team efficiency is dependant on many aspects. It gets affected when some kind of dysfunctional behavior appears in the team. The longer it stays within the team without proper acts from a team leader for overcoming it – the more dysfunctional behavior becomes a norm in the team, spreads around different members, and creates inefficiency in a team. For a team leader, it's vital to know what kind of aspects lead to inefficiency in a team and how to manage team members' behaviors & attitudes, so the team would be fully efficient.

**The aim of the thesis** is to identify team leaders applied practices for overcoming inefficiency in international project teams such as conflicts and accountability.

### **The objectives of the thesis:**

- 1) To overview the concept of an efficient team, conflicts & lack of accountability topics as sources from where inefficiency in a team can appear, and team leader's practices for overcoming inefficiency in an international project team
- 2) To develop a framework for conducting qualitative research of successful team leader's practices phenomena for overcoming inefficiency in an international project team
- 3) To perform research and collect team leaders' practical suggestions and successful practices for overcoming inefficiency in the international project team



- 4) To organize the research results and provide recommendations for team leaders on how successfully overcome inefficiency in the international project team

**Research methods of the thesis:**

An explanatory and discussing literature review was performed for the theoretical part. To conduct the research, a qualitative research approach using an interview has been applied. Information from interviews was grouped into sections around research questions. Those sections consist of different ideas and after interpretation, they were provided in the results part.

# 1. THEORETICAL APPROACH TO TEAM LEADER'S PRACTICES FOR OVERCOMING INEFFICIENCY IN A TEAM

## 1.1. Concept of bad behavior leading to inefficiency in a team

One of the daily duties for managers is to constantly look at how to reduce costs and maximize productivity, but often managers fail to see the expense of bad behavior from one or another member of the team. If team members are acting improperly towards one another, it creates inefficiency for individuals as well as the teams, since all of them are losing time, energy, focus, effort, creativity, loyalty, trust, commitment, and other necessary abilities (PORATH and PEARSON 2010).

According to Griffin and Lopez (Griffin and Lopez 2005), bad behavior of team members refers to any act that has a probability to negatively affect an organization, its teams, or individuals from the teams. In other words, bad behavior reflects team members' acts that organizations would prefer not to have in their culture because it's impairing effectiveness.

In the review of (Lawrence and Robinson 2007) on the term "bad behavior" of team members, they noticed that the spread and costs of such negative behavior leading to poor effectiveness are large. This thesis is focused on overcoming bad behavior occurring between team members and as recommended by Griffin and Lopez (Griffin and Lopez 2005) it's called dysfunctional behavior.

Table 1. *Definitions for Bad Behavior*

Behavior	Definition and Forms
Dysfunctional behavior	Behavior that has negative consequences for another team member, the whole team, or the organization itself
Workplace deviance	Behaviors that are out of social norms Destructive deviance (Constructive deviance) <sup>a</sup>
Workplace aggression	Very assertive psychological behavior towards a team member, whole team, or the organization itself Destructive aggression (Constructive aggression) <sup>a</sup>
Workplace violence	Very assertive physical behavior towards a team member, whole team, or the organization itself
Antisocial behavior	Another term for dysfunctional behavior
a. Positive analog for mentioned bad behavior.	

Source: Griffin, Ricky W., and Yvette P. Lopez. 2005. "Bad Behavior" in Organizations: A Review and Typology for Future Research." *Journal of Management* 31 (6): 1001.

For this thesis, dysfunctional behavior of team members is defined as noticeable behavior by one or few team members that are a threat to smooth team functioning. Dysfunctional behaviors in the teams complicate team processes and goals (Robinson and O’Leary-Kelly 1998) and damages norms that are vital for efficient team performance (Felps, Mitchell, and Byington 2006).

In (Cole, Walter, and Bruch 2008) research dysfunctional team behavior is described as bad acts from one individual, but eventually, it affects all team members because of mutual interactions. This means inefficiency in a team starts from one person’s dysfunctional behavior and it progress all over the team by intoxicating other members. (Felps, Mitchell, and Byington 2006) affirm that even a single disruptive member is the issue for the whole team functioning.

(Cole, Walter, and Bruch 2008) in their research also provided a connection between dysfunctional behavior in a team and team performance. They tested a model that provides guidelines to understand why team performance declines because of dysfunctional behavior in a team.

For this reason, team leaders should take proper actions to overcome dysfunctional behavior in their project teams to keep their teams efficient (Lawrence and Robinson 2007). The things they have to do include strong communication of behavioral norms with team members, prevention and management of team conflicts, elimination of negative role models, continuous strengthening of team harmony, and raising team members’ awareness of organizational and team goals. (Cole, Walter, and Bruch 2008).

## **1.2. Models for overcoming inefficiency in a team to drive team performance**

### **1.2.1. Successful project team**

Successful teams are strong when members are good at working together. That means they have clear and acceptable goals, their communication is open, trustful, respectful, and frequent, members possess a talent for creating and accomplishing ideas, the leader is a great fit for the team needs, and the support along with resources for them are provided smoothly.

The quality of a team is one of the most powerful drivers of organizational success. However, highly efficient teams don’t happen by the miracle. They have to have proper leadership and it takes a chunk of time to progress and mature for a team. (Meuse 2009)

### **1.2.2. Popular models for driving team performance**

There are a few frequently cited team models for driving team efficiency:

- Rubin, Plovnick, and Fry (1977);
- T7 model (1995);

- Katzenbach and Smith (1993);
- LaFasto and Larson (2001);
- Hackman (2002);
- Lencioni (2005).

All of the models are very powerful frameworks to improve work in teams (Meuse 2009). Meuse did a comparison between all of those models (from the T7 model angle) and that led to a discovery that all of the models are very similar to each other in terms of core aspects (Appendix 1).

### **1.2.3. T7 Model for driving team performance**

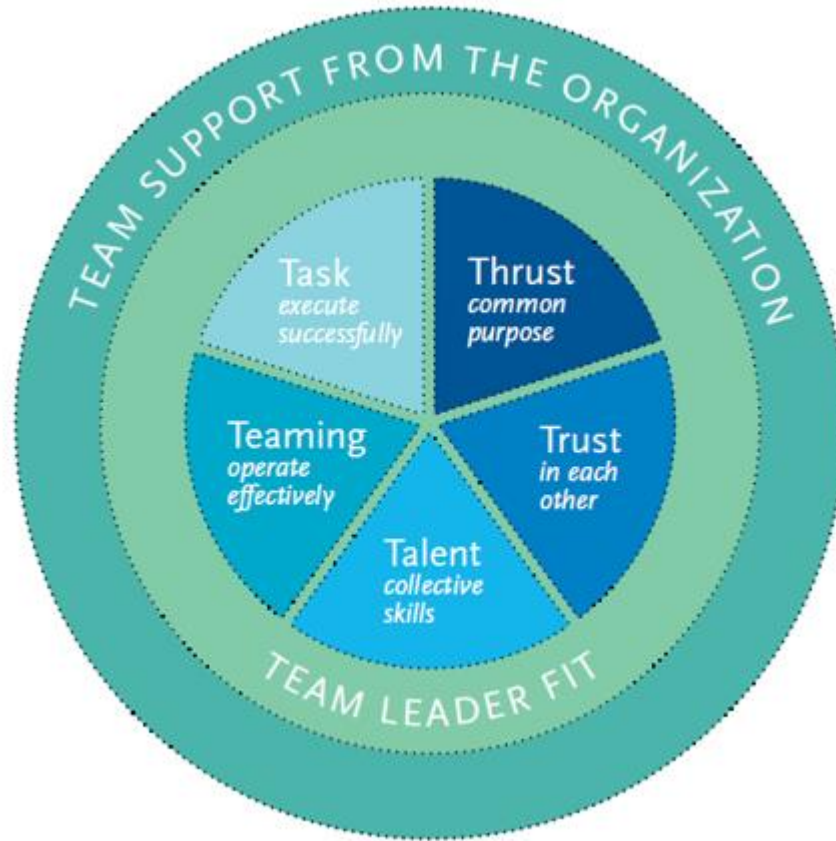
The T7 model was developed in 1995 by Michael Lombardo and Robert Eichinger to understand how teams work by representing the key aspects that influence the performance of work teams. In their research review, they state they identified 7 factors in total, that makes an impact on team efficiency. Five factors are inside the team and two factors outside the team. (Meuse 2009)

Internal team factors are:

- Thrust – a common purpose that needs to be accomplished or in other words - team goals;
- Trust – in each other as teammates;
- Talent – team members skills that let accomplish the job;
- Teaming skills – doing work as a team, not as individuals;
- Task skills – the successful execution of the job.

External team factors are:

- Team leader fit – how successfully team leader understands and satisfies needs of team members;
- Team support from the organization – the amount of leadership help, which enables team performance.

Figure 1. *T7 Model of Team Effectiveness*

Source: Michael Lombardo and Robert Eichinger. 1995. The Team Architect® user's manual.

Each of the factors inside the team can be delineated into dimensions.

Table 2. *Internal factors are divided into dimensions*

Internal Factor	Dimension
Thrust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thrust Management</li> <li>• Thrust Clarity</li> <li>• Thrust Commitment</li> </ul>
Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trust in Truthful Communication</li> <li>• Trust in Actions</li> <li>• Trust Inside the Team</li> </ul>
Talent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talent Acquisition and Enhancement</li> <li>• Talent Allocation and Deployment</li> </ul>
Teaming Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resource Management</li> <li>• Team Learning</li> <li>• Decision Making</li> <li>• Conflict Resolution</li> <li>• Team Atmosphere</li> <li>• Managing Process</li> </ul>
Task Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focusing</li> <li>• Assignment Flexibility</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measurement</li> <li>• Delivering Goods</li> </ul>
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Source: Michael Lombardo and Robert Eichinger. 1995. The Team Architect® user's manual.

All five internal factors must be present for teams to generate high-performance results. However, it's not enough, critical factors are organizational and leadership support for a full structure – without mentioned factors being provided, teams simply cannot perform highly. It does not matter how great a team is on all five internal factors: thrust, trust, talent, teaming skills, and task skills, the team must have external factors as well: the support from the organization and the leadership fit to be efficient (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1995).

Factors and dimensions structure of T7 Model for team efficiency is validated. As the author says “The teams were employed in 50 organizations across a variety of industry sectors (e.g., manufacturing, health care, telecommunications, finance). Whether the data were obtained from the team leader, team members, or were aggregated at the team level, the model was supported” (Meuse 2009, p. 6).

#### **1.2.4. The most popular model for driving team performance**

The most popular model is provided by Patrick Lencioni in his book name book named Five Dysfunctions of a team (Lencioni 2002). This book earned massive success over the world and appeared on American best-seller lists including The New York Times Best Seller List, Business Week, Wall Street Journal, and USA Today (The BusinessWeek Best-Seller List, 2004).

The author of this book states that every team must overcome different types of dysfunctional behaviors among team members to become a great performing team. Those types of different behaviors are even sorted into stages in sequence order. Meaning, by overcoming one kind of dysfunctional behavior in the team, you will hit another, and only after overcoming this, you will be able to overcome the third one and so on. The overall author distinguishes five types of groups dysfunctional behavior in a sequence order as described in the following paragraph.

The first dysfunctional behavior among team members is an unwillingness to be vulnerable within their colleagues in the team. This type of behavior indicates a lack of trust in the team. As Patrick Lencioni says “team members who are not genuinely open with one another about their mistakes and weaknesses make it impossible to build a foundation for trust”.

By not being vulnerable within the group and not creating trust in the team, the team is unable to effectively function in terms of conflicts. From there occurs second behavior having a negative impact among team members named fear of conflicts according to Patrick Lencioni. “Teams that lack trust is

incapable of engaging in an unfiltered and passionate debate of ideas. Instead, they resort to veiled discussions and guarded comments.”

When teams do not have healthy conflicts and efficient discussions, they are not capable to genuinely committing to the same work direction. This is the third stage of dysfunctional behavior, which occurs if team members do not express their opinions with a passionate and open debate. When people are left unheard or if they do not participate in the discussion, they are not engaged to commit the decisions made during those meetings.

After the commitment to the decisions, which direction the team should work, and what tasks to do, there happens next negative behavior called avoidance of accountability. When team members do not buy-in for real into the decisions and work direction of the team, they aren't interested to take full responsibility for their and other team members' work. Even if people by themselves are very motivated, without commitment to a clear plan of actions, they hesitate to call their team members on behaviors that are counterproductive for the good of the team.

The last behavior having a negative impact on the team performance is inattention to results. If team members do not hold each other accountable for the team results, it creates an environment where members of the team put their individual needs such as career development, ego, or recognition above the collective goals of the team (Lencioni 2002).

Figure 2. *Five aspects creating inefficiency in a team*



Source: Lencioni, Patrick. 2002. *The Five Dysfunctions of A Team: A Leadership Fable*.

### **1.2.5. Team leader's role in building efficient teams**

According to different popular models, there are many similarities to the behavior problems between team members, which drive down team performance. There might be different wording for each stage of dysfunctional behavior leading to an inefficiency in a team, but they consist of the same core elements.

According to Parker (Parker 1990), a leader with the right skill set is the most essential factor to create efficiency in a team. A good leader has to motivate team members by setting clear goals and vision for the team, while also he takes the lead in motivating team members to create a teamwork environment, where teammates take responsibilities on their own and co-operate with each other. In other words, the successful team leader must know how to deal with all dysfunctional behaviors among team members mentioned in those models and use correct practices to create efficiency in a team.

The following parts of the theoretical analysis of this research paper are made to cover inefficiency in a team created by conflicts & lack of joint accountability among team members and team leader's practices for overcoming it.

## **1.3. Conflicts in projects & team leader's overcoming practices**

### **1.3.1. Types of conflicts**

Conflicts depending on their traits are categorized into 3 different types: relationship, process, and task. Relationship and process conflicts are bad for teams. They disrupt processes and as a result, lower performance. However, a team that members engage frequently in task conflicts – creates higher team performance (Edmondson, Amy & McLain 2006).

Relationship conflict is negative for team performance because it has a tendency to create tensions among team members and causes team members to spend their time on issues that are not relevant to the tasks. It also decreases team members' willingness to communicate with each other as well as their commitment to the team. Teams that experience high levels of relationship conflict tend to have relatively poor performance and team members are more dissatisfied. Also, because of the high level of relationship conflict team members tend to be less trusting of each other, and are less likely to show organizational teamwork behaviors, such as being supportive and helping other team members (Choi & Sy, 2010).

Process conflict is negatively related to team outcomes too. Process conflict occurs from the discussion of process issues that causes a negative effect. Discussable process issues are like who will do what, who will be responsible for certain aspects of the project, etc. There is a thin line for this discussion to be taken "personally" among team members and some of them may quickly start



interpreting it as signs of disrespect. Team members, for example, may feel that they are assigned to a certain task because other team members do not believe in their capabilities to perform more complicated tasks. As a result, they may interpret their specific task as a personal insult, which may cause frustration, reduce team members' motivation to work with the team, and hamper the whole team's functioning (Greer, Jehn, and Mannix 2008).

The third type of conflict is task conflict and it consists of disagreements dealing with the content and outcomes of a task. Moreover, task conflict is conceptualized as differences among team members in opinion relating to work or business decisions. In comparison, in the meanwhile relationship conflict pertains to personality differences and interpersonal tensions. The findings of the reasearches further suggested that teams can benefit from task conflict, however, this strongly depends on specific contextual characteristics. Task conflict and team performance, for example, were more positively related among studies where the correlations between task conflict and relationship were weak (rather than strong) (Marrone 2013).

### **1.3.2. Performance of project teams correlation with conflicts**

There are at least three different indicators to determine the performance of project teams: the extent to which a project team meets its goals, whether it does so within the boundaries of the budget and schedule assigned to it, and whether the output is of high quality. It is very unlikely for a project team to score high on these performance indicators if there are high levels of relationship conflict. First, it's because a relationship conflict causes team members to spend time and energy on issues that are not related to the task. As a result, this problem makes it more difficult for a project team to stay within the boundaries of the budget and schedule assigned to it. Second, as mentioned before, relationship conflict tends to hurt relationships between team members. It, for example, makes it less likely for team members to trust each other or to act in organizational teamwork behavior and be truly committed to their team. As a result of mentioned causes, relationship conflicts make it less likely that project teams will reach their goals and deliver high-quality outputs (Choi & Sy, 2010).

### **1.3.3. How to profit from the conflict?**

The most important factor determining if the team can profit from task conflict seems to be the absence (vs. presence) of relationship conflict. Analysis of the intragroup conflict literature has shown that the relation between task conflict and team performance has been more positive among studies that reported a weak relation between task and relationship conflict. This suggests that teams may benefit from task conflict, but only when there is no room for disagreement among team members about more personal issues. Also, it was found that when there is an absence or just a little relationship of conflict

in the team, moderate levels of task conflict may create superior performance levels. However, when teams experience relatively high levels of relationship conflict, task conflict affects team performance in a negative way (Marrone 2013).

A necessary aspect in preventing a task conflict from occurring together with relationship conflict is to prevent a task conflict from triggering a relationship conflict. However, to manage this, is difficult, because members of the team quite often take task conflicts too personally. As a result, task conflicts are quite often perceived as personal attacks and misinterpreted as relationship conflicts as they become a trigger to relationship conflicts (Simons & Peterson, 2000; Yang & Mossholder, 2004).

A crucial factor that may prevent task conflict from triggering relationship conflict is to ensure a psychological safety feeling among team members. For example, the belief by team members that the team consists of a safe atmosphere for interpersonal risk-taking, such as criticizing another member's viewpoint and bringing up alternative ideas (Edmondson and Nembhard 2009).

(Bradley et al. 2012) found that task conflicts have a more positive impact on team performance when members of a team experience high levels of psychological safety. Team members working in a safe environment feel a sense of openness and stay away from interpreting task disagreements personally. Psychological safety feeling among team members is likely to be the highest when team members approach each other's diverging viewpoints in an open and considerate manner and when there is a team leader's input in encouragement and welcoming of those inputs. Together these factors cause team members to feel freer to express a diverging viewpoint and to approach others in a less competitive and more understanding manner.

Furthermore, it was found that moderate levels of task conflict resulted in the highest Team innovation performance, compared to low or high levels of task conflict. One of the reasons for this effect appeared to be that moderate levels of task conflict facilitated the excellent exchange of information between team members, as well as more collaborative problem-solving decisions (Marrone 2013).

Considering the timing when the task conflict should appear, so the team may benefit, it's found that perfect timing for task conflict is the first stages of the project life cycle. It's because, during the beginning of the project, teams formulate their task strategy. Task conflict allows team members to share, debate, and integrate their diverging opinions regarding the strategy, so during the first stages of the project cycle, task conflict may facilitate better elaboration on information, and therefore lead to excellent strategies and team efficiency (Ford and Sullivan 2004).

Additionally, as (Farh and Lee 2010) note, during the early stages of a project life cycle, team members are keener to dedicate their energy and time to address the diverging opinions. This becomes

much more difficult during the more mature phases of the project because changing the course of action will not come easily and without costs. The timing of the task conflict will determine whether it will have a positive effect on team performance or not.

All the information provided above shows that project teams have a tendency to be hurt by process and relationship conflicts, but may benefit from task conflict. It also shows that the positive impact of a task conflict depends on specific moderating characteristics: teams should make sure they do not experience a relationship conflict and there should be created a psychologically safe environment among team members. All of that is the responsibility of the team leader. Additionally, research shows that the level of task conflict should be kept at moderate levels and not occur too frequently, and can be stimulated at the early stages of a project life cycle, rather than the later stages when it will be harder to change anything and it will require additional resources. This information is inevitable for a good team leader to cope correctly with the conflicts and increase team efficiency out of conflicts among team members.

#### **1.3.4. “Hot” vs “Cool” topics**

To successfully increase team performance having a frequent task conflict, there are 3 conditions to be met. First, the task conflict must not trigger opposing belief systems, interests, or values in the team. For example, if some members of the team believe that good design sells products while others believe that customers are primarily motivated by price, a conflict that puts design against price triggers these opposing beliefs. The second condition is met if accurate analysis of facts, such as financial data or engineering tests, can be done to reduce or eliminate key uncertainties that support different options. Third, the stakes should be low or only moderately high among team members (Edmondson, Amy & McLain 2006).

When those conditions are met, the topics are considered as “cool topics” and they can be addressed by discussing the facts, with zero to the little risk of giving rise to heated disagreement. In these cases, especially when leaders emphasize the same shared goals and great communication, teams can process conflicts effectively (Edmondson, Amy & McLain 2006).

In contrast, “hot topics” fall under a completely different approach. Hot topics in teams are those for which:

- relevant uncertainties surrounding the topic or decision cannot be reduced or eliminated by a review of the available facts;
- differing (usually taken-for-granted) values, belief systems, or interests shape individuals’ points of view, and team members trigger them during the discussion;
- stakes are high.

Under these conditions, relationship conflict has an annoying tendency to show up uninvited, despite managers' best efforts to avoid that. This is because of the way the human mind works.

Table 3. *Contrasting Cool and Hot Topics*

	<b>Cool Topics</b>	<b>Hot Topics</b>
<b>Data</b>	Accessible, relatively objective, conducive to testing of different interpretations	Controversial and/or inaccessible, interpretation, highly subjective, different interpretations, hard to test
<b>Level of Certainty</b>	High*	Moderate to low
<b>Stakes</b>	Low to moderate	High
<b>Goals</b>	Largely shared	Differ based on deeply held beliefs, values, or interests
<b>Discussion</b>	Reasonable, fact-based, collegial	Often emotional, lack of agreement about which facts matter and what they mean, veiled personal attacks likely
* High certainty situations involve present actualities or near-term possibilities that can be illuminated relatively easily through facts and analyses. Low certainty situations involve more distant or future possibilities for which facts don't yet exist, only inferences.		

Source: Edmonson, Amy & McLain. 2006. Too Hot To Handle? How to Manage Relationship Conflict?

### 1.3.5. Conflict management styles

When it comes to managing a conflict, there are usually three approaches: avoiding, collaborating, and competing. These approaches can be seen also as “moving away,” “moving toward,” and “moving against” someone else during a conflict (De Dreu, C. K. W., & Van Vianen 2001). In other words, when people avoid a conflict, they ignore their different viewpoints and leave them for what they are without any discussions. When people decide to collaborate with others during a conflict, they try to find a solution that is acceptable to all – to compromise. When conflict parties compete with each other, they are focussing on winning the debate and trying to have others concede and embrace their ideas (Thomas 1992).

Researchers suggest conflict management styles have a relevant effect on team functioning. For example, compared to competing or avoiding, a collaborative approach during conflict is associated with higher levels of team-directed citizenship behaviors, as well as team performance (Marrone 2013). This is explained by the fact when team members manage a conflict in a collaborative manner, they show concern for other team members. Likewise, they show a motive to cooperate with other members of the team to accomplish the team's goals. Vice versa, when individuals avoid or compete during the conflict,

they show a motive toward their individual concerns and goal accomplishment (DeChurch, Mesmer-Magnus, and Doty 2013).

In project teams, it is likely that conflict management styles in the team moderate the impact of a conflict on team performance. First of all, a collaborative approach is likely to enable task conflict to have a positive effect on team performance. When team members have different task-related ideas, a collaborative approach may facilitate the effective integration of these ideas. Instead, when team members avoid task conflict, team members may fail to consider important alternative viewpoints and then forget possible superior solutions to the task at hand. Likewise, a competitive approach a conflict increases team members' reluctance to disconfirm initial preferences and may lead to damage a group functioning, in both the short term and the long term (Marrone 2013).

Whereas in terms of relationship conflict, research shows that an avoiding response may be most beneficial. By avoiding a relationship conflict (so ignoring the issue at the heart of relationship conflict), group members will be able to concentrate on the task itself. This makes it more likely that project teams attain the goals they have set for themselves and do so within the boundaries of the budget and schedule assigned to the team. Competitive approaches are instead likely to escalate relationship conflicts and make them intractable. This is because the issues at the heart of relationship conflict are often very closely tied to individuals' self-concept, and when this is being attacked, very defensive responses are triggered. The same is true for more compromising approaches. Although the intentions are perhaps more constructive, finding a middle ground is often impossible because sudden changes, in someone's preferences, are very unlikely (De Dreu, C. K. W., & Van Vianen 2001).

### **1.3.6. Conflicts overcoming practices**

With the best of intentions executives seek to exploit the advantages of teamwork, but often encounter conflicts that sabotage collaboration. This is the moment when task conflict gets personal. So, from this moment team leader must work on the elimination of unhealthy conflict. For this matter, team leaders can learn a set of practices to engage both task and relationship conflicts productively, which are called: manage self, manage conversations, and manage relationships (Edmondson, Amy & McLain 2006).

The first practice is to effectively manage self. Managing self is the ability to examine and transform the thoughts and feelings that obscure a person's ability to reason his point calmly when conflicts heat up. Team leaders who wish to be professionals at handling those situations can learn how to manage the thoughts and feelings that arise during discussions of hot topics. This is not like counting to ten or suppressing their emotional reactions. It's rather a reflection on their reactions and reframing the situation, so then becoming less emotionally triggered and more able to calmly ask questions and

consider alternative interpretations. Reflecting and reframing are the hallmarks of a person's cooling system. The more we engage in these two acts, the more we build a capability to enable the cooling system under stress. Practicing reflecting and reframing makes a person's cooling system better at interrupting emotional heatness before it blocks progress.

The great team leader must know how to reflect on spontaneous reactions. Once a conflict triggers an emotional reaction, reflecting can cool a person's own emotions down by switching the automatic "*go*" response into a more deliberate "*know*" response. In making this shift, managers neither ignore their feelings nor act on them; instead, they stop for a minute to examine them. This reflective standpoint allows people to "have their feelings," without letting their feelings "have" them.

Then after reflection goes reframing. When reflecting on their reactions, team leaders are doing a great job by asking the question: "How am I interpreting the situation such I'm reacting this way?" The goal is to bring the manager's framing of the situation to conscious awareness. Effective approaches to managing oneself when a hot topic triggers an emotional response rely on two frames: 1) because of our different beliefs, we will each see things the other misses; 2) we are responsible for discussing our different views so that each of us can learn what we might be missing.

Reflecting and reframing can be enormously difficult when a person's hot system is engaged - this is why a facilitator sometimes may be needed to help team members reflect on and reframe their reactions, so they don't obscure their ability of reasoning. However, this is also where the rest of the team can play a key role. Those who are not directly participating in a debate (not in the hot seat) have easier access to their cool systems and can help others reflect and reframe when they are unable to do so. (Edmondson, Amy & McLain 2006)

In sum, when it comes to hot topics handling, self-management through reflecting and reframing is the foundational practice. Great team leaders should build a sense of understanding between team members that they all have different views and the discussion of those views makes them an effective team.

The second practice is to efficiently manage conversations. The team conversations can be managed in three specific ways:

- Exploring different beliefs among team members – allowing them to see or consider new possibilities;
- Acknowledging emotional reactions openly and exploring causes that led to them;
- Identifying fundamental task conflicts and relationship conflicts and discussing both as needed.

It's possible to exercise and build a team's collective cooling system by reflecting on emotional interactions. Moments of collective reflection build team members' competence in self-regulating. Then it's a reflection, which serves a performance. Only by focusing on interaction, it's possible to promote good decisions. After the reflection, there is a productive engagement in a conflict, where all sides serve the decision-making process and help team members to understand each other and the issues inside the team, also help team members to make a progress as a team.

The third practice is to efficiently manage relationships. The first two practices were about building team relationships that can withstand the temporary emersion of disagreement. This one is about building personal relationships and making them prosper.

It starts by building grounded trust. Managers who take the time to make team members get to know each other as people and to understand each others' goals and concerns are less likely to speculate negatively about each other's motives and more likely to ask one another about their concerns. This is the way to build trust that is grounded in inexperience. Ungrounded negative attributions fuel relationship conflicts that are unproductive. Investing time in getting to know one another helps to prevent this and ensure productivity during discussions. Productive discussion of relationship conflicts requires a clear stated recognition that people see things differently, that each view has strengths and weaknesses, and each team member (especially if there is a managers team) has legitimate interests and concerns. Trust allows the team members to recognize that, even though no one is perfect, everyone is trying to do their best to work through the issues.

Trust helps work through issues, but building trust is better achieved by successfully working through difficult task issues. In this case help from an outsider may be needed - but not to do team building. The best way to develop a self-reinforcing cycle of trust is to help teams deal constructively with real conflicts. With a bit of grounded trust, team members are better prepared to use moments when conflicts break out to strengthen their relationships. (Edmondson, Amy & McLain 2006)

Another thing for team leaders to manage relationships effectively is to invest in key relationships. Since not all relationships are equal, team leaders should know which relationships have more impact on the company's welfare, so there they could invest more time and expect greater benefit. Those types of relationships are along organizational faultlines - connections where tensions build and eruptions occur causing the damage. In those relationships, all of the agreements on strategy or action are essential, but very difficult as well.

There is a very useful tool for managing relationship conflicts, which is called mapping interaction patterns. Many conflicts become unproductive because people don't understand the dynamics of interpersonal interaction. There is a thing that affects what you think, then it affects what you say and then what other people think next, and so on. If we do not see our contribution to the other's behavior,

we feel blameless when we encounter an interpersonal problem. Team members by observing and mapping interactions can strengthen their key relationships and help each other to reframe their roles in a conflict. The discipline of mapping requires paying attention to what people are doing, not why they're doing it. It's to the behaviors or actions of the people around the table, not their intentions or motives.

More generally, researchers found that team leader who learns to map relationship dynamics help team members avoid behaviors that cause uncontrollable conflicts. This is because maps show the nature of relationship conflict - how each party acts in ways that, firstly, worsen the others' negative attributions and, secondly, indirectly feedback to intensify rather than resolve the conflict. In this way, maps reveal the ways people contribute to creating or worsening the very problems they want to solve. This makes mapping a critical managerial competence for relationships that affect the speed and quality of core business decisions. Although initially difficult to master, this competence helps team leaders navigate all kinds of conflicts (Edmondson, Amy & McLain 2006).

#### **1.4. Accountability in projects & team leader's overcoming practices for lack of it**

##### **1.4.1. Concept of accountability**

Project work teams' performance critically depends on everyone pulling and contributing for the same unified goal. Individual members who simply show up at meetings to express their opinions but do not put in any work, worsen performance and demoralize the active team members. Value in the team has to be earned through real work and productive contribution to the team deliverables. In other words, team members who obtain the benefits of membership without doing their share cannot be tolerated. It's not that every member must contribute the same amount of time to team activities. Depending on the role and on the topic, engagement between team members is different due to their duties (Holtzman and Anderberg 2011).

Another author mentions that high-performing teams develop a common commitment to their working relationships. Team members must agree on who will do what, by mentioning certain responsibilities, how schedules will be set, what skills need to be developed, and how the team will make and modify decisions. An efficient team establishes social commitment among members that relates to their purpose and obligates how they work together. ("Practical Approaches to Addressing 5 Dysfunctions of a Team," n.d.)

Highly efficient teams are made of members that hold themselves collectively accountable. To set responsibilities for everyone individually is critical, but high-performing teams on top of that find ways to keep the collective accountability (Bolman and Deal, 2003). Top performing teams peers immediately and respectfully confront one another when problems arise. Not only does this drive greater



innovation, trust, and productivity, but also it frees the team leader from being the playground monitor (Grenny 2014).

In other words, it can be said that in the weakest teams, there is no accountability. In mediocre teams, team leaders are the source of accountability, while in high-performing teams, members manage the vast majority of performance problems with one another (Grenny 2014).

The role of the team leader should not be to solve problems or constantly monitor the team, it should be to create a team culture where colleagues address concerns immediately, directly, and respectfully with each other. It takes time to make it, but the return on this investment happens fast as lost time is regained and problems are solved faster and more effectively. (Grenny 2014)

Those teams, which lack mutual accountability for performance are teams that failed at shaping a common purpose and approach to sustain them as a team. Individual accountability is not enough. The team that is only individually accountable is lacking either a common team purpose, mutual agreement on how best to proceed, work or product goals, or all of them. To look at the contrast, a group of people who are fully committed and accountable for team results, it can be seen that they have both: mutually agreed on approach and strong purpose as a team (Smith and Katzenbach 1993).

To know what's the situation in the team, it's good to measure a sense of mutual accountability. This can be done by answering these questions:

- 1) Are you individually and as a team accountable for the team's purpose, goals, works and approach?
- 2) Can you measure progress in reaching specific goals, and do you do that?
- 3) Do members feel responsible for all measures?
- 4) Is it clear for members what they are individually responsible for and what they are responsible for as a team?
- 5) Is there a culture that "only a team can fail"?

Answering those questions shows the degree to which team functions as a real team. Also, helps to determine how it can be strengthened to increase team performance. Answering questions honestly may reveal a hard challenge that was not seen from the side, but managing this challenge correctly will accelerate the progress of the team and full potential can be achieved (Smith and Katzenbach 1993).

### 1.4.2. Methods to increase accountability

An increase in accountability starts with the team leader. He is the one, who must hold correct behavior and be experienced enough to serve culture in the team around accountability among different team members (“Practical Approaches to Addressing 5 Dysfunctions of a Team,” n.d.).

The team leader has to reinforce accountability and it’s done not by adding more pressure on team members and forcing them to take responsibility, but by asking questions about why they are avoiding accountability. When peers believe their team leader is counting on them and they know the leader has confidence in their ability to perform, it becomes much easier for them to accept accountability (Sensenig 2008).

In the research done by Grenny, it was found that health of a relationship in a team and an organization can be approximated by measuring the average lag time between identifying and discussing problems. The shorter the lag time, the faster problems are solved and it strengthens relationships. The longer the lag, the more space there is for mistrust and negative behavior to appear. Team leaders’ work is to reduce this gap. The best he can do is to develop a culture of joint accountability. There are some ways how to create this kind of norm:

1. Set expectations. The team leader should inform new team members that he wants and expects them to hold himself and others accountable.
2. Tell stories. The team leader should tell commendable examples of colleagues addressing accountability concerns. Especially when they take a great risk by holding team leaders accountable. Observational learning is a strong form of influence, and storytelling is the best way to make it happen.
3. Model it. The team leader should confront concerns directly to his peers. Only by doing that team leader can expect the same from his team members. Otherwise, they will model negative behavior of team leader, for example griping about his peers to others.
4. Teach it. The greatest leaders are teachers. The team leader should select the skills that in his opinion are the most important for holding “crucial conversations” - and take from 5 to 10 minutes in a team meeting to teach one skill at a time. The best way to practice is on real-life examples, especially those that happened recently. Team members may complain, but this teaching will make a big difference in retention and transference to real life.
5. Set the “it takes two to escalate” rule. If there is a struggle with lots of escalations for the team leader, he should set a rule that “it takes two to escalate” which means that both team members need to agree they can’t solve an issue at their level before they bring it to the team leader (Grenny 2014).

Another author is talking about including clear benefits for team members to receive as a necessary thing for team members to hold accountability among each other. These benefits can be taken in many different forms: the emotional-psychological reward of doing meaningful and interesting work, a learning experience that will add points for a future career, or an extra money bonus. In the absence of clear benefits, team members will not contribute to joint accountability at a high level for a long time. The benefits team members get from their regular job duties, take their attention, and make team duties a secondary priority.

Also, a supportive environment, in other words, trust between team members, plays a big role for a team to hold joint accountability. Business depends on the organizational environment for resources, information, and assistance. The extent to which colleagues are supportive, indifferent, or hostile to the team and its goals is having a huge impact on team efficiency. Further, there are listed environmental factors, which team leader needs to consider.

1. Leadership support. Support from the leader is essential. Leaders help to ensure resources and recruit the right people. Leadership support also provides protection from departments that for some reason could interfere with the team objectives and goals.
2. Nonhierarchical team structure. Team-based work has more chances to be successful if the organization does not work according to a rigid hierarchical structure. A non-hierarchical structure creates favorable habits to team-based work: a willingness to share information, collaboration across the organization, and employee empowerment. For comparison, if bosses do all the thinking and directing everyone – that kind of structure creates habits that are not team-based.
3. Motivating reward system. As mentioned before, team leaders should create a difference between individual and team-based success rewards.
4. Experience with team-based work. Teams benefit the most when the organization and individual team members have a lot of experience with team-based work. Experience gives knowledge of what works, what's the best way to organize around a goal, how to collaborate as a team, how to alter the team at different points in its life cycle, and what shouldn't be done because it's simply not working. It's good to provide some training on team methods. Team members need help with skills like communicating with different kinds of people, listening, collaborating with people from different departments, and staying focused on the common goal (Holtzman and Anderberg 2011).

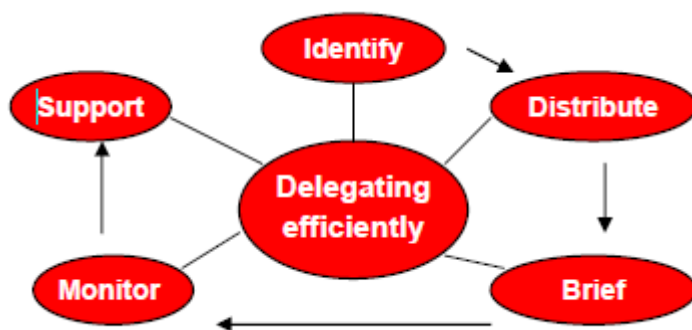
For the same argument as a non-hierarchical team, another author mentions a must of leadership shifts in teams. He says that inefficient teams, team leader sometimes shift the leadership to a team

member depending on the required competence. It helps to grow and develop team members as well as create a more productive team.

One of the ways to shift leadership within the team is by delegating tasks. To do it correctly, there is a sequence of steps that team leader should do:

1. Identify and define tasks that have to be delegated;
2. Distribute those tasks to team members accordingly to a match with their strengths and passions;
3. Brief the team about goals and desired outcomes;
4. Give team members authority and responsibility to make decisions and take actions;
5. Monitor progress regularly and make sure each team member is performing;
6. Support the team members by giving guidance and feedback regularly to ensure their success (Doke et al, 2011, p. 126-7).

Figure 3. *Effective Delegation*



Source: Doke, DeeDee. 2010. Building a Team: The Practical Guide to Mastering Management, p. 127.

From the several different authors, it's stated that team accountability increases team performance. To have a highly efficient team, the leader should create a culture where team members hold each other accountable. This can be done by eliminating only one clear leader in the team and splitting the team among different leaders from time to time according to their strengths. Also, communication about accountability, showing good practices, reinforcing it in the team, and giving team members rewards for good achievements as a team-based work helps to create a highly efficient team.

### **1.5. Relation of dysfunctional behavior with inefficiency in a team**

From all the theory analysis there is clear relation of dysfunctional behavior among team members affecting the efficiency of the team in a way of decrease. According to theory analysis of efficient team and two topics where dysfunctional behavior can appear: conflicts and accountability,

there were found theoretical practices for team leaders, which help to overcome those dysfunctional behaviors and build a highly efficient team. Those practices in this thesis are called factors, because of their presence or absence, there is a direct effect on team efficiency. The list of those factors is provided below.

#### 1. Selection of candidates

The team leader starts forming efficiency in a team by selecting talented candidates for the project and working with them through all other steps. As mentioned by one of the authors even one person in the team can spread dysfunctional behaviour all over the team, which will create inefficiency in a team.

#### 2. Successful practices of communication

An efficient team has possess a trustful atmosphere between team members. The creation of a trust is mentioned in all topics: efficient team, conflicts, and accountability. Without a strong foundation of trust can't exist efficiency in other processes of a team. A trust is created by team leaders using communicational practices and letting people feel safe in the environment. Inefficiency can be prevented by showing sincerity, weaknesses, and mistakes team members make. It's vital to have trust in a team to participate in healthy and efficient discussions.

#### 3. Conflicts prevention

Team leader improves team efficiency by stimulation of discussions. One thing he has to ensure is that conflicts will not appear during the discussion because that can lead to inefficiency in a team. The team leader has to know different types of conflicts: task, process, and relationship. His job is to increase the amount of tasks conflicts (discussions) but only at the early stages of the project and eliminate relationship conflicts during all life-cycle of the project. Also, he is aware of hot and cool topics. This theoretical knowledge helps him to communicate with team members in a preventive way and prepare for potential conflicts how he should by knowing what kind of topics can raise a conflict between team members.

#### 4. Conflicts management

Team leader overcomes inefficiency arising from conflicts in a team by managing conflicts and using a collaborative approach. He uses practices of self-management, conversations management, and relationships management.

## 5. Creation of an autonomous behavioural culture

Team leader overcomes inefficiency arising from a lack of joint accountability in a team by creating behavioural culture, where peers address concerns immediately, directly, and respectfully with each other by promoting team members' communication with each other.

Moreover, he sets expectations for team members, tells them exemplary stories, acts in exemplary ways, and teaches team members to possess traits of accountability through the behavioural culture. Also, the team leader delegates tasks to team members, which shifts leadership among them.

For the same reason, a team leader creates a non-hierarchical team structure that sets responsibilities for team members to possess leader traits.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. Research design**

Qualitative research was conducted to accomplish the goal of the research – find out team leaders from IT field practices for overcoming inefficiency in a team. Standardized open-ended interviews were used for this matter. All of the interviews participants were asked identical questions worded in a particular way that led to getting open-ended responses (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Those questions worded in this kind of way let participants answer as much in detail as they wanted and also as a researcher I was able to ask probing questions to follow-up.

While doing the research it was taken on the record that in-depth interviews provide valuable information, but the general rule on sample size for interviews is when the same stories, topics, issues, and themes are emerging from participants, then a sufficient sample size has been reached (Boyce and Neale 2006). According to this information, research was made by collecting data from different respondents until the fact of repeatable information appeared.

As Creswell (2007; 2018) mentioned the three main parts of the interview are:

- Reasercher's preparation for the interview;
- Creation of effective research questions;
- The implementation of the interview(s).

For the preparation of the interview part, it is necessary to create a reliable sampling strategy that will serve to attract qualified candidates and get credible information (Creswell, 2007). The same author also suggests looking for the traits in respondents such as honesty and openness to share the information – those people will serve the study well.

Respondents were chosen according to the information mentioned by the author as well as their work field. In this research, all of the respondents are related to IT project management. They are from a few different organizations operating internationally in the IT field. All of them are split between 3 sectors: FinTech, EdTech, and SaaS. All of them hold team leaders - managers roles in their organizations. Those criteria of respondents hit the foundation of the research.

The next necessary step according to Kvale (2007) is to make a pilot test to prepare for an interview. It helps to determine if there are any flaws or weaknesses in the interview and the researcher can make revisions according to gathered information. The pilot test is conducted with the participant, who has the same criteria as all other respondents of the research.

### **2.2. Research questions design**

The second part of the interview is to create effective research questions. There are suggested few recommendations on how to create effective questions:

- Wording must be open-ended (participants must be able to choose their terms when answering questions);
- Questions must be as neutral as possible (wording that might influence answers, e.g., judgmental, evocative wording should be avoided);
- Questions must be asked only one at a time;
- Questions must be worded clearly;
- Be careful with "why" questions (McNamara, 2009, Wording of Questions section, para.1).

Based on this information, questions in the research were asked in an open-ended way and were not affecting answers in one or another way.

There are 15 questions in total in a questionnaire (appendix 2) and it was provided to the participant together with a consent form. The interview started with ice-breaking questions and led to main questions with the probes included being seen as helpful. Below are listed a few examples of probes that were used during the interview:

- Would you give me an example?
- Can you elaborate on that idea?
- Is there anything else? (Boyce and Neale 2006)

### **2.3. Participants**

Participant 1 – her experience of managing and leading is more than 30 years in the context of Information Technologies with national and international teams from 10 to 50 people. She had experience managing with more than 50 people, but in those cases usually, that big amount of people were split into groups and she managed those groups. Currently, she is a founder and head of the board of international IT organization in the field of EdTech. She takes a leadership role in many other IT EdTech projects as well.

Participant 2 – she is quite a new manager, now with 3 years of experience in managing international IT projects in the field of EdTech. Her team consists of 5 people. When they are going to international meetings and work in groups, then she is leading the work of bigger teams.

Participant 3 – a deputy of a director already for 5 years in the field of EdTech. She manages 6 managers, who have teams of 8 members. Her main job is to make those different teams perform the best and be aligned.

Participant 4 – he has more than 30 years of management experience, mostly with IT projects & products in the fields of telecommunications, software development, etc. Currently, he is working abroad for more than 10 years in one very known large international company as a manager of IT service.

Participant 5 – development department manager for more than 8 years in an international IT company. The company operates in the software development field internationally. His manageable



projects are responsible for the optimization of business software systems. At the moment he manages a department of 90 people.

Participant 6 – CEO of an IT company operating and competing internationally in the field of FinTech. His team also consists of international people. He started working as a manager 25 years ago in the field of banking. From that time he always was managing smaller or bigger teams. The biggest responsibilities of his career are when he had under him about 100 – 130 people. He didn't count because he had 7 direct reports to manage other managers and those managers were managing other people. That was the hierarchical structure. Usually, he was having from 5 to 8 direct reports to manage other managers.

Participant 7 – CEO of an IT company operating and competing internationally in the field of FinTech. He has more than 15 years of experience as a manager. His first team consisted of 25 people which he had to manage. Later he got 40 people team and a bit more later he was managing a team of 100 people in an abroad project with representatives from different countries. He had direct reports with 10-11 managers, which were under him and had their own smaller teams.

#### **2.4. Research factors**

Interviews are conducted around 5 factors identified in theory analysis:

##### **1. Selection of candidates**

The research goal of this factor is to understand successful practices used by team leaders during the hire or acquisition of candidates for a team - how they think about this process when they are looking for candidates for their project team. Is it a necessary aspect in their opinion to have an efficient team? Through what process they go and what practices they apply when they look for candidates to their project team.

##### **2. Successful practices of communication**

If trust is the foundation for an efficient team and other factors like conflicts & lack of accountability - then what are the communication practices of team leaders to set this foundation efficiently? Are there any other communication practices out of trust scope that are necessary for team leaders to prevent the team from potential inefficiency?

##### **3. Conflicts prevention**

The research goal of this factor is to find different practices of a team leader for overcoming inefficiency arising from conflicts. This will help to know what practices team leaders use to separate

discussion from a conflict between team members, practical methods how team leaders stimulate discussions in a team, and what practices apply to prevent the team from potential inefficiency caused by conflicts.

#### 4. Conflicts management

What practices for conflicts management team leaders apply in their project teams? Conflicts are unavoidable in work life and everyone faces them. There can be hidden silver bullets of conflict management practices, which won't be found in any literature.

#### 5. Creation of an autonomous behavioural culture

There are many different ways what a type of culture in a team can be created. How do team leaders create a culture in their projects, what practices do they use and what are their expectations of the culture? Do all of them use practices to create a culture that sets a foundation for joint accountability between team members?

Also, two more topics were researched during the interviews, to add additional information on top of the 5 factors. Those topics are:

#### 6. Measurement for practices success

The research goal for this topic is to get to know how well respondents mentioned practices are working in reality and how they could be measured. How they are sure that their practices are working well? What are the levels of success? Do they use any specific practices to measure that?

#### 7. Respondents' recommendations

Maybe there are more golden practices, which weren't mentioned because of being busy concentrating on the specific formulation of questions in the questionnaire? This topic let respondents tell their last thoughts or maybe even the best thoughts about practices that should be applied by the team leader to overcome inefficiency in a team.

### **2.5. Implementation of interviews**

The last phase is the implementation of interviews. The implementation was started by collecting consent from interviewees, organizing virtual meetings, and turning on the recording before conducting an interview. After the interviews data was collected and ready for interpretation. I grouped information into sections around the factors mentioned before. Those sections consist of different ideas that are

common among participants (Creswell, 2007, 2018; Kvale, 2007). After compiling the information into the groups, I used those groups of information to form the results, make my interpretations and provide recommendations.

### **3. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH RESULTS**

#### **3.1. Selection of candidates**

The respondents mentioned the practice of taking candidates into serious consideration before selecting them for hire or acquisition as organizational resources to a project is necessary because it has a high relation with inefficiency in a team. They mentioned 3 different aspects that should be considered by team leaders before making a hire or acquisition decision: candidates' talent, diversity, and character.

##### **3.1.1. Competency**

The team leader should look to the competency of team members as a critical component for efficient team performance. Before hiring or acquiring people for a project, the team leader must think precisely about what competencies team members are needed in the project and according to that choose the best candidates. Sometimes one or another candidate can lack some of the competencies, but he or she might be eager and capable to learn fast to become a professional.

Respondent 4 emphasized it's easier to hire the right candidates if the team leader is doing the hiring process or if he has the privilege to dispose of resources in an organization – in those scenarios he can distribute required resources according to the project needs – so those people with their abilities would match team concept and tasks that must be done. The difficulty appears when resources must come from other departments. Then is the challenge for the team leader - how to get those resources he needs. Everyone wants to get as best as possible specialists to their team, and nobody wants those less competent people. At those times team leader must use negotiation skills to get the specialists he needs at the current time – negotiate it with other departments.

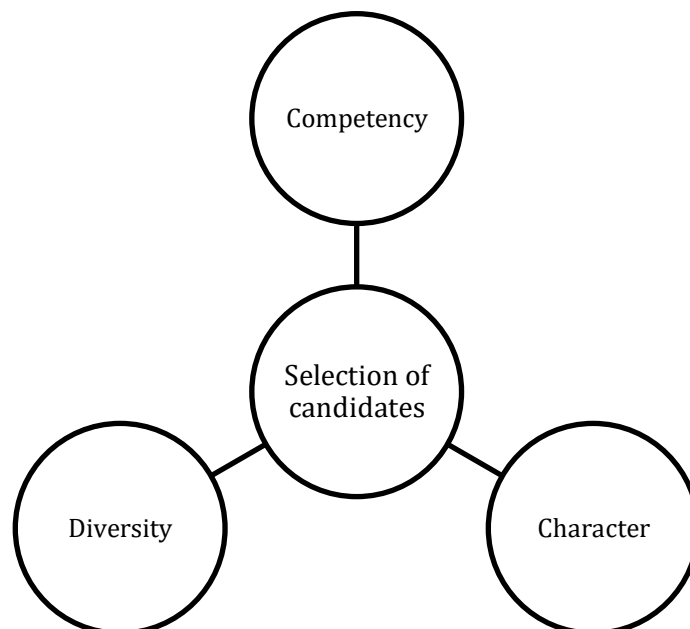
##### **3.1.2. Diversity**

Also, before doing a hire or acquisition, the team leader should consider the diversity of skillset of potential team members and select those who have a fairly different experience. In this way, team members will be able slightly to supplement each other. As respondent 6 said it's natural that a person is better at one thing and can bring one kind of experience to a team, while others are better at other things and can bring other experiences. It's the team leader's task to find out candidates' differences and most importantly their strengths, according to that information team leader can form a team of people possessing different skillset as their core strengths and supplement each other as individuals, making a greater team performance.

### 3.1.3. Character

Another thing to take into consideration before acquiring a new team member is a character of a candidate. It starts from knowing what kind of values people should be in the team. In big international companies' values are described at the organizational level, so team leaders must know and follow them. Also, the team leader must look for candidates with similar humour, ethics, norms, and standards for work and social life as a team. Talking about social aspects, the team leader has got to know and consider certain traits of candidates such as those who are dominant and going to fight for their opinion without letting it go, and on the other hand, those who tend to accept other people opinions. A team should be formed around those who possess friendly traits because if there will be a person who likes to compete and feels better than others he will not fit into the team. Respondent 5 emphasized: “naturally a person who feels better than others and competes, has to become a leader for another team, but only if he has competencies for that. If the person who competes for lack necessary competencies to be a leader of the team, then the team will not be efficient as well” (personal communication, 2021-10). Also, it's a bad practice to put people who like to compete into one team, because it will end up in continuous conflicts.

Figure 4. *Guideline for selection of candidates*



### 3.2. Successful practices of communication

The above-mentioned requirement to form a team with talented members is the first step to creating a trustful atmosphere in the team as well. Trust can be only among competent team members, so everyone can be certain that their teammates will do the job.

Trust must be created not even among team members, but they must trust their team leader and the whole organization. The team leader should look to trust like to umbrella under which there are many aspects of teams and organization, such as positive attitude, promises execution, no punishments for mistakes, etc, there should be psychological safety. The creation of a psychologically safe environment goes through the practices of team leaders reacting calmly to the mistakes of team members. The team leader shouldn't criticize team members for their mistakes or apply punishment such as no bonus provision, contrary – the team leader should see value in those mistakes and team members' diligence. He should be glad of team members' efforts and discuss with them what to do next. Team leader must discuss clearly the rights acts, so team members will know well what to do - in this way, chances of a potential mistake will be decreased.

### **3.2.1. First Meetings**

First meetings of a new team are vital to form an efficient project team. During those meetings, the team leader must express attitudes for tasks, final goal, and general relevance of how quickly the project must be done – the team leader must create urgency. By expressing mentioned things at the very first meetings, the team leader creates the same expectations among all team members. The team leader must prepare well before those meetings, so he could clearly express his thoughts and answer all possible questions from team members. Respondent 4 also mentioned this process as a creation of a sense of agency for all members of a team.

The team leader should know that if team members do not feel that the work, they must do is important and urgent, then other ordinary jobs take their attention. In this scenario energy that's necessary is not created. The team leader must prepare to sell the idea. When he does it successfully, then dynamic appears among team members – the team is working towards one goal, it's easy to agree on tasks planning and all other steps.

### **3.2.2. Celebrations**

Another important thing is to celebrate as much as possible. The team leader must set the first deliverables after which the completion team would celebrate. This will let team members believe that everything will be alright, they will feel that everything is moving toward the final goal. After the celebration, they will be more relaxed and more confident with their team, project, organization, and final goals. Celebration is necessary not only for the beginning but for all stages of the project, the thing from the team leader's side is to ensure a balance between celebration and work. Celebration is good, but work pace must be maintained.

### **3.2.3. Showing example**

The team leader must show an example to other team members and hold high principles, so the team would follow him. If the team will see the team leader talking not nicely or acting disrespectfully with others, then the team will think that it's tolerated, and they can start doing the same. Respondent 6 emphasized: "if team leader does not respect someone from the team, then other team members can take over this attitude towards this member" (personal communication, 2021-10).

The team leader must demonstrate through his acts and communication values he wants to see among his team members. It shouldn't be fake, the team leader honestly must act and communicate in this certain way, so team members can adopt the same. Respondent 6 also emphasizes "not always it's easy to do so for team leader, sometimes you get upset, sometimes you get a bit emotional and act spontaneously out of emotions" (personal communication, 2021-10). In those scenarios when the heat is rising in the team leader, he must spot it in himself and control it. He must be very self-aware and do not act out of his emotions, because it's not an efficient behavior.

However, even if the team leader is acting ideally, it's not the case that all other people see and accept it. Some people struggle with noticing and accepting the behavior of other people, so it's necessary for some team members to talk individually about the values, and usually, it's not a one-time conversation. There should be continuous conversations and during which the team leader educates those team members' perception and respect for other team members.

All the process to overcome inefficiency in a team by showing examples is not easy and quick thing. This is a continuous process, which is started by the team leader at the beginning of the project and goes on during all lifetime of the project.

### **3.2.4. Resource removal**

Sometimes a team member does not fit into the team and raises many problems. In certain cases, it can be very difficult to change the behavior of this team member, so the team leader should remove him from the team as soon as possible. As respondent 4 emphasized: "team leader must be like a gardener, who is growing trees or gardens" (personal communication, 2021-10). The team leader must take care of team growth and remove things that cause inefficiency in a team. There is no time in the project to change a problematic person, so the best solution is to replace this member of a team. There can be other teams or projects where this person could fit and be useful.

### **3.3. Conflicts prevention**

#### **3.3.1. Attitude for a discussion, not a conflict**

Teams can achieve outstanding results if they often discuss topics and are not afraid of potential conflicts. Then those discussions are honest, people say what they think, and everyone works towards the same goal. The team leader's job to create a clear atmosphere, so everyone could know what's the final purpose of a discussion, then the team knows for what they must agree. One point emphasized by Respondent 1, "team leader must warn team members that never going to be agreed to a truth of one person, always there will be compromises needed" (personal communication, 2021-10). Respondent 4 statement supplements it: "Team leader should teach team members with statements of Marcus Aurelius: "Everything in there is just opinion, not a fact" and "everything we speak is a perspective not a truth" – about those philosophical ideas team leader should talk in advance. The difference of opinions is a benefit for all – so nobody should take it personally. All sides can understand more about the object about which they are discussing" (personal communication, 2021-10).

Everyone in the team must possess an attitude that discussions aren't bad, even if they have some signs of conflicts, but team members must understand that it's not a conflict – it's a discussion. This is an attitude, which a team leader must create in a team by communicating that it's an opportunity to learn more, find a better solution and that there is always another option for a solution. Let's say if two people have a different opinion and can't agree, somebody else can say a thought that has both options advantages and does not have any disadvantages.

When forming those attitudes, the final step is that all team members agree to disagree. The team leader is responsible for making the final decision and then everyone must commit to it. When it's agreed, the team should go and work on this direction, team leader must make sure he expressed clearly, so there is no room left for talking about the decision from a negative angle after the discussion. However, the team leader must mention that the team members' responsibility is still to observe the situation and especially for those who had a different op. If they find arguments why they were right, they must tell it on time, so the team could discuss again, adjust their decision, and move in the right direction.

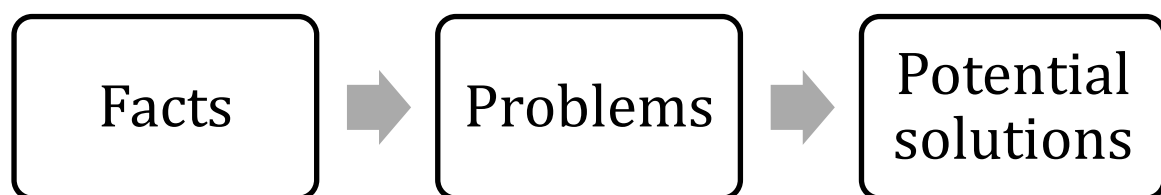
The team leader must express the perspective that during discussions the goal of a person is not to convince others but understanding another opinion as much as possible. A very good practice to promote this perspective is to make one of the agile management ceremonies – retrospectives. During the everyone meets to discuss what was well done and what's not, and why some of the team members have one opinion, while others another. After the retrospective, there is always a better atmosphere and a more productive team.



### 3.3.2. Structured discussion

Discussions must be constructive as well because sometimes people are talking not about necessary things for a current goal of discussion and while some people will join that conversation, for other members it can be an irritation. In those cases, the team leader must jump in, stop the inefficient discussion, and get back to the team on important things about the topic. This is called the skill of discussions moderation. The team leader must take the role of a moderator. Respondent 3 mentioned principle for discussions moderating: “First name the facts – for them, everyone agrees, then say problems out of the facts – for this step colleagues can see different problems, and then the majority of the time spend on discussions about potential solutions” (personal communication, 2021-10).

Figure 5. *Discussion moderation practice*



Respondent 6 mentioned “It’s good to provoke another opinion in situations when everyone says that it should be done in one way, the team leader should ask what if we will do differently? It should be done not only by thinking that this path is correct but as a practice for better discussion and check-up: did we consider as much as possible options, scenarios, possibilities, solutions, etc.” (personal communication, 2021-10). This practice makes discussions more efficient as well as prepares team members for a variety of opinions and teaches them to do not take any kind of task-orientated discussion personally.

Depending on the dynamic of people participating in a discussion, there could be different atmospheres and according to the situation, the team leader should apply the right practice. One of the extremes is when the discussion is happening between experts from different work fields. There can appear a conflict that they refuse to discuss anything because their argument is “we always did it in a way as I say”. According to respondent 7 there is one golden discussion mechanism in this scenario: “to provoke them why they do it - ask if it wouldn’t be a tradition and you wouldn’t have a history of doing in this way, would you do it in the same way? And use the 7 why practice” (personal communication, 2021-10). This is the practice when the team leader should ask 7 times why until he will get the real answer or at least an answer closer to the real answer. In this way, the team leader can prevent a conflict and the team can understand that not everything they did earlier in their practice is ideal and there is always an opportunity to change something for the better, especially in innovative fields.

If discussion happens between people with a different level of experience on the discussable object, it would be very easy to listen to only those who have a lot of experience and listen less to those who have less experience. However, the fresh mind of those who lack experience sometimes can provide interesting results. They can propose something without stopping themselves, which those people with a lot of experience would never think because it's not usual. In this case, the team leader from time to time should stop a few experienced team members and encourage those with less experience. Stopping those with a lot of experience can be challenging, but it's necessary because without doing it leads to conflict and inefficiency – they start saying that less experienced people do not know anything. Experienced team members start to think that less experienced members' opinion is useless and listening to them is just a waste of time. Meanwhile less experienced people lose the motivation to tell anything, and all these situations can lead to interpersonal conflicts and create inefficiency in a team. So, the team leader should not even communicate why everyone should listen and why it's worth listening to every opinion, but also give the same amount of time for everyone to express their opinions.

Another very good practice to improve the structure of discussions and prevent potential conflicts leading to an inefficiency in a team is to take notes during the discussions. The team leader can do it by himself or propose for team members to do that individually and in later stages of discussion, some of the notes can be used and repeated. In this way, team members hear expressed opinions once but with a new perspective, because for one or another reason previously they were skipped quickly. For example, if they were mentioned by a person who has less experience, automatically it has a higher chance to be skipped by others. However, to go once again through the notes, there is a chance to find very brilliant ideas.

Figure 6. *Conflicts prevention practices*



### 3.4. Conflicts management

#### 3.4.1. Low-level conflict

Teams are affected negatively by interpersonal conflicts. The team leader should stop at the right time that kind conflict. If there are conflicts like a discussion form of how to do the task better, everything is alright with that – it's great to not agree from a professional perspective as a specialist with another opinion and have a deep discussion about a better solution. The threat appears at interpersonal conflicts and that's usually a case, because as Respondent 7 emphasized "people rarely tell anything bad about the work that does the negative impact to another person, usually there is a remark about other person personality" (personal communication, 2021-10).

When a team leader sees appearing an interpersonal conflict, he should react to that and navigate discussion to other questions and only when the discussion is over, he should communicate with both conflicting sides. It's better to talk separately with each person. Then team leaders can listen to their perspectives one by one. Sometimes there are conflicts because people understood things differently – in this case, team leaders should provide different perspectives for team members, so they could see

different views from the same case. Other times it will be because team members have different needs, at this scenario team leader must look for a solution with both sides, that will satisfy them both. This will help to eliminate potential conflicts in the future. Respondent 7 emphasized using questions such as “when this conflict appeared?”, “why this conflict appeared?”, “did they try to do anything to make this conflict smaller?”. If both sides still have their truth, the team leader’s job to gather them to the same table and talk in a way by expressing those conflicts won’t help a team. The team is doing one big job, and everyone must put effort to eliminate conflicts – sometimes it can be, that person will not tell something that’s on his mind or will tell it in a different way, which won’t affect another team member in a negative way.

This one-time communication for some people works immediately at least for some time, for others, one time is not enough. Then it’s natural that the team leader must work with this situation for a longer time. If team members aren’t capable to manage themselves not to get into conflicts within a smart period, 3-4 months, and this conflict is continuously interfering with the work, then team leader should remove one or another person from the team, because otherwise, this conflict will escalate to a way higher level.

Respondent 3 states team leaders should look more for conflicts prevention than intervention. However, it should be done with the thought that discussions and people must tell what they think while others have not to take it personally. As respondent 6 mentioned that people cannot live without conflicts as they are inevitable. In respondent’s 6 words “If you keep team members like in a greenhouse – for them to live sterile without any kind of conflict, it hardly possible it won’t bring good results. There is a quote that the worst thing is to accept other opinions without stating yours” (personal communication, 2021-10).

### **3.4.2. High-level emotional conflict**

Sometimes it happens that conflicts are too hot. Team members start conflicting at a very high level and express their opinions using their emotions instead of rational thinking. This happens when low-level conflict escalates too high or when some kind of very sensitive topic has been touched. The team leader should be aware of the possibility to happen that kind of situation and must have a plan how to act to stop it as fast as possible.

Firstly, he can try to manage this conflict during the discussion. This is a very tricky part, but Respondent 3 has provided one solution to how it could be done: “team leader has to tell that in this tone team will not be able to continue communication and look for solutions. When stating those words team leader must be calm and confident because hot emotions are dispelled when the team leader has confidence that other people can calm down. That’s the solution. And I do not recommend showing

frustration that person is experiencing high emotions – that won't be good and won't solve the problem” (personal communication, 2021-10).

If it is mentioned practice is not working and there is a heat in the air or conflicts still exist at a high stage, the best practice mentioned by other respondents for team leaders is to stop a discussion. There are two ways he can pick: one is to take a break and tell everyone to meet again after 10 or 15 minutes, another way is to end all the discussions for that day and plan a freshly new discussion at the next day – this is the solution if the conflict is so hot, that it's just impossible to work. Team members need time to cool off. Sometimes few hours will work as well – this is the thing that the team leader should evaluate.

High-level hot conflicts can be managed easily by preparing before them with team members. Respondent 7 shared a practice he was successfully using in his career: “Team leader can set a rule for a team, that if somebody from the team sees that some kind of conflict is arising – he can say a word “stop” (or any other word, whatever you agree with your team). That means everyone in a team can use this word when they think is necessary - when they see that there is a beginning of not a constructive discussion, higher emotions, or other inefficient stuff. After saying this word agreed on word, everyone goes for a small break – to make a coffee, breath some air, etc, and shortly after that everyone comes back calm to continue the discussion. This works well because usually, people in a conflict don't see the beginning of the conflict – they are in the emotions. Meanwhile, other team members can see it clearly and give a chance to calm down. One bad thing can appear with this practice if coalitions between team members in a way that some groups of members are against one member, then nobody will tell to stop a conflict. However, if there is such a case in a team, that's a signal of a very bad situation in a team and the team leader should take other actions to fix it out of the scope of discussions” (personal communication, 2021-10).

Figure 7. *Conflicts management practices according to level of a conflict*

Low level conflict	Medium-high level conflict	Very emotional conflict
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Navigate discussion to other questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make a break for a few minutes or hours</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stop discussion for this day</li> </ul>

### 3.5. Creation of an autonomous behavioural culture

Accountability in a team is made by creating the right behavioural culture. Team leader's responsibility ensures that. All of that can be made by being conscious of communication and exemplary behaviour showing. And this starts from the team leader – he is the one about whose acts the team cares the most. The one thing to have accountability in a team is to have respectful communication between all team members. If there is a needed team leader's intervention among team members, who are having issues with accountability – the team leader's role should be consultant, but not a judge.

The team leader always communicates and repeats his statements and visions to create a behavioural culture, which possesses joint accountability. His responsibility is to repeat it over and over and explain principles of accountability to team members. The more he communicates in a team and clearly states what he wants – the better it is.

Naturally, accountability appears when there is a commitment in a team – when the team leader creates an atmosphere where everyone in a team agreed on their goal and destination and they believe they can do it, then they possess the accountability. In other words, there are 2 things: commitment – team members know what the goal is and agree for it, confidence – team members believe they have a chance to do it. Team members must communicate clearly and motivate the team for that to happen.

Respondent 4 also mentioned things that shouldn't be in a team: “there should be no guessing and no hoping – and that leads that team wants to avoid surprises – so there should be no surprises. This is important because if the team cannot avoid surprises from a team member – then the team cannot trust him and there is no 100% of trust in this person. If that team member does not know something, he must ask, but not guess. If he is not sure he can do something, he must talk about it, so the team leader or other team members will show him how to do it. If a team is working on those things, then team members will sense accountability and confidence that other team members can help them. If there will be a question, team members will know how to get help” (personal communication, 2021-10).

Another thing the team leader must communicate is that if a team member is facing a problem, is not a shame to ask for help, contrary it's a display of confidence. By acting in this way team members show that they are not afraid, and they trust in their team. When somebody from a team does that, then others start acting as well in this way. Teams often copy the style of communication, which they like, and see efficiency in it. So, the team leader needs to show a path to this style, show how it increases results and team members will start acting in this way naturally.

It's a wrong culture if the team leader is thinking of solutions and taking decisions of other team members. Then team members do not take responsibility on their own and that leads that they can't have a mutual responsibility – accountability. The team leader must create a culture by communication where

team members come to him not only with problems but with solution options as well. A team leader does not have to be a person who is creating solutions, he can only be the one who decides from available options. In this way there should be respect between team members, so they could discuss their possible options for a colleague who is struggling. Then after decent communication with team members, he can go with options to the team leader.

Accountability creates autonomy in a team and the foundation for that is agile methodology. The team leader can think of implementing this methodology or some parts of it into his project to create accountability in his team. For example, a few agile practices are daily stand-ups, retrospective, tasks planning. Then gradually some responsibilities can be given to the team, so the team becomes more and more autonomous. In agile methodology it's de facto that there is accountability – everyone is equal and unafraid to ask for help, while their team members help them with respect. The only issue can appear when there is a beginning of a project, or a new member added to the project – then the team must overcome that PMBOK classic stage of forming-storming-norming-performing. It's easier to make if there is a new person in a project because all team is already performing and there is more difficult to do it in a freshly new project, especially where everyone is new to each other. In those cases, with a new project team leader must work much more on mentioned practices to create a behavioural culture. The team can possess accountability only in the performing stage.

Respondent 5 mentioned a practice applied in the IT field – pair programming. This form creates a behavioural culture of accountability because by using this practice two team members sit together, and the one who has more knowledge in certain tasks, do the job and explains everything to others. So, some members of a team can work in this way, have regular sessions, and all team members will fix appeared issues faster and without any kind of disrespectful behaviour.

Respondent 7 emphasized the idea of team members' attitude to the job they do as a creation of a team culture that has strong joint accountability. Respondent used an anecdote as an explanation: "Journalist came to Russian cosmodrome and asked a cleaner what she does there. She looks at him and answered – what? Are you stupid? Can't you see I clean the floor? Then after some time journalist arrived at NASA. There is also a cleaner who is cleaning the floor. Journalist asked her what she does her. She looked at him and told – what? Are you stupid? We are launching rockets to the cosmos" (personal communication, 2021-10). This is the different attitude of people who do the same job – and it's created within a team culture. In a scenario when everyone feels equally important, then all team members aren't afraid to ask for help, solutions happen quickly and with respect.

Also, there is the solution for a team leader to organize some training instead of taking actions for his own – it's effective when team leader sees some accountability issues in a team and he has lower competency to fix them or there are other duties on his calendar, so currently can't give a decent amount

of time for mentioned practices. He can pass this job to professionals and see how much it helped, and how much he needs to add his input.

### **3.5.1. Shifting leadership among team members**

To make accountability work in a team, everyone must know what he or she can do and what they can ask others. That's the part of the culture and it is the job of the team leader to communicate what team members are responsible for and what help colleagues can get from their peers at the early stage of a project or when team structure recently changed. After the team leader must pass this responsibility to team members, so they could create joint accountability by themselves of agreeing with each other who is responsible for what. During those discussions, there should be clear what must be achieved – the final goal. Respondent 1 mentioned that sometimes team members do not understand clear who is responsible for what. One person thinks that the other person will do the job, while the other person thinks contrary. The team leader should help with clear communication and setting responsibilities if there appear issues when the team is doing that on their own.

A team leader's work is to make conditions for a team and specialists to work. Team leader comes to manage people, who are specialists, and they know much more in-depth than the team leader. So, if the team leader would start explaining to specialists how to work when he does not know it well, then nothing good will come out of that. Naturally, a good team leader wants the team to be autonomous – take decisions on their own and move forward without the team leader's micromanagement. The team leader's role is to explain goals and responsibilities to team members as much as it's needed, then in later stages let team members decide between each other about their responsibilities. Respondents also mentioned that certain people are waiting for directions from a team leader, so then it's a challenge for a team leader to create accountability in a team. Only continuous communication can fix that or there is always a solution to change that person in a team with another one.

Another practice is for a team leader to reach an agreement between team members that everyone is doing a good job in their role, everyone tries to do the best as they can and if it's not always working well – that's the life. Not everything happens perfectly all the time. But everyone in the team understands why they are in the team, what's their job and that they are required. Any kind of failure isn't taken personally, so team members are respected by each other and can work on their own.

Respondent 5 emphasized that in the IT field agile methodology clearly describes the roles of team members and their responsibilities. So, the team leader should follow up the methodology to set accountability in a team. For example, the product owner is a team leader in the scrum, and he has his responsibilities: he set the priorities, but how to implement the priorities, what technology to use is decided by team members. So, knowing who is responsible for what team is autonomous and team



members feel accountable. The product owner can't tell what technology should be used, because he does not have competency for that, so he lets team members decide that on their own and only if they aren't capable to decide what solution should be implemented, then they should come to the product owner. But not just with the problem, they should come with possible options. Respondent 6 emphasized when a team leader does not know what's the right option for a solution, he must puzzle out it. Practice for that is to listen to the team member and help him to formulate the questions for himself: "team leader should ask such questions as to how do you think? What other options? More options? Why one option is better than another? Why one option is worse than other?" (personal communication, 2021-10) – the purpose of this practice is to let team member propose a solution that is the best.

### **3.6. Measurement for practices success**

The success of mentioned team leader's practices towards overcoming inefficiency in a team is measured in two perspectives:

1. How efficiently team is working – what are the results for milestones and final goals?
2. What are the moods in a team, how satisfied are team members?

The first perspective is measured by looking at the results – if tasks were done on time, according to the plan, then it's a success. Behaviour to postpone tasks is a natural tendency of many people and team leaders by making team efficient ensures that everyone feels mutual responsibility for the tasks they do. The team leader must look to the results and if he sees that tasks are not done accordingly to the plan, he should look for gaps from where this inefficiency appeared. If the team would be fully efficient, then everything would be done on time, but if there is somebody who does not complete his tasks – it's a whole team's problem and mostly team leader's because from one person soon others can start acting the same. It could help to put more milestones or there can be issues in other aspects such as commitment, accountability, or inattention to results – team member does not act together with a team.

Another perspective for the mood in the team firstly can be measured by looking where there were any stressful situations in the team until the job was finished? For this matter team leader can organize discussions: after achieving a milestone or goal, not even talk about how successful it was, but also were there any challenges that caused stress or other negative emotions? In agile methodology, it's a retrospectives ceremony that lets the team leader know the situation.

Another way is to do it by intuition and feeling. The team leader speaks with team members not only about the job but also in an informal environment and he must notice how team members feel. He can see by team members moods, by the humour among them, by their communication between each other – do they talk good or not.

Respondent 7 emphasized that for him the best measurement is the loyalty of team members and their dedication to the job. “For example, when a team member comes to you and says he got a very interesting career proposal from competitors, but I didn’t even read it, because I have no idea what they can offer better to me – that means everything is great in a team. But when a team member silently put statement for leaving a company on your table and not even talking with you – just for one or another reason he is leaving the company, then it’s natural that there is a huge issue in a team, which needs a solution” (personal communication, 2021-10).

Meanwhile, Respondent 5 was not only about informal and psychological ways of measurement, but he also mentioned formal metrics and talked about ENPS – employee net promoter score. In his organization it’s a standard to do recurring ENPS metrics, but every time with a different question. Through ENPS managers see the signals when something is about to happen in the team and according to this information, the team leader can overcome potential inefficiency from happening. His organization uses the principle that every team leader encourages team members to do ENPS anonymously, it has a scale from plus 100 to minus 100 and on this scale, it’s possible to see how team members are feeling in different areas. In his team scenario, it’s done once every month. But he mentioned all other aspects as well, same as his respondents, that it could be done in other ways: team leader can collect smiles of happiness and sadness in team meetings, use a traffic light principle: red, yellow, green – how every team member feels, etc – everything can be done during retrospectives in agile methodology – that’s the best time to check how successful the team is.

### **3.7. Respondents’ recommendations**

Some respondents provided their additional recommendations for team leaders of practices they should apply to create an efficient team and easily overcome inefficiency between team members happened because of dysfunctional behaviour.

Respondent 3: “Watch microclimate and continuously take care for its improvement” (personal communication, 2021-10).

Respondent 4: “Use technique after-action review – standard questions can be used immediately after the action with a purpose to get as many lessons as possible. Questions are: what goal did we try to achieve? What results we wanted to achieve? And what results did we achieve for this moment? Through these questions, the team leader can see if there is a gap in the team’s functioning. If there is then the team leader asks: what influenced this gap to occur? Then team leader can initiate a brainstorm or analysis session on what could be done differently, so in the future, such things won’t happen. The same is with the results that were better than planned. The team leader must ask a question for the team: What influenced this outstanding result, that is better than we expected?

After making those conclusions probably the last question is: where we could try this in practice? Because those conclusions are hypotheses until they are validated in practice” (personal communication, 2021-10).

Respondent 5: “If there is a good psychological climate, then everything will be alright. The team will be autonomous, efficient, bring good results, etc. There was Google Aristotle project research a few years ago – it had great insights. The essence of the project was that they conducted research and got results – that those teams are successful, which have a secured or settled psychological climate. This means if a team member makes a mistake – it’s not that he will be criticized or punished” (personal communication, 2021-10), “Overall IT field is very dynamic, a lot of things are changing constantly, and everything moves so fast forward in comparison with other industries. So now it’s known that people and teams who do mistakes and fail more often –are more successful. From this fact appeared a next agile step – continuous delivery model or also called continuous deployment model. It means that team is continuously delivering a product to the client. Nowadays teams do it every day. The more often team delivers a product, the more often the newest version of product clients will use and faster appear bugs or team will detect in which areas product fails” (personal communication, 2021-10).

Respondent 6: “Do not develop blame culture. If a team is looking for guilty people, then they do not solve problems. If you find who is guilty – it won’t solve a problem now and it won’t solve it in the future. The real solution for team leaders is to stack processes very clear. Also, he must have clear agreements about who is responsible for what of team members and how is proceeding the process of decisions acceptance. This will decrease the possibility of mistakes” (personal communication, 2021-10), “Another advice for team leader is to dedicate a fair amount of attention for yourself. If you don’t do that for yourself, then you can’t do that for others as well, because you are drowning in some other concerns” (personal communication, 2021-10).

Respondent 7: “Be brave to accept not popular solutions. Those people, teams, and organizations which achieved something great at some level –weren’t afraid to accept not popular solutions. Including not popular and fast solutions, including people hiring and firing. Not popular solutions I mean those which are uncomfortable for someone. For example, firing a person.

If something is bad, it’s better to do everything immediately, without a try to solve everything with a bunch of meetings, group discussions, etc. Usually, a long process of problem-solving creates more problems.

Google has this, for people who come to work for them Google offer immediately to pay a three-month salary for newcomers to quit Google. Some people take the money and leave, but Google

has an argument – they understand those people wouldn't be a long-term employee – he had different values” (personal communication, 2021-10).

To sum up all the recommendations, there is a clear winner for psychological safety and healthy microclimate in a team. The team leader should take care of that by letting team members do mistakes and learn from them. Then the team will become successful faster and will reach full efficiency.

For summing up all the research one of the biggest accents among respondents was a trust and psychological safety among team members as well – it leads to have healthy and highly performing team. This lays under successful practices of communication factor. For the same factor goes team leader as an example attitude and communication. Respondents put a huge importance on behaviour of team leader, because team members tend to copy it. Selection of candidates' factor was important among respondents too because the people team leaders get into their teams are the people they must work together. However, there were some different opinions in conflicts prevention factor among respondents. While some of the respondents mentioned themselves putting more energy to ensure conflicts prevention than intervention and believing in this type of practice, others mentioned they do not believe in efficient team, which wouldn't have any kind of conflicts – in their opinion, there must be conflicts and team members have to know how to deal with them among themselves, team leader should not try to totally prevent team from potential conflicts and shouldn't be the key person to solve all the conflicts among team members. For conflicts management factor, respondents mentioned quite similar answers such as talking separately and one on one with conflicting sides. As well, as if there is a high-level conflict during discussion, then the best practice is to stop a discussion. However, this was mentioned by few respondents, so it can be assumed that other respondents were able to create a better conflicts prevention atmosphere in a team, what lead to evasion of experiencing a high-level conflict among team members. For the last factor – creation of autonomous behavioural culture everyone agreed it's created with the help of using Agile methodology. This methodology creates a right mindset for team members to have accountability in a team. Since research was done among IT field team leaders, we were not talking much about joint accountability in other fields, but there might be a case that in other fields team leaders would have different opinions. In IT field people teams are formed with talents – great performing experts, so Agile methodology fits well and providing autonomous for such teams is both a safe and efficient move.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Looking at different models made by various authors it's being seen that all of them have a slightly different scope for the core aspects that makes a team efficient, but they are very similar in general. Some of the models are presented in a wider perspective, while other authors take a narrower niche for efficiency creation in a team. For example, the T7 model has 7 core aspects: thrust, trust, talent, teaming skills, tasks, team support from the organization, and team leader fit. And this model is validated in more than 50 different sectors. Meanwhile, the most popular, huge success receiver Lencioni's model has listed 5 aspects: trust, discussions, commitment, accountability, team results – this is a much narrower perspective because some of those are just one dimension of T7 model aspects – for example, commitment in T7 model is under thrust aspect, which has three dimensions: management, clarity, and commitment. According to that, it can be said that a narrower perspective can work well – a team leader can create and sustain an efficient team, but to know a wider perspective of aspects is a must for a team leader to make things work in a team.
2. Conflicts among team members are one of the sources from where inefficiency can occur in the team. However, conflicts as a form of discussion are a huge benefit for the team performing. If there would be no discussions, the team wouldn't be efficient and vice versa, if the team struggles with interpersonal conflicts among team members – it's a clear sign of inefficiency. The team must increase discussions and eliminate relationship conflicts between team members. For this, he must be aware of hot and cool topics and talk with team members to prevent hot topics from appearing during discussions. Also, during the conflict team leader must use a collaborative approach to find a solution as well as must use practices such as self-management and conversations management to keep an efficient atmosphere during the discussions and after them.
3. Lack of accountability in the team is another source from where inefficiency can appear. This inefficiency team leader can overcome by creating autonomous behavioural culture, where team members take responsibility for themselves and the whole team: they address concerns immediately, directly, and respectfully with each other. They promote other team members' communication regarding team or personal issues, which impacts team goals. Also, he set expectations for his team members, tells exemplary stories, acts in the same exemplary way, and teaches team members behavioural culture that has an aspect of accountability. Another practice is for team leaders to delegate tasks among their team members, which would shift the leadership between them and would make them stronger working in an autonomous model.

4. Research was conducted with IT field professionals as research respondents. Most of them have more than 10 years experience of in management. The qualitative form of in-depth interviews lets gets deep into the different practices applied by experts in the IT field, used in their everyday work to overcome inefficiency in a team and reach a high team performance.
5. Team leader drastically decreases the chance of inefficiency emergence in a team if he starts building an efficient team from the early beginning of the project. That means, firstly, he must hire or acquire team members that fit project needs. He must consider 3 dimensions before forming a team and according to them choose the candidates. Those dimensions are competency, diversity, and character. Also, when the team is formed or being formed, the team leader must create through his communication a trustful atmosphere among team members. He must speak positively, form a positive attitude, create psychological safety by promoting mistakes. First meetings are vital to form a trustful atmosphere. The team leader shows an example through his acts and communication and the team adapts the same behaviour. After reaching milestones, the team leader must organize a celebration – so team members can get to know each other well, build better trust bonds with each other, and get confidence that the project is going to be successful.
6. Conflicts can be prevented from happening in a team by changing team members' attitudes and atmosphere for discussions instead of conflicts. The team leader should use different practices of communication to create this kind of attitude and atmosphere. Such practices are: letting team members understand that compromise is unavoidable, teaching team agree to disagree, creating an attitude to think of discussions as a learning process, teaching team members that during discussions they should not try to convince others, but better understand opinions and ideas proposed by others – in this way the discussion has many different ideas and after discussing them all, the team can choose the best solution. Also, discussions must be structured, the team leader must take the role of moderator, and if needed use practices such as: provoking different opinions, using the 7 why method, or encouraging everyone to take notes of the discussion.
7. If interpersonal conflicts happen during discussions, they harm team performance. The team leader must overcome conflicts. There are different practices regarding the intensity level of a conflict. When it's a light form of conflict appears, the team leader must detect it on time and navigate discussion to discuss another question. If it's not working and there is still heat between team members or in a case of stronger conflict, the team leader must stop the discussion and make a break for a few minutes or even plan it to another day. Also, after the meeting, he must talk separately with conflicting team members and help them to understand the root cause of the conflict and how next time it could not happen again. After talking with

both sides, he leaves it to figure out on them. Team members must find a solution with each other.

8. Accountability is created by creating an autonomous behavioural culture in a team. The team leader can do it by making conscious continuous communication and by showing exemplary behaviour. This can be accomplished firstly by team leader keeping respect to all team members, so all of them could respect each other. In any situation among team members, the team leader must be a consultant, not a judge. Also, the team leader must create a culture, where team members come to him not only with problems but with solution options as well. Moreover, the team leader must create an attitude in a team where all team members feel equally necessary, and everyone knows what he or she can do and what they can ask others. They know they will get quick and respectful support from their team members. All of that can be created by using agile methodology's framework: stand-ups, retrospectives, reviews, etc let communicate continuously and often, which leads to the creation of autonomous behavioural culture. If it's a new project or there is a new member in the team, all the processes must be overcome again. The team can possess accountability only in the stage of performing, so if there are any changes of team members, then the team is going again through the process of forming-storming-norming-performing with all the mentioned practices to build an autonomous behavioural culture among all team members. The team leader's role is to explain goals, responsibilities and provide support to team members when it's needed, all other matters team members are doing inside their team.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

All the recommendations listed below have relations with theory and are research find outs of practices applied by team leaders.

1. Start a project with people you need. Consider candidates' competencies, diversity, and characters.
2. Start creating a trustful atmosphere from the first day. For this matter use communication practices such as teaching team members to think of discussion as a learning process, the main attitude is not to convince others, but to understand ideas expressed by them, compromise during discussions will be unavoidable, etc.
3. Moderate discussions by a principle: team states facts, then problems and the biggest amount of time is dedicated to discussing possible solutions.

4. Use 7 why practice in situations when experts are holding to their opinion very strongly, but you or other team members think there could be better solutions.
5. Manage conflicts by navigating discussion to other questions. If it's too hot, try to calm down team members by saying that in this tone we won't find any solution in a confident manner. If this practice didn't work, then stop discussion either for a small break or even plan it for the other day.
6. Talk separately with members who had a conflict. Help them understand why this conflict happened and how could it not appear again next time, what topics they should skip and what shouldn't be said to another team member. Also, sometimes it's good to tell to not take things personally.
7. Create a culture where team members come to you not only with problems but with solution options as well.
8. Convey the positive attitude and respectful communication behaviour among team members.
9. Create responsibilities for team members at the early stage of a project. Later let them do it by themselves.
10. Let specialists take decisions in their field. Your job is to explain goals and responsibilities to team members and help them when they can't find the best solution on their own.
11. Measure the success of your practices for team efficiency by discussing the situation between planned results and actual results as well as the mood of team members regarding the atmosphere in the team. Use ENPS when you think anonymous answers will show a more real situation.

Lastly, my recommendation as an author of this thesis – team leader should apply all practices found out in the research, depending on the stage of the project, circumstances, and situation they are having as a team.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCHS**

Topics of trust and candidates' selection can be researched more deeply for the team leader practices. There might be much more practices orientated into processes. Also, all other aspects that make a team efficient by overcoming dysfunctional behaviour such as trust, commitment, talent, teaming skills, tasks can be researched to get a list of team leader practices designed to that behaviour.

Also, research can be conducted in conflicts and lack of accountability aspects with respondents from another sector than IT.



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## APPENDIXES

Appendix 1. Comparing T7 model with other Team Efficiency Models in Literature

Factor / Dimension	Rubin, Plovnick & Fry (1977)	Katzenbach & Smith (1993)	LaFasto & Larson (2001)	Hackman (2002)	Lencioni (2005)	Total
<b>Thrust</b>	■	■	■	■	■	<b>5</b>
1. Management	○	○	○	○	○	5
2. Clarity	○	○	○	○	○	5
3. Commitment	○	○	○		○	4
<b>Trust</b>	■	■	■	■	■	<b>5</b>
4. Truthful Communication	○	○	○	○	○	5
5. Trust in Actions	○	○	○	○	○	5
6. Trust Inside Team	○	○	○	○	○	5
<b>Talent</b>	■	■	■	■		<b>4</b>
7. Acquisition/Enhancement	○	○	○	○		4
8. Allocation/Deployment		○	○			2
<b>Teaming Skills</b>	■	■	■	■	■	<b>5</b>
9. Resource Management		○		○		2
10. Learning			○			1
11. Decision Making	○	○	○		○	4
12. Conflict Resolution	○	○	○		○	4
13. Team Atmosphere	○	○	○	○	○	5
14. Managing Process	○	○	○	○		4
<b>Task Skills</b>			■		■	<b>2</b>
15. Focusing	○			○	○	3
16. Assignment Flexibility		○				1
17. Measurement		○	○			2
18. Delivering the Goods			○		○	2
<b>Team Support from Organization</b>			■	■		<b>2</b>
19. Organization Support			○	○		2
<b>Team-Leader Fit</b>	■	■	■	■		<b>4</b>
20. Team-Leader Fit	○	○	○	○		4
<b>Total Factors [■]</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	
Total Dimensions [○]	13	16	17	12	11	

## Appendix 2. *Interview questionnaire*

1. Tell me about yourself when you started to work as a team leader (your experience, projects, team sizes).

2. What are the aspects of successful team? How would you describe a successful team?

3. What challenges do you face in team management as a leader?

4. How do you deal with those challenges? Would you say that there is a specific order? For example, a certain problem needs to be solved first so another one could be solved after it, etc. until your team reaches a stage where they can work autonomously?

5. Do you encourage your team to speak up (discuss) even if it can lead to potential conflicts?

6. Sometimes discussions turn into conflicts. Conflicts between team members can cause inefficiency in a team. How do you anticipate and resolve conflicts before they start? How do you avoid conflicts in your team?

7. What practices do you apply for conflict resolution?

8. Some conflicts are difficult to resolve because they are influenced by emotions (they are very emotional). How do you deal with intensive conflicts to maintain a friendly atmosphere in your team?

9. Do you agree that a team is more effective when team members (not just the leader) take responsibility for each other? They tell each other what they do wrong, one or another thing could be improved, etc.

Do you apply any practices to encourage the formation of such responsibilities?

10. Do you agree that the most effective team is the one whose team members resolve problems without the team leader's help?

How do you encourage team members to solve problems by themselves?

Is there a boundary when the team leader's help is necessary?

11. How do you increase the efficiency of your team, so that team members could resolve the problems together quickly and without conflicts?

12. How do you evaluate if practices were successful?

13. Could you offer more recommendations regarding team management, especially conflict resolution and team accountability?