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Silvija Stapulionė

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PROJEKTŲ LYDERYSTĖ ADVOKATŲ KONTOROSE BALTIJOS ŠALYSE	PROJECT LEADERSHIP IN THE BALTIC STATES LAW FIRMS
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SUMMARY

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PROJECT LEADERSHIP IN THE BALTIC STATES LAW FIRMS

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In conducting various studies, a link between successful project management and leadership, but little attention is given to leadership in law firms – a specific organizational environment where is an established narrative that successful project implementation is primarily based on expertise and efficient project process management, with leadership taking a secondary role. The study **examines the problem** of how project leadership shapes and influences project management practices in law firms and explores how do local and global factors influence project leadership styles in this sector.

The main objective is to identify which elements of leadership are essential in project management within organizations, using the example of law firms in the Baltic countries. The research **sets the following tasks**: a) to analyze existing scientific research and literature related to project management and leadership in the legal services sector; b) to apply a research methodology tailored to the context of law firms; c) to conduct interviews with project managers and partners from law firms in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia; d) to analyze the collected data and identify key leadership aspects impacting project management; e) to provide recommendations on how to strengthen project leadership in the legal services field.

Using semi-structured interviews and the narrative analysis method, 10 representatives from law firms, including project managers and partners, were interviewed. 7 relevant thematic areas were identified, forming narrative codes based on the respondents' insights.

The empirical part of the thesis confirmed most of the aspects discussed in the theoretical section but also revealed that project leadership in law firms in the Baltic States often faces the challenge of balancing individual leaders' responsibilities with ensuring organizational direction. In these professional services, it is traditionally assumed that all team members are autonomous leaders; however, this approach does not always enable effective project management. Analyzing this context and questioning traditional "best practices" highlights that a uniform leadership model may not be effective in all settings, particularly in legal organizations, where a delicate balance between individual accountability and collective leadership is essential.

The findings indicate that leadership significantly impacts the quality of project management practices in law firms, particularly in ensuring the strategic alignment of projects with the firm's objectives. The results underscore the need to invest in developing leadership competencies and to create new project management models tailored to the specificities of the legal services sector.

The study concludes with recommendations aimed at helping law firms manage projects more effectively and strengthen their competitive advantage in the Baltic market.

SANTRAUKA

VILNIAUS UNIVERSITETO VERSLO MOKYKLA

TARPTAUTINĖS PROJEKTŲ VADYBOS STUDIJŲ PROGRAMA

SILVIJA STAPULIONĖ

PROJEKTŲ LYDERYSTĖ ADVOKATŲ KONTOROSE BALTIJOS ŠALYSE

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Atliekant įvairius tyrimus ieškoma sąsaja tarp sėkmingo projektų valdymo ir lyderystės, tačiau mažai dėmesio skiriama lyderystei advokatų kontorose – specifinėje organizacijų aplinkoje, kurioje yra nusistovėjęs naratyvas, kad sėkmingas projektų įgyvendinimas paremtas daugiausiai ekspertiškumu ir efektyviu projektų procesų valdymu, lyderystę paliekant antrame plane. Šiame darbe analizuojamas projektų vadovų ir partnerių požiūris į lyderystę, gilinamasi ar visose Baltijos šalyse jis yra vienodas, kas yra projektų lyderystė advokatų kontorose ir kokią vertę ji potencialiai gali sukurti galutiniam projekto rezultatui. **Tyrime nagrinėjama problema** – kaip projektų lyderystė formuoja ir veikia projektų valdymo praktikas advokatų kontorose. **Pagrindinis tikslas** – išsiaiškinti, kokie lyderystės elementai yra esminiai projektų valdyme advokatų kontorose, analizuojant Baltijos šalių advokatų kontorų pavyzdį. Tyrime **keliama šie uždaviniai**: a) išanalizuoti esamus mokslinius tyrimus ir literatūrą, susijusią su projektų valdymu ir lyderyste teisinių paslaugų sektoriuje; b) pritaikyti tyrimo metodiką, atitinkančią advokatų kontorų kontekstą; c) atlikti interviu su projektų vadovais ir partneriais iš advokatų kontorų Lietuvoje, Latvijoje ir Estijoje; d) analizuoti surinktus duomenis ir išskirti pagrindinius lyderystės aspektus, darančius įtaką projektų valdymui; e) pateikti rekomendacijas, kaip stiprinti projektų lyderystę teisinių paslaugų srityje.

Pusiaus struktūruotų interviu bei naratyvų analizės metodo pagalba buvo apklausti 10 advokatų kontorų atstovų, įskaitant projektų vadovus ir partnerius. Identifikavus 7 aktualias temines sritis susiformavo naratyviniai kodai paremti respondentų įžvalgomis.

Empirinė baigiamojo darbo dalis patvirtino dauguma teorinėje dalyje rašytų aspektų, bet taip pat ir atskleidė, kad advokatų kontorose Baltijos šalyse projektų lyderystė dažnai susiduria su iššūkiu derinti individualių lyderių atsakomybę ir organizacinės krypties užtikrinimą. Šiose profesinių paslaugų organizacijose tradiciškai manoma, kad visi komandos nariai yra savarankiški lyderiai, tačiau toks požiūris ne visada leidžia efektyviai valdyti projektus. Analizuojant šį kontekstą kvestionuojamos tradicinės „geriausios praktikos“ atskleidžia, kad vienodas lyderystės modelis gali nepasiteisinti visose kontekstuose, ypač teisinėse organizacijose, kur reikalingas subtilus balansas tarp individualios atsakomybės ir kolektyvinio vadovavimo.

Lyderystė advokatų kontorose reikšmingai veikia projektų valdymo praktikų kokybę, ypač užtikrinant projektų strateginį suderinamumą su kontoros tikslais. Tyrimo rezultatai pabrėžia poreikį investuoti į lyderystės kompetencijų ugdymą, taip pat plėtoti naujus projektų valdymo modelius, atitinkančius teisinių paslaugų sektoriaus specifiką.

Gale pateikiamos rekomendacijos, kurios padės advokatų kontoroms efektyviau valdyti projektus ir stiprinti savo konkurencinį pranašumą Baltijos šalių rinkoje.

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INTRODUCTION

John F. Kennedy once said, “Change is the law of life, and those who look only to the past and present are certain to miss the future,” Project leadership is undergoing significant transformation globally, influenced by technological advancements, evolving work paradigms, and the increasing complexity of projects. The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automation is reshaping project management practices, enabling leaders to streamline processes and enhance decision-making capabilities. According to a 2019 study by Gartner, 80% of project management tasks are expected to be eliminated by 2030 due to AI advancements (Coursera, 2024).

Project leadership is the ability to guide a team toward achieving specific goals within the constraints of scope, time, and budget while balancing the needs of the team, stakeholders, and project objectives (Turner & Müller, 2019). Unlike traditional management, project leadership focuses on flexibility, vision, and teamwork rather than strict hierarchical control (Aga et al., 2016). Effective project leadership combines strategic thinking, emotional intelligence, and the ability to manage uncertainties, making it an important skill across industries, including law firms.

This shift allows project leaders to focus more on strategic planning and stakeholder engagement. The rise of remote and hybrid work models has introduced new challenges and opportunities in project leadership. Leaders are now required to manage distributed teams, necessitating a focus on effective virtual communication, team cohesion, and adaptability. The Project Management Institute's Global Megatrends 2024 report emphasizes the need for project leaders to develop digital skills and foster a culture of innovation to navigate these changes successfully (Project Management Institute, 2024)

Additionally, there is a growing emphasis on soft skills, such as emotional intelligence and adaptability, in project leadership. The ability to understand and manage team dynamics, especially in diverse and cross-cultural settings, has become crucial. The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs report highlights the increasing demand for these competencies in the modern workforce (Patra, 2024).

The dynamics of the legal profession in the Baltic States have undergone significant transformations in recent years. Law firms in the area are increasingly using project-based approaches to deliver legal services more efficiently, as client needs become more complex and technology plays a bigger role (Turner et al., 2021). Competition among business law firms in

the Baltic States is growing daily. Firms are trying all possible ways to win as many projects as possible and build strong, loyal client lists. Good project management and leadership have become key factors for keeping clients satisfied, crucial for staying competitive.

In law firms, project leadership has a unique role because of their partnership structure, where each partner is expected to take on leadership responsibilities within their area. This structure encourages shared accountability and decision-making (Hodgson & Paton, 2020). However, expectations for lawyers in the Baltic States are higher than ever. They are expected to work more efficiently, bring in more clients, and demonstrate leadership skills, which are not traditionally taught in legal education (Mulder & Eringa, 2022). This gap highlights the growing need to develop leadership abilities tailored to the unique demands of the legal profession.

Competition among business law firms in the Baltic States is growing every day. Law firms compete hard for every new client and assignment, while also aiming for the best rankings in legal directories. The legal market is expanding annually, and financial targets for top firms are increasing as a result. Law firms are trying all possible ways to win as many projects as they can and build strong, loyal client lists. Good project management and leadership have become key factors for keeping clients satisfied, which is crucial for staying competitive.

Because of this, expectations for lawyers in the Baltic States are higher than ever. Lawyers in the largest firms are expected to work more efficiently, earn more profits, bring in more clients, and take on new assignments. At the same time, they are expected to be good leaders communicating well, working with others, delegating tasks, and guiding their teams. However, these leadership skills are rarely taught at universities, where the focus is on specialization and technical expertise. This gap between what is expected and the skills many lawyers have highlights the growing need to develop leadership abilities that fit the specific demands of the legal profession.

The problem addressed in this thesis is how project leadership shapes and influences project management practices in law firms and the impact of local and global factors on leadership styles. Lawyers are expected to perform at the highest level as experts, dedicating significant time to billable hours while also meeting increasing expectations to be effective leaders. This dual responsibility requires a broad set of leadership skills, including communication, integration, delegation, empathy, and emotional intelligence, among others. However, these skills are often outside the comfort zone of most lawyers, whose expertise is rooted in legal competence rather than leadership or project management.

Managing projects in law firms requires stepping into a leadership role that demands a very different skill set from traditional legal practice. Extensive research has explored the elements of effective project leadership, yet there remains a gap in understanding how these principles apply specifically to law firms in the Baltic States. **This study aims** to provide guidelines for project leadership improvement in law firms in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

Objectives of the thesis:

- To identify essential leadership competencies required for effective project management within Baltic law firms.
- To analyze scientific research and literature to understand the principles and challenges of project leadership in the legal services sector.
- To develop a tailored research methodology and conduct empirical research with legal professionals in the Baltic States.
- To provide recommendations to enhance project leadership in law firms.

Research Methodology: The empirical research was done using two main methods: qualitative research method and performing individual semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. Ten interviews were carried out with project managers and partners from leading law firms across the Baltic States. Flexibility was maintained during interviews to allow for adjustments based on the unique contexts and perspectives of each participant. The interviewees will be selected from among partners and project managers at leading law firms in the Baltic States to ensure a diverse range of insights.

After conducting the interviews, thematic analysis was used to systematically analyze, code, and interpret the data. This process involved identifying recurring themes and patterns in participants' responses, which helped create an overarching narrative. The findings were then presented in the research section, focusing on key leadership aspects and their impact on project management practices.

In developing the research methodology for this study, we initially considered incorporating focus group discussions as a qualitative research tool. Focus groups can provide rich, collective insights and facilitate dynamic interactions among participants, which are valuable for exploring complex topics like project leadership in law firms. (Netscribes, 2023). However geographical dispersion and competitive Professional environment influenced decision to exclude focus groups from current research design. Despite mentioned, the potential value of focus groups for future research would be significant.

The main outcome of this research is to provide practical recommendations for law firm partners and project managers in the Baltic States on how to improve project leadership practices. These recommendations will focus on addressing the challenges **of balancing legal expertise with leadership roles** and **identifying the key skills** needed for effective project management. Additionally, the methodology developed for this study could be used in the future to analyze leadership practices in other law firms or professional service industries. The insights gained from this research aim to spark broader discussions about the importance of project leadership in improving efficiency, client satisfaction, and competitiveness in the legal sector. Ultimately, the findings will help law firms in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania adapt their leadership practices to meet the growing demands of their industry.

The structure of the thesis is organized as follows: The literature review examines the theoretical foundations of project leadership and its application in the legal sector, with a focus on the Baltic States. The research methodology outlines the design and approach used to gather empirical data. The findings and discussion sections present and interpret the results, while the conclusion and recommendations provide actionable insights and avenues for future research.

Keywords: Project leadership, project management, law firms, Baltic States, legal industry.

1. THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF PROJECT LEADERSHIP IN LAW FIRMS

1.1. Conceptual Foundations of Project Leadership

1.1.1. Project Leadership: Definition and Core Principles

Project leadership is defined as the ability to guide a team toward achieving specific goals within the constraints of scope, time, and budget while balancing the needs of team members, stakeholders, and organizational objectives (Turner & Müller, 2019). Unlike traditional management, project leadership emphasizes vision, adaptability, and collaboration rather than rigid hierarchical control (Aga et al., 2016). Effective project leaders are characterized by their ability to communicate clearly, foster teamwork, manage conflicts, and motivate team members. Additionally, emotional intelligence and adaptability are increasingly recognized as critical competencies for project leadership in complex and dynamic environments (Goleman, 2020).

A critical distinction between project leadership and management lies in their focus. While project management involves the planning and execution of tasks to meet specific objectives, project leadership focuses on inspiring and guiding people to achieve these objectives (Kerzner, 2019). This distinction highlights the importance of soft skills in project leadership, including empathy, communication, and strategic thinking, which are crucial for addressing the human elements of projects.

The conceptual foundations of project leadership in professional service firms, particularly law firms, lie in the evolution of leadership roles over time. Traditionally, leadership in law firms revolved around managing client relationships and ensuring high-quality legal outputs. However, as the legal industry evolved, the need for strategic vision, collaboration, and project-based work increased (Hodgson & Paton, 2020). Modern project leadership integrates elements of both classical management theories and contemporary leadership approaches, such as transformational and adaptive leadership styles, to meet these new demands.

The shift from purely transactional leadership to a more collaborative and team-oriented approach is particularly evident in the adoption of project-based frameworks within law firms. This shift emphasizes the integration of technical expertise with interpersonal skills to navigate complex client requirements and ensure the seamless execution of multidisciplinary projects.

In this context, the role of the project leader extends beyond task management to include fostering innovation, aligning team objectives, and driving organizational growth (Turner et al., 2021).

1.1.2. Project Leadership in Professional Services

Professional service firms, such as law firms, operate in a unique environment where intangible deliverables, client relationships, and knowledge-based work predominate. In these settings, project leadership is essential for managing teams of highly specialized professionals to deliver client-centric solutions efficiently. According to Hodgson and Paton (2020), project leadership in professional services requires balancing technical expertise with leadership skills to coordinate complex, multidisciplinary efforts effectively.

In law firms, project leadership takes on additional complexity due to the partnership structure. Partners are expected to act as both technical experts and leaders, making leadership an implicit yet often underdeveloped aspect of their roles (Mulder & Eringa, 2022). The increasing demand for integrated legal services and project-based workflows further amplifies the need for strong project leadership, as it ensures seamless collaboration across various legal disciplines.

The legal profession in the Baltic States—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—has undergone significant changes over the past decade. Law firms in the region have increasingly adopted project-based frameworks to meet the growing complexity of client demands and the integration of advanced technologies (Turner et al., 2021). As competition intensifies and financial targets rise, law firms must rely on project leadership to deliver high-quality services, maintain client satisfaction, and achieve profitability.

1.1.3. Legal Project Leadership (LPL) vs Legal Project Management (LPM)

Building upon the foundational understanding of leadership within law firms, it is essential to explore the specific domain of project leadership, particularly within the context of the Baltic States. Project leadership in law firms involves applying structured project management principles to legal matters, aiming to enhance efficiency, client satisfaction, and overall service delivery. This approach, known as Legal Project Management (LPM), has gained significant traction in recent years.

Analyzing all scientific sources related to project leadership the importance and differences between Legal Project Leader (LPL) and Legal Project Manager (LPM) is undeniable. It comes to mind thought provoking perspective what's the difference between managing legal projects (LPM) and leading them (LPL). Leadership in law firms is evolving to encompass not only firm-wide strategy and vision but also the effective management of individual legal projects. This shift is closely linked to the rise of LPM, a structured approach that applies project management principles to legal work. The American Bar Association (2022) defines LPM as a methodology aimed at improving efficiency, reducing costs, and delivering value to clients by planning, executing, and monitoring legal projects systematically.

Table 1: Comparison Between Project Leadership and Project Management

Dimension	Project Leadership	Project Management
Focus	Vision and inspiration	Execution and organization
Key Competencies	Strategic thinking, empathy	Technical expertise
Stakeholder Interaction	High-level engagement	Task-level coordination

While LPM focuses on the technical aspects of project execution, such as timelines, budgets, and resource allocation, LPL introduces a complementary dimension. LPL emphasizes the human and strategic elements of guiding a legal project team, fostering collaboration, innovation, and alignment with client goals. This distinction raises a critical question: Are Legal Project Management and Legal Project Leadership interchangeable, or do they represent distinct skill sets and approaches within the legal profession?

LPL and LPM share common goals, ensuring the successful delivery of legal services, but differ in their primary focus and required competencies. While LPM concentrates on processes and efficiency, involving developing workflows, using project management software, and ensuring tasks are completed on time and within budget (Thomson Reuters, 2023), LPL, on the other hand, centers on people and strategy. It involves motivating teams, building consensus, and adapting to dynamic client needs (Lawyerist, 2023). Important to highlight skillset where LPM requires strong organizational, analytical, and technical skills to manage resources and monitor progress effectively (ABA, 2023) and LPL requires emotional intelligence, decision-making under uncertainty, and the ability to inspire and guide a team (Goleman, 1998; Heifetz et al., 2009). Seems like both roles can have the same responsibilities, but LMP ensures that the project plan is followed, risks are mitigated, and deliverables meet agreed-upon criteria and LPL takes a broader view, ensuring that the project aligns with the

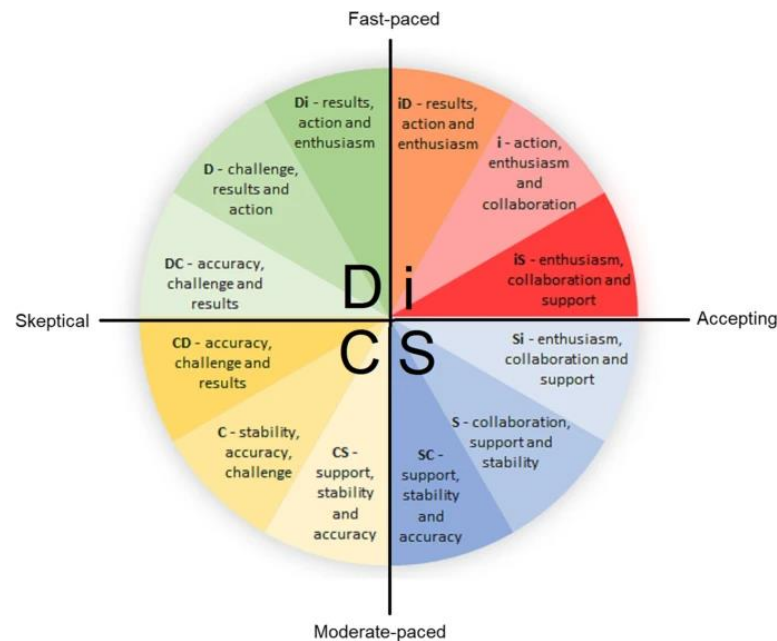
client's broader strategic goals and navigating interpersonal challenges within the team (Susskind & Susskind, 2021). And finally, LPM seeks measurable efficiency, reduced costs, and clear accountability while LPL seeks enhanced team performance, client satisfaction, and long-term relationship building. It took quite a good amount of time to tick the boxes, as in law firms these differences are not very familiar with working managers and leaders. There is no evidence in researched public websites of the biggest law firms in Baltic States that LPL position would be accented. Although many companies are already announcing their investments in leadership training.

One recent public example that was presented during law firms conference in Vilnius, Lithuania, 2024, to all legal community. TGS Baltic, a top tier law firm in the Baltic States, implemented a comprehensive leadership development program for its project managers. This initiative comprises three stages: group interactions, DiSC assessments, and individual coaching sessions.

Stage I: Group Interactions. The program begins with regular group sessions where project managers engage in discussions to share experiences and address leadership challenges collectively. This collaborative approach fosters a supportive environment conducive to mutual learning and growth.

Stage II: DiSC Assessment. In the second stage, participants undertake the DiSC assessment, a behavioral profiling tool that categorizes individuals into four personality traits: Dominance (D), Influence (I), Steadiness (S), and Conscientiousness (C). This assessment enhances self-awareness and improves communication within teams. Research indicates that DiSC assessments demonstrate high levels of construct validity, accurately capturing the behavioral dimensions they aim to measure (Milne, 2019).

Figure 1, DiSC styles and priorities driving behavior with 2-dimensional scales



Stage III: Individual Coaching. The final stage involves personalized coaching sessions with certified professionals, focusing on individual leadership development. This tailored approach addresses specific needs and goals, facilitating the practical application of leadership concepts.

Outcomes. As a result of this training program, project managers have:

- **Firm implemented regular feedback sessions:** Engaging in consistent one-on-one feedback sessions with team members has been shown to enhance communication and performance.
- **Adopted the situational leadership® Model:** Developed by Dr. Paul Hersey and Dr. Ken Blanchard, this model emphasizes adapting leadership styles to the competence and commitment levels of team members. It has been widely recognized as an effective framework for influencing and managing teams (The Center for Leadership Studies, n.d.). [Situational](#)

By investing in such structured leadership development initiatives, TGS Baltic not only enhances the capabilities of its project managers but also reinforces its commitment to excellence in client service. This approach aligns with contemporary leadership theories that advocate adaptability and responsiveness to team dynamics. It also shows an attitude towards leadership in a law firm environment, where the narrative is that the main strength of the lawyer is their expertise. However, it becomes more evident that expertise is only a hygiene, and competitive market players are searching for more solutions to overcome competitors.

Understanding the differences between LPM and LPL might be an advantage for law firms aiming to stay competitive in a rapidly changing legal environment. The most effective legal teams integrate both approaches, with managers focusing on the technical aspects of project execution and leaders ensuring alignment with strategic objectives. Firms in the Baltic States can benefit from this dual approach as they navigate the complexities of a regional legal market influenced by globalization, technology, and client expectations.

1.1.4. Leadership Styles in Project-Based Work

There are many reasons why it is worth analysing leadership styles in this study, but from all the material and arguments that are listed below, a conclusion can be drawn that leadership styles do have impact on project success, on navigating challenges, reducing stress, bridging skill gaps. Leadership styles play a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of project leadership. Recent studies highlight that leadership styles influence not only team dynamics but also project outcomes, particularly in professional service firms like law firms (Northouse, 2022). Four key styles have been identified as particularly relevant in project-based work:

Transformational Leadership focuses on inspiring and motivating team members to achieve their full potential and exceed expectations. According to Bass and Riggio (2021), transformational leaders operate through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. This leadership style has been shown to elevate team performance and foster innovation in high-demand environments, making it highly relevant to law firms in the Baltic States. This leadership style uplifts the morale and performance of team members by aligning their goals with the leader's vision (Bass, 1999).

Bass elaborates: “Transformational leaders elevate followers’ level of maturity and ideals, fostering achievement, self-actualization, and well-being of the team and organization” (Bass, 1999, p. 11). Such a leadership culture promotes innovation and high employee engagement. For example, Asbari (2020) suggests that transformational leadership is crucial for driving innovation in scientific teams, as leaders encourage team building and shared visions.

In the Baltic law firm context, transformational leadership is particularly relevant as it helps legal teams innovate in response to increasing client demands and competitive pressures.

Empirical research in this thesis could explore how law firm partners inspire and motivate teams through shared goals and innovation-driven practices.

Comparing **transactional leadership** emphasizes structured processes, rewards, and penalties to achieve specific objectives. As noted by Hansen and Pihl-Thingvad (2021), transactional leadership ensures accountability and compliance through a clear system of rewards and consequences, which is critical in the structured and task-oriented nature of legal work. Bass et al. (2003) clarify that “followers comply with the leader in exchange for praise, rewards, and resources or avoidance of disciplinary action” (p. 208). This leadership style ensures accountability and performance consistency.

Khan (2017) illustrates this with an example from education, where students receive rewards for completing assignments well. Similarly, in law firms, transactional leadership aligns with the task-oriented nature of legal work, such as meeting deadlines, ensuring accuracy, and adhering to regulations. Hansen and Pihl-Thingvad (2019) argue that transactional leadership can promote innovative behavior when coupled with verbal rewards, ensuring a structured yet creative environment. *For empirical research, transactional leadership can be analyzed by examining how law firm leaders use structured processes to manage project deliverables, ensuring compliance and efficiency in complex legal cases.*

Servant Leadership prioritizes the needs of team members and emphasizes creating a supportive work environment. Greenleaf (2003) defines servant leadership as focusing on serving others and empowering team members to achieve their potential. Spears (2020) adds that servant leaders foster a culture of collaboration, trust, and ethical behavior.

Research indicates that servant leadership is highly effective in reducing workplace stress and increasing team cohesion (Spears, 2020). In Baltic law firms, servant leadership can address challenges related to the high-pressure legal environment, improving employee satisfaction and retention. According to Mulder and Eringa (2022), law firm partners acting as servant leaders can bridge gaps in leadership skills, fostering a collaborative and client-focused culture.

In empirical research, the adoption of servant leadership could be explored through interviews assessing how leaders support their teams emotionally and professionally, enhancing project outcomes.

Adaptive Leadership highlights flexibility and responsiveness to changing circumstances, which is especially critical in dynamic industries like law. Heifetz et al. (2020) describe adaptive leadership as a framework that enables leaders to guide their teams through

uncertainties and complex challenges, a skillset increasingly vital in the rapidly evolving legal sector. According to Northouse (2019), adaptive leadership behaviors include identifying challenges, regulating stress, and fostering innovation through collaboration.

Nelson and Squires (2017) highlight that adaptive leadership is particularly effective in addressing complex organizational problems requiring diverse stakeholder input. This is critical for Baltic law firms navigating technological advancements, regulatory shifts, and evolving client needs.

Empirical research can examine adaptive leadership by analyzing how leaders in law firms respond to unexpected challenges, such as technological disruptions or shifting client priorities, while maintaining team cohesion and productivity.

The selection of these four leadership styles is grounded in their applicability to the unique dynamics of Baltic law firms. Each style offers specific advantages for addressing challenges in project-based environments. While Transformational Leadership fosters innovation and team alignment, essential for staying competitive in the legal market, Transactional Leadership ensures accountability and task completion, aligning with the structured demands of legal projects. Servant Leadership addresses team well-being and collaboration, mitigating stress in high-pressure environments. And Adaptive Leadership equips firms to navigate changes and uncertainties, critical for responding to evolving client and regulatory landscapes.

In the empirical research methodology these styles might be adopted as thematic categories during data collection and analysis. For example, taking interview questions, there might be different questions asked from different styles: a) Transformational: “How do you inspire innovation and align team goals in complex projects?” b) Transactional: “What processes do you use to ensure accountability and task completion?” c) Servant: “How do you support team well-being and foster collaboration?” d) Adaptive: “Can you share an example of responding to unexpected challenges?”

Data from interviews can be categorized under these leadership styles, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how each style influences project outcomes. Findings can guide tailored leadership development programs, focusing on cultivating a balance of these styles to enhance project leadership in Baltic law firms.

1.2.Context of Project Leadership in Law firms across the Baltics

Project leadership within law firms in the Baltic States is a developing area, reflecting the global trend of integrating structured project management and leadership practices into legal services. Leading law firms in the region are increasingly recognizing the importance of these competencies to enhance efficiency, client satisfaction, and overall service quality.

TGS Baltic, a prominent law firm operating across Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, emphasizes its strengths in transactions, project work, and dispute management. The firm highlights its commitment to providing solutions to complex legal problems and strategic decisions, indicating a focus on effective project leadership ([TGS Baltic](#)).

COBALT, another leading Baltic law firm, has been acknowledged for its excellence in various legal domains. The firm's recognition as the Baltic-wide Law Firm of the Year by Chambers Europe in 2022 reflects its commitment to high standards in project execution and client service ([Cobalt Legal](#)).

Ellex, one of the biggest law firms in Baltics, has been recognized for its excellence in project management and staffing. According to the Kantar Prospera Tier 1 Baltic Law Firm Review 2023, Ellex significantly outperforms other law firms in categories such as Lawyers' skills, Advisory, Project Staffing, and Project Management.

Sorainen that has the best international presence in Baltics has launched an 'interim lawyer' service, providing clients with flexible legal support tailored to their specific project requirements.

Client expectations are driving law firms to adopt more structured project management and leadership approaches. According to a survey by Prospera Tier 1 Law Firm Review 2017 Baltics, project management is one of the most important criteria for business clients when choosing a law firm. TGS Baltic was rated highly by clients in this regard, indicating that leading firms are taking project leadership seriously to meet client demands.

While explicit information on the adoption of formal Legal Project Management (LPM) and Legal Project Leadership (LPL) practices in Baltic law firms is limited, the emphasis on efficient project execution and client satisfaction suggests an implicit integration of these principles. Firms are likely adopting tailored project management methodologies to align with client needs and market demands.

1.2.1. The Evolution of Leadership Roles in Professional Service Firms with a focus on law firms.

“Law firms deserve particular focus in a study of leadership because they are, where the largest number of lawyers have opportunities to develop leadership skills, and the largest number suffer when those skills are absent.” (Rhode, 2013).

The roles of leaders in professional service firms, including law firms, have evolved significantly over time. Historically, leadership in these firms was limited to ensuring technical excellence and meeting client needs. However, the increasing complexity of client demands, and the adoption of project-based work have shifted the focus toward collaborative and strategic leadership (Hodgson & Paton, 2020). Leaders in law firms are now required to balance their technical expertise with skills in team management, communication, and adaptability to ensure the success of multidisciplinary projects.

Law firms play an important role in discussions about leadership because they are where most lawyers learn and develop leadership skills. At the same time, many lawyers feel the impact when those skills are missing. Rhode (2013) explains that strong leadership in law firms affects not only individual lawyers but also the overall success and culture of the firm.

In the past, practicing law was seen as a noble profession focused on justice and serving the public. However, the 20th century brought big changes, such as globalization and new technologies, which reduced the demand for routine legal work. Susskind and Susskind (2015) noted that tasks like document review or drafting contracts started to be handled by machines or outsourced. This led to tougher competition among law firms, with many fighting to win over each other's clients. As a result, being a good lawyer was no longer enough, leaders needed to focus on strategy, building a strong reputation, and managing their firms effectively.

Today, law firm leaders must do more than just practice law. They are expected to represent their firm, create a clear vision for the future, and guide their team to stay competitive. Goleman (1998) points out that leadership requires skills like emotional intelligence - the ability to understand and connect with others - which helps leaders inspire and manage their teams. Firms with leaders who focus on building strong relationships tend to see higher job satisfaction and less turnover among employees.

Modern law firm leaders must also embrace new tools and approaches to stay relevant. Heifetz et al. (2009) explain that leadership now means being flexible and open to change, especially with the rise of technology that is reshaping the legal industry. Leaders who resist change risk leaving their firms behind in an increasingly complex environment.

1.2.2. Cultural Influences on Project Leadership in Baltic Law Firms

Big law firms worldwide have offices in different countries. Having local lawyers allows law firms to win big deals and ensure the quality of legal services, which means assuring a fluent project process. The Baltic States is a region where all legal industry players are trying to have offices in all three countries. From the global perspective, the Baltic region is relatively small in geographical size and might be quoted as one country, each country has distinct legal systems, languages and diverse cultural landscapes that need local expertise.

Leadership within Baltic law firms starts of modern management practices, reflecting regions dynamic legal market. Leading law firms in the Baltic states, such as TGS Baltic, COBALT, Ellex, and Sorainen, operate with structured leadership teams that include managing partners and specialized practice group heads. These leaders are responsible for strategic decision-making, client relationship management, and overseeing the firm's operations across Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. For instance, TGS Baltic's management includes a Baltic Board comprising partners from each country, ensuring cohesive regional governance (TGS Baltic, 2021).

Leadership in Baltic law firms has evolved to integrate traditional legal expertise with modern management practices, particularly through the adoption of Legal Project Management (LPM). This approach enhances efficiency, client satisfaction, and the overall quality of legal services. The globalization of legal services and increasing client demands have led to the adoption of LPM in Baltic law firms. LPM applies project management principles to legal cases, focusing on planning, resource allocation, budgeting, and communication to ensure timely and cost-effective delivery of services. This approach aligns with global trends where law firms integrate LPM to remain competitive and responsive to client needs (Kochański & Partners, 2023).

Cultural influences play a pivotal role in shaping leadership styles and their effectiveness within Baltic law firms. In Estonia, a preference for structured and systematic approaches often defines leadership, aligning well with transactional leadership styles. Latvia, on the other hand, emphasizes interpersonal relationships and adaptability, reflecting a blend of servant and adaptive leadership principles. Lithuania tends to focus on hierarchical structures but has increasingly adopted collaborative practices, influenced by global leadership trends (Valackiene & Čepinskis, 2019).

By analysing various scientific sources there were a few key cultural aspects identified as key while talking about effective leadership and team collaboration, and can be adapted to the Baltic countries as well:

- **Communication styles.** Cultural variations in communication can significantly influence project leadership. For instance, in some cultures, direct communication is preferred, while in others, indirect communication is more common. (Bull, Pakovits-Rauter, Szabo, 2019).
- **Attitudes Toward Authority and Hierarchy.** The degree of acceptance of hierarchical order varies among cultures. Leaders must recognize these differences to manage teams effectively and foster an environment of mutual respect. (Bull, Pakovits-Rauter, Szabo, 2019).
- **Decision-Making Processes.** consensus vs. top-down approaches can influence project outcomes. (Anbari, Khilkhanova, Romanova, Ruggia, Tsay, Umpleby, 2009).
- **Legal Cultural Differences.** Each Baltic state has its own legal culture and history, which can impact law firm operations and project leadership. Understanding these legal cultural differences is vital for effective management. (Mockaitis, 2002).
- **Adaptability to Change.** Cultural attitudes toward change and innovation can influence the adoption of new project management methodologies. Leaders should assess and address any cultural resistance to change.

These cultural angles affect how project leadership is perceived and implemented. Leaders must navigate differences in communication styles, expectations regarding authority, and approaches to problem-solving across the three countries. By understanding and adapting to these cultural variations, project leaders can foster stronger team cohesion and enhance overall project outcomes.

Evaluating project leadership in Baltic law firms might be challenging due to limited scientific sources in this field, but taking into account faces challenges that are rooted in regional specificities.

1.2.3. Leadership Skills in Law Firms: A Framework

The analysis of leadership in law firms highlights a wide range of skills essential for effective management and organizational success. From emotional intelligence and strategic thinking to adaptability and client-centered approaches, these qualities define what it takes to

lead in a highly competitive and evolving legal environment. However, as law firms increasingly adopt modern management practices, the concept of project leadership has gained prominence.

Project leadership, in contrast to traditional firm-wide leadership, focuses on the skills and strategies required to manage specific legal projects or teams effectively. This shift raises important questions: Are the skills needed for general leadership in law firms the same as those required for project leadership? Do the qualities that define a successful managing partner or firm leader translate to the management of individual cases or client engagements?

These questions are particularly relevant in the context of law firms operating in the Baltic states, where the legal profession is shaped by unique cultural, economic, and regulatory factors. Exploring the similarities and differences between general leadership and project leadership in law firms offers an opportunity to identify the specific qualities that contribute to the success of legal projects.

Effective leadership in law firms is crucial for navigating the complexities of the legal profession and fostering a culture of excellence. Many surveys and scientific material has their approach to what are the most important leadership qualities. Recurring leadership skills from various sources was picked to illustrate the key leadership skills essential for law firm success:

- a) **Effective Communication:** Leaders must articulate clear expectations and maintain open lines of communication with clients, legal teams, and stakeholders. This skill ensures alignment and fosters trust within the firm. ([National Law Review](#), 2021),
- b) **Integrity and Ethical Conduct:** Despite the commercial pressures, law firm leaders are also stewards of their firm's professional integrity. Maintaining high ethical standards while navigating the competitive legal market remains a fundamental challenge (Rhode, 2013);
- c) **Strategic Thinking:** Leaders should possess the ability to develop comprehensive legal strategies that address clients' long-term needs, anticipate challenges, and navigate complex legal landscapes effectively (Ala, [BCG Search](#)). Yukl (2012) indicates that visionary leadership enhances organizational cohesion and resilience, particularly in industries undergoing rapid change like the legal profession;
- d) **Emotional Intelligence:** Understanding and managing one's emotions, as well as empathizing with others, enables leaders to handle sensitive negotiations, provide constructive feedback, and create a positive work environment. ([The Legal Leadership Project](#));
- e) **Adaptability and Openness to Change:** Law firm leaders must also champion the integration of technology and innovative practices. The American Bar Association (ABA, 2023) emphasizes that firms adopting cutting-edge legal tech tools enjoy a competitive

advantage, but such integration requires leaders who can manage change effectively; f) **Client-Centered Approach:** Successful law firms prioritize client needs. Leaders should cultivate a client-centered environment by understanding client expectations and guiding their teams to meet these consistently ([TimeSolv](#), 2024); **People Management and Culture:** Law firms are inherently people-driven organizations. Building a collaborative and inclusive culture is key. Studies highlight that leadership practices fostering diversity and psychological safety lead to better decision-making and innovative problem-solving (Edmondson, 1999).

Leadership within law firms has evolved from a focus on technical legal expertise to a multifaceted role requiring vision, emotional intelligence, adaptability, and ethical stewardship. In this new landscape, leaders must balance the commercial realities of the profession with the enduring values of justice and service. By prioritizing leadership development, law firms can better equip themselves to navigate the challenges of the 21st century, ensuring not only their survival but also their continued relevance and impact.

1.2.4. Challenges in Developing Project Leadership Skills in Lawyers

Lawyers often face distinct challenges in transitioning to project leadership roles. While they are recognized for their exceptional technical expertise, the qualities that make them skilled legal practitioners do not always align with the competencies required for effective leadership. This creates a gap between the skills lawyers possess and those required for effective project leadership.

Table 2: Challenges in Developing Project Leadership Skills in Lawyers, created by author

Challenges	The description
Emphasis on Technical Proficiency Over Leadership Development	Legal education traditionally prioritizes analytical reasoning and mastery of legal principles, often neglecting leadership training. This focus can leave lawyers underprepared for roles that require strategic planning and team management. The American Bar Association underscores the necessity for leadership development, noting that adaptation and the ability to navigate challenges are now essential skills in modern law firms. American Bar Association
Prioritization of Billable Hours	The legal profession's emphasis on billable hours can impede leadership development. Lawyers may find it challenging to

	allocate time for leadership training when productivity metrics are closely tied to client work. This focus on immediate client deliverables often conflicts with the long-term perspective required for effective leadership. Leadership for Lawyers
Specialization as a Barrier to Leadership	Lawyers often work in specialized areas, making it difficult to adopt the broader, integrative perspective required for project leadership (Mulder & Eringa, 2022). Effective leadership demands the ability to coordinate across disciplines and understand diverse stakeholder needs. Specialization can create silos, making it difficult for lawyers to assume roles that require broad organizational oversight and collaboration. Legal Project Management
Non-delegation and Control-Oriented Mindsets	A common challenge in law firms is the reluctance among lawyers to delegate tasks, driven by a commitment to excellence and accountability. However, effective project leadership requires empowering team members and distributing responsibilities. This hesitation can lead to inefficiencies and bottlenecks, undermining the success of legal projects. BKGL Leadership Coaching
Adapting to Evolving Client Expectations	Modern legal projects increasingly demand a multidisciplinary approach, involving collaboration with professionals from various fields. Lawyers accustomed to traditional legal frameworks may find it challenging to adapt to this dynamic environment. Project leaders must integrate knowledge from diverse domains to address complex client needs effectively. natlawreview
Cultural Factors in the Baltic States	In the context of the Baltic states, additional challenges arise from cultural and regulatory nuances. Hierarchical organizational structures prevalent in the region can inhibit the adoption of collaborative leadership styles. Furthermore, economic and regulatory constraints may limit access to leadership development programs or modern project management tools, further widening the skills gap.
Bridging the Gap: Towards Leadership	To address these challenges, law firms must prioritize leadership development as a strategic objective. This requires shifting cultural

Development in Law Firms	norms, incentivizing participation in leadership training, and embedding leadership skills into professional development pathways. Specific initiatives could include mentorship programs, leadership training, cultural shifts that value leadership development alongside technical expertise, and leveraging legal tech tools to streamline workflows. Loeb Leadership
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By addressing these challenges, law firms in the Baltic states can equip lawyers with the skills needed to succeed in project leadership roles, enhancing their ability to navigate the complexities of the modern legal environment.

1.2.5. Emerging Trends in Legal Project Leadership

Legal project leadership is undergoing significant transformation as law firms adapt to technological advancements and the challenges of remote work. The rise of AI and digital tools has significantly impacted legal project leadership, especially in terms of enhancing efficiency and collaboration.

AI tools such as legal research platforms and contract analysis software assist LPM by automating time-consuming tasks, thus allowing project managers to focus on high-level strategic activities.

Legal Tech tools also play a crucial role in LPL by supporting decision-making and innovation. For example, project leaders can use AI-driven insights to provide clients with better solutions and lead teams through complex legal matters.

These technologies allow for streamlined processes and improved client service, contributing to both LPM and LPL.

Digital tools, such as project management software, have become central to enhancing efficiency and collaboration in legal projects. These tools enable better resource allocation, real-time updates, and streamlined communication, particularly in the context of hybrid work environments (Project Management Institute, 2024). Remote work has also redefined leadership strategies. Project leaders must now focus on fostering team cohesion and maintaining productivity across distributed teams. This requires advanced communication skills and the ability to adapt to digital communication platforms effectively (Patra, 2024).

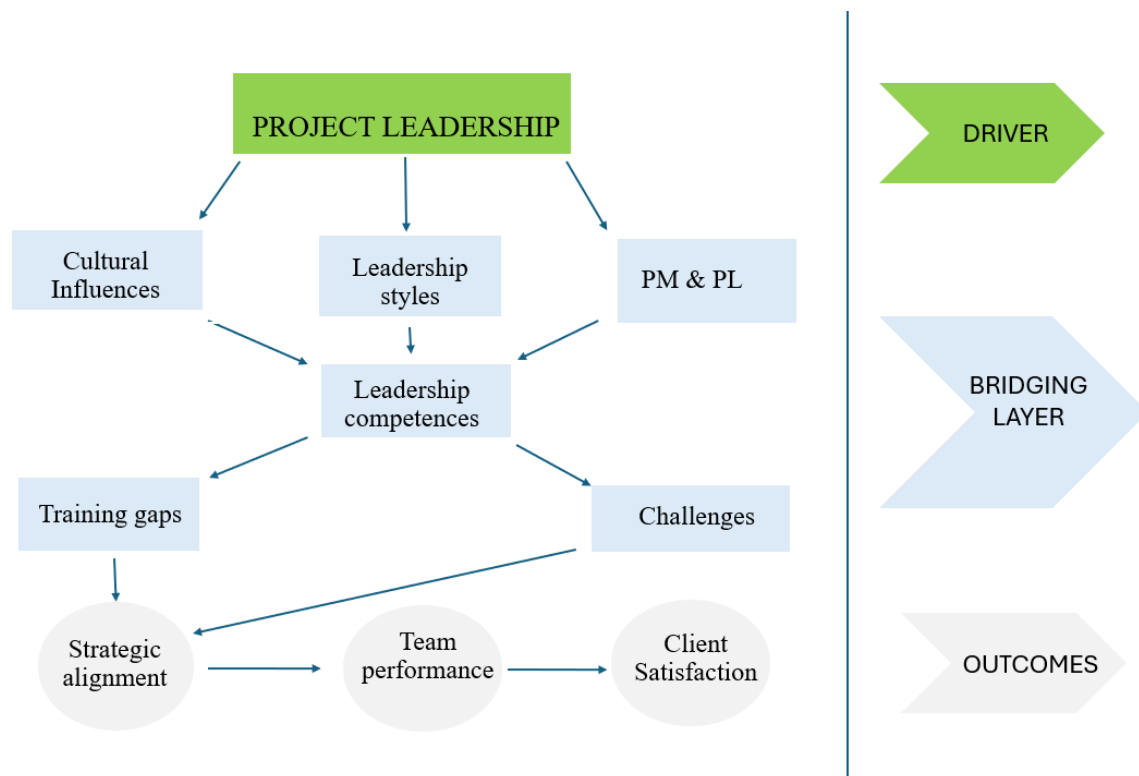
Additionally, the legal sector is increasingly prioritizing ethical considerations and sustainability in project outcomes. Leaders are expected to integrate these principles into their project strategies, ensuring alignment with broader organizational values and client expectations.

The increasing emphasis on project leadership in law firms across the Baltic States presents an opportunity for firms to strengthen their competitive position. By investing in leadership development programs and integrating project leadership principles into their organizational culture, law firms can:

- Enhance operational efficiency.
- Improve client satisfaction and retention.
- Prepare their teams to adapt to future challenges and opportunities.

Project leadership plays an essential role in the operations of modern law firms, especially in the Baltic States, where regional and global trends come together. By building strong leadership skills, solving the challenges lawyers face, and using leadership to improve client satisfaction, law firms can achieve long-term success in a competitive market. Future studies and practices should focus on finding better ways to make project leadership an everyday part of legal services.

Figure 2 Conceptual model of the research theory, Source: created by the author.



2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this part of thesis, the research methodology is presented. This part is important to identify the practical angle of project leadership in law firms across the Baltics. Research aims and objectives will be outlined, followed by an introduction to the model, the design, and the methodology. This will include an empirical research instrument and conclude with an overview of the respondents and a detailed description of the data collection process.

Although the theoretical part of the master's Thesis helped to explore the main challenges faced by law firms in the Baltic States, this section will focus on the challenges and factors that lead to success in managing projects within the legal sector. As shown in the theoretical framework, there is still not enough detailed information about trends and leadership needs in law firms in the Baltic region. While other industries have been affected in different ways, the demand for legal services in the region has been shaped by factors such as growing competition and the increasing need for specialized legal knowledge (Smith, 2022). This change in the legal field has made strong leadership in managing legal projects even more important (Johnson & Clark, 2020).

The need for skilled leaders in law firms has become more noticeable in recent years. Good leadership is essential not only for ensuring the success of legal projects but also for keeping up with changes in client needs, technology, and regulations. This **research aims** to explore how project leadership shapes and influences project management practices in law firms across the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania). The study focuses on understanding the key elements of leadership essential for project management in law firms and how local and global factors influence leadership styles within these organizations.

The specific **objectives of this research** are:

- To identify key leadership competencies in Baltic law firms.
- To explore the challenges of project leadership in Baltic law firms.
- To investigate the influence of cultural and regional factors on project leadership.
- To differentiate between legal project leadership (LPL) and legal project management (LPM) in law firms.
- To provide practical recommendations for enhancing project leadership practices

These objectives will guide the research and ensure a clear understanding of project leadership dynamics in the context of the legal industry, specifically focusing on Baltic law firms.

2.1. Research design

In the field of project leadership, particularly in law firms, **qualitative research** is often chosen because it allows gathering detailed insights from participants, which is crucial for understanding leadership behaviors and project management practices that quantitative methods cannot capture. This section will analyze relevant scientific sources that support this decision.

Qualitative research is ideal for studying complex topics like project leadership in law firms, especially when leadership behaviors are difficult to measure. This approach helps explore personal experiences and leadership styles, which can vary in the context of law firms. As noted by Creswell (2018), qualitative methods allow researchers to understand participants' "lived experiences," capturing diverse insights. In law firms, especially in the Baltic States, leadership practices are influenced by unique organizational cultures. Flick (2018) emphasizes that qualitative research helps explore how individuals respond to their work environments, making it perfect for understanding leadership in this specific context. A qualitative design is well-suited for exploring these variations.

The research is based on the **narrative analysis** method, which is particularly suitable for examining individual experiences and perspectives. This approach enables the extraction of themes, patterns, and narratives related to leadership practices within project management in law firms.

Based on literature mentioned below, **semi-structured interviews**, a qualitative tool, allow for open-ended questions that can evolve based on the responses of participant, "typically underutilized, yet it has remarkable potential" (Galletta, 2013). As discussed by Kvale and Brinkmann (2015), semi-structured interviews are particularly effective for exploring complex, context-dependent subjects like leadership in law firms. Semi-structured interviews offer the advantage of guiding the conversation with predefined questions, while also allowing the interview to explore emerging topics that may arise during the discussion. This flexibility is critical in understanding leadership dynamics in law firms. As argued by Bryman (2016), semi-structured interviews provide both consistency across interviews and room for detailed, personalized responses, making them suitable for exploring leadership within the legal profession. For better understanding the choice of semi-structured interview, table 3 below shows advantages of three different interviews:

Table 3: The types of interviews, Source: Adapted from Galletta (2013)

Structured interview	Semi-structured interview	Unstructured interview
-Detailed script -Formal -Script usable for more than one researcher	-Room for deviation -No pressure to stick the script -Room for negotiation, discussion	-Few open-ended questions -Informal -Follow the lead of interviewer - Conversational

Interviews are a powerful tool for capturing rich, detailed data about complex phenomena. Bryman (2016) highlights that semi-structured and unstructured interviews allow researchers to follow up on interesting points raised by participants, which can lead to unexpected insights. The main advantage of semi-structured interviews is the ability to adapt and change questions. This flexibility helped guide the interview to different perspectives on project leadership, especially in the legal sector, where leadership behaviors may vary significantly between firms and individuals.

2.2. Research method

The main tool used to conduct interviews in this research is the **questionnaire**, which is included in **Appendix 1, Table 10: Interview Guide**. As mentioned earlier, some questions may be added up or adjusted during the interviews depending on the responses, giving flexibility to explore unexpected insights. The interview guide focuses on several key areas related to project leadership in law firms in the Baltic States. These include:

1. **Interviewee's role:** Questions about the participant's job as a project leader (or in a similar position) and the responsibilities they have. As well as the duration of being a lawyer and a project leader because of experience importance in this research.
2. **Leadership in project management:** The importance of leadership in managing projects, and practical examples of leadership in action.
3. **Key competencies:** The necessary skills and abilities that make a project leader effective in law firms. Also questions about specific training or education.
4. **Cultural and Regional Influences:** is there any influence in project leadership through cultural perspective and how project leadership differs within the Baltic States.

5. **Challenges in Project Leadership:** The main difficulties project leaders face in law firms, such as balancing leadership with technical skills, managing clients, or overcoming firm-specific limitations.
6. **Future Recommendations:** Ideas for improving project leadership in law firms, based on the interviewee's experience.

The structure of the questionnaire is important for making sure all key topics are covered. It also helps identify trends in responses, which can be used to analyze the data later. Following this structure ensures consistency across all interviews, making it easier to compare responses. Each area had 2-6 questions to cover different perspectives.

The interviews were conducted with project managers and partners from top law firms in the Baltic States. Because law firms are spread across three different countries, both **online and offline interview options** were offered. Online interviews were conducted using video calls (e.g., Zoom or Microsoft Teams), making it easier for participants in different countries to take part. Where possible, **offline interviews** were done in person at the participants' offices or other locations. In-person interviews help build trust and make the data more reliable, as body language and spontaneous conversation can provide additional insights.

The interviews were conducted in three stages:

1. **Preparation:** Before the interview, participants were contacted to explain the research, build trust, and get their permission. They were also given a copy of the interview guide with the open-ended questions.
2. **Data Collection:** During the interviews, participants shared their thoughts and experiences. The interviews were recorded (with permission) and transcribed for further analysis.
3. **Analysis:** The transcriptions were analyzed using **thematic coding**. This method helps identify common themes and patterns related to leadership in law firms. These themes are then used to draw conclusions about leadership practices, challenges, and strategies.

This approach is useful because it is both **structured and flexible**, allowing research to capture the complexities of project leadership in law firms while also leaving room for new and valuable insights from the interviewees.

While investigating it was important to recognize that the firms involved are competitors in a highly sensitive and competitive market. By ensuring the anonymity of all participants, the study aimed to capture honest picture of leadership practices across different law firms. This is not a secret that being a good lawyer is not necessary to be a good leader.

Rather the opposite of that. Because for leadership quite a different skillset is needed. The subject of leadership in law firms is particularly sensitive because it touches on aspects such as leadership versus task completion. Leadership often involves mentorship, guidance, and team management, which can be more challenging than simply completing tasks independently. To avoid any pressure on participants and to encourage honest responses, all respondents were identified as "Respondent 1, (R1)", "Respondent 2, (R2)" and so on. This approach helps to mitigate the risk of bias and allows for more transparent insights into leadership styles and project management practices within the firms. Research indicates that ensuring anonymity in interviews can lead to more honest and accurate responses, especially in competitive industries. For instance, a study by Jamshed (2014) highlights that semi-structured interview, which allow for flexibility and depth, can be particularly effective in sensitive contexts where participants may be hesitant to share information openly. Only respondents who agreed to be named will be cited.

2.3. Sample Size and Characteristics Participants

After analyzing the literature related to project leadership in law firms in the Baltic States, it became clear that the emphasis on technical proficiency plays an essential role in leadership development, so this specialization barrier to leadership makes project management complicated. For that reason, **partners** of law firms in the Baltic States were selected for the survey, who could highlight the priorities set for projects and project managers, thus seeking an answer to what project leadership is in law firms. Also, the **project managers** themselves play an essential role in the analysis, and their opinion on project leadership is vital from a practical point of view.

Since the Master thesis raises an issue on a Baltic scale, partners and project managers from Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania were interviewed, considering cultural aspects that influence project leadership in different countries. Nowhere in the literature has it been found that large firms' project management and leadership differ from boutique firms but to ensure findings to be comprehensive, the interviews were conducted with the representatives of leading law firms in the Baltic States.

Considering the diversity angle, some studies suggest that rather than achieving a strict balance in an interview, they aim to ensure that the full range of experiences related to research

is captured. (Gates Foundation, 2020; Equal4Europe, 2020). So, intentionally, an equal quantity of men and women were interviewed.

Another vital nuance that was considered is that since the topic is very complex, and the importance of leadership in law firms is growing (as we saw from example on leadership trainings in TGS Baltic) many firms hire management and leadership experts to help firms bridge the gap towards leadership development. The scope of this study was to interview a **certified leadership expert**. The group of potential respondents was formed and asked to give interviews. But no certified expert gave an approval to be interviewed.

The number of interviews for this study was not exactly set, but according to recent research, a sample size of 10 to 30 participants is common in qualitative studies. In qualitative research, the goal is to gather detailed insights, so a smaller sample size is often enough to reach a point where no new information is being added (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Therefore, this study aimed to have at least 10 participants, which aligns with common practice in qualitative research (Guest et al., 2020). Each interview lasted up to 30 minutes, a duration that is typically long enough to gather meaningful data without overwhelming the participants (Carter et al., 2018). To select participants, a combination of purposive (judgmental) sampling and snowball sampling was used. Purposive sampling helped ensure that only partners and project managers from law firms were chosen because they have the experience and knowledge needed to provide valuable insights into leadership in law firm projects (Palinkas et al., 2015). Snowball sampling was also used, where participants referred to others who fit the criteria, allowing the sample to grow as new people with relevant experience were found (Noy, 2008).

The number of interviews for this study was not predetermined, but based on recent research, a sample size of 10 to 30 participants is typical in qualitative studies. The purpose of qualitative research is to gather in-depth insights, and a smaller sample size is often sufficient to reach saturation, meaning no new information is emerging (Fusch & Ness, 2015). For this study, the purpose was to interview at least 10 participants, which aligns with common practice in qualitative research (Guest et al., 2020). Each interview lasted up to 30 minutes, which is long enough to collect valuable data without overwhelming the participants (Carter et al., 2018).

To select participants, a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling was used. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that only partners and project managers from law firms were included, as these individuals have the experience and knowledge needed to provide valuable insights into project leadership within law firms (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Additionally, snowball sampling allowed for further participant selection, as initial interviewees referred others who met the same criteria, expanding the sample with people who had relevant expertise (Noy, 2008).

By selecting a small but diverse sample of partners and project managers from law firms in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, we can ensure the findings reflect different perspectives while also keeping the data manageable and focused.

2.4. Data analysis

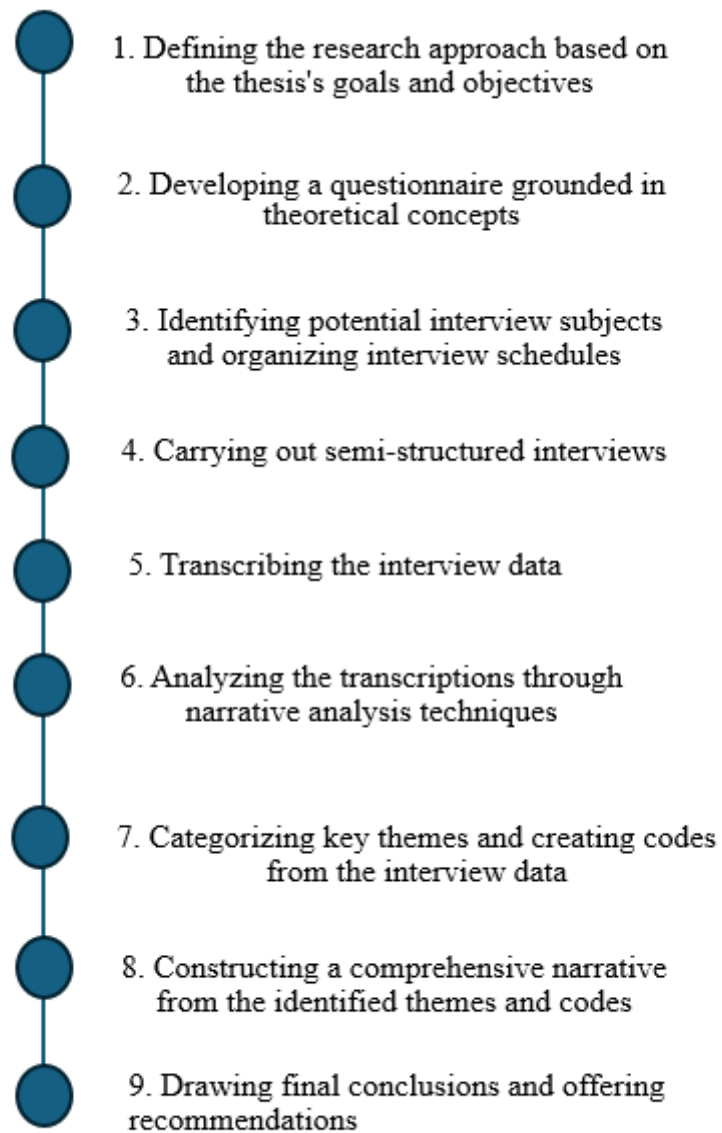
After the interviews were conducted, **thematic analysis** was used to organize, code, and synthesize the data. This method is widely used in qualitative research because it helps identify patterns and themes that reflect the participants' different experiences and perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saunders et al., 2023). One of the key tools in this analysis is **coding**, which breaks down large volumes of data into smaller, manageable parts, making the analysis easier and clearer (Gaižauskaitė & Valavičienė, 2016).

The process began with transcribing the interviews, followed by reading through the transcripts to identify initial patterns or key points. These key points were then assigned **codes** that captured the main ideas (Saldana, 2016). For example, if a participant mentions the importance of team motivation in a complex legal project, this would be coded under the theme of transformational leadership. Coding involves marking sections of the data that relate to specific topics, which are later grouped together (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

Once the initial codes were created, the transcripts were reviewed again to refine these codes. If new patterns emerged during the review, additional codes were added. **Microsoft Excel** was used to organize the codes and manage the data efficiently (Houghton et al., 2013). After the initial coding, similar responses were grouped into larger themes, such as Leadership Styles or Project Management Challenges. This helped to identify key patterns and insights in the data, which were then used to draw conclusions about project leadership in law firms. The themes were further refined to ensure they accurately represented the key findings (Charmaz, 2014).

The final narrative was constructed around these themes, incorporating direct quotes from participants to provide context and deepen the analysis. The interviews revealed that the respondents were open and willing to share detailed insights, which enriched the findings and made the analysis more nuanced.

Figure 3 The structure of the research, Source: compiled by the author



3. RESULTS OF RESEARCH

The interviews have been transcribed and analyzed to identify key leadership competencies, challenges, and cultural factors in project leadership within Baltic law firms. In order to gain a deeper understanding of project leadership in the Baltic region, it was necessary to conduct interviews with partners and project managers from law firms across Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. As discussed in the theoretical part of this thesis, it is common in law firms that all lawyers may act as project managers; however, this responsibility is typically assumed by senior lawyers. Therefore, the interviews were conducted with senior associates, associate partners, and partners from these law firms, as they are generally the individuals responsible for leading legal projects.

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of project leadership across the Baltic States, it was important to include representatives from multiple law firms within each country. According to recent research, such as the annual survey by Kantar (2024), the four leading law firms in the Baltic States for 2024 were identified as Ellex, Sorainen, Cobalt, and TGS Baltic. These law firms were selected for the research as they are recognized as the largest in the region, collectively employing more than 170 lawyers across the Baltic States, as stated on the official websites of each firm. These firms were chosen not only for their size but also for their prominent position in the legal market, the picture below demonstrates.

Figure 4. Tier 1 Law firm review 2024 Baltics. Created by Kantar (2024)

Tier 1 Law Firm Review 2024 Baltics

Overall Performance

Rank	Score	
*1	4,67	COBALT
*1	4,67	Ellex
3	4,61	SORAINEN
4	4,51	TGS Baltic



Based on 362 interviews. For more information, please visit us at www.kantarsifo.se/erbjudande/prospira and [LinkedIn](#)

In the highly competitive market of law firms, there is an increasing expectation that firms will not only recruit skilled lawyers but also develop effective internal structures and processes, including project management practices, where lawyers can demonstrate both their legal and leadership abilities. Lawyers are being tasked with more responsibilities, with project leadership being one of the key roles expected of them. In selecting participants for the interviews, a primary criterion was their experience in managing projects for at least five years. The interviewees shared their experiences as project managers, reflecting on the challenges they faced and their thoughts on the leadership required in managing these projects.

The respondents were selected from various legal specialization groups and departments to ensure a diverse range of legal expertise and perspectives on project leadership. Below, you can find more detailed information about the participants.

Table 4: Interviewers of the research, created by author.

Interviewees	Law firm, Country	Seniority	Experience as a lawyer and project manager
Respondent 1 (R1)	TGS Baltic, Lithuania	Partner	15+ years of experience as a lawyer and project manager
Respondent 2 (R2)	TGS Baltic, Estonia	Associate partner	10+ years of experience as a lawyer and project manager
Respondent 3 (R3)	TGS Baltic, Latvia	Senior associate	10+ years of experience as a lawyer and project manager
Respondent 4 (R4)	Ellex, Lithuania	Partner	20+ years of experience as a lawyer and project manager
Respondent 5 (R5)	Ellex, Latvia	Senior associate	10+ years of experience as a lawyer and project manager
Respondent 6 (R1)	Cobalt, Lithuania	Associate	7+ years of experience as a lawyer and project manager
Respondent 7 (R2)	Cobalt, Estonia	Partner	22+ years of experience as a lawyer and project manager
Respondent 8 (R3)	Sorainen, Estonia	Partner	20+ years of experience as a lawyer and project manager
Respondent 9 (R4)	Sorainen, Lithuania	Senior associate	10+ years of experience as a lawyer and project manager

Respondent 10 (R5)	Sorainen, Latvia	Senior associate	8+ years of experience as a lawyer and project manager
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It was also noted that the balance of men and women was maintained during the selection of interviewees. However, gender did not play a crucial role in this research, as the primary factor that was considered significant was the interviewees' experience in leading projects. The participants' experience varied from 5 to 25 years, providing a wide perspective on the research objectives:

- To identify key leadership competencies in Baltic law firms.
- To explore the challenges of project leadership in Baltic law firms.
- To investigate the influence of cultural and regional factors on project leadership.
- Based on the comparison between theoretical and empirical parts of the thesis, to provide practical recommendations for enhancing project leadership practices.

The interview data was organized in a matrix created in Microsoft Excel. Patterns that emerged from the responses were linked to relevant quotations and categorized under unified codes. These codes were then grouped into broader topics. In the end, all transcriptions were coded under 7 themes that are listed below with codes that were grouped into topics.

Table 5: Themes and codes found during the research phase, Source: created by the author.

1.	Project leaders' ability to balance technical expertise with leadership skills
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of emotional intelligence has become crucial. • Empathy influences team motivation.
2.	Project leaders' communication as essential in navigating project leadership
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kvint essential for aligning teams. • Consistent communication with clients. • Communication is glue when in big teams and different cultures.
3.	Project leadership in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia requires adapting to distinct cultural preferences
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision making styles differ in all three countries. • Legal regulations dictate different approaches. • Effective project leadership must account for international collaboration complexities.

4.	Dominant Leadership Styles
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emerging technologies (e.g. AI) are changing leadership perspective. • Tech advanced leaders will be those who integrate innovations into projects.
5.	Growing need for leadership competencies and elimination of training gaps
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership skills are essential when managing interdisciplinary teams. • Leaders must understand team dynamics. • Leaders maintaining trust during complex projects. • Visible need for agile decision-making. • Negotiation became a key while talking about project leadership. • Cross-disciplinary skills is needed through targeted training programs in law firms.
6.	Client centric approach is new normal in project leadership
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client satisfaction metric is a key to successful projects leadership and should be measured regularly. • Approach through client industry. • Strategic business solutions than rather meeting deadlines or budgets.
7.	Future Trends and Recommendations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resistance to change in developing project leadership. • Still a rich opinion that the main selling point is expertise. • Emerging technologies (e.g. AI) are changing leadership perspective. • Tech advanced leaders will be those who integrate innovations into projects

3.1. Project Leader or Project Manager? Balancing Technical Expertise with Leadership Skills

Law firms often struggle to balance the technical expertise required for legal work with the leadership skills necessary for managing projects effectively. The distinction between a project leader and a project manager is a critical one, particularly in the legal sector of the Baltic States. A project manager focuses on tasks such as scheduling, resource allocation, and adherence to deadlines, while a project leader takes a broader approach by inspiring teams, fostering collaboration, and aligning project goals with organizational strategy. This differentiation was frequently emphasized in interviews. Respondent 4 (R4) explained, "A

project manager ensures tasks are completed, but a project leader inspires the team to exceed expectations, especially in high-pressure legal cases."

This role of a project leader reflects the increasing demand for emotional intelligence in leadership. Teams in law firms are often made up of high-achieving professionals who excel technically but may struggle with collaboration. A project leader bridges this gap by understanding and addressing the unique motivations and challenges of team members. Respondent 7 (R7) observed, "Leaders need to recognize the emotional cues of their team members, especially during stressful projects. It keeps the team cohesive and focused."

The importance of emotional intelligence (EI) in leadership has become a cornerstone for effective leadership in many industries, and the legal profession is no exception. In industries such as healthcare and IT, where teamwork and client interactions are pivotal, leaders with high emotional intelligence are often more successful at resolving conflicts, enhancing team performance, and fostering loyalty. Similarly, legal teams, which operate under tight deadlines and client pressures, benefit greatly from leaders who can manage stress, demonstrate empathy, and inspire trust.

Respondent 1 (R1) emphasized, "A project leader needs to think beyond the immediate tasks and align the project with the client's strategic goals. It's not enough to just focus on deliverables." EI plays a critical role in understanding these strategic needs and communicating them effectively to the team. In broader terms, leaders in the Baltic States must deal with cultural nuances and the often-hierarchical structure of law firms, making EI even more critical.

Empathy, an integral part of emotional intelligence, directly influences team motivation. Respondent 5 (R5) shared, "A leader who listens and acknowledges individual struggles creates a supportive environment that fuels productivity." This statement reflects a growing recognition in leadership studies that empathetic leaders not only improve morale but also drive higher levels of commitment and innovation.

Empathy enables leaders to anticipate challenges and preemptively address team concerns, fostering resilience during high-pressure situations. This insight aligns with broader observations in professional services, where empathy often translates into better client outcomes and enhanced team dynamics. Across industries, leaders who demonstrate empathy report stronger team cohesion and higher retention rates, which are equally relevant in the Baltic legal sector.

So, is there empathy and emotional intelligence that allocates managers from leaders? The respondents of the research have thoughts that (R1) "being a good manager does not prove

being a good leader, so all the possible skillset for people management is crucial and the communication is among them”.

3.2. Communication as a pillar of project leadership

Clear and consistent communication emerged as a central theme in the interviews, underpinning nearly every aspect of effective project leadership. It serves as the foundation for aligning teams, building trust, and ensuring client satisfaction. Respondent 2 (R2) emphasized, "Consistent communication builds trust - both within the team and with clients. Without it, misunderstandings can derail a project."

In the context of law firms, communication must be strategic and intentional. Respondent 6 (R6) described their approach as "many mistakes might be made, but communication can't be ignored. People are important. Make them feel like they are important." This mindset ensures that team members and stakeholders are aligned and that potential issues are addressed proactively. Effective communication is particularly important in large, multidisciplinary teams, where misaligned expectations can lead to delays and frustration.

Communication plays a critical role when working in big projects with big teams. Team leader is the pillar of the project, and communication is the pillar for team leader. The idea of structured communication models is not new but is gaining traction across various industries. For instance, agile methodologies in software development rely on daily stand-ups and sprint reviews - tools that prioritize clear, frequent updates. Similar principles can be applied in legal settings to enhance coordination and efficiency.

And of course, communication with clients was another critical area highlighted in the interviews. Respondent 5 (R5) remarked, "Even a quick update to a client can reassure them that the project is on track, which strengthens their confidence in our work." Regular updates help maintain transparency, which is a key expectation in client relationships today. This is particularly true in industries such as financial services and construction, where consistent communication helps mitigate risks and foster trust.

Law firms are increasingly recognizing the importance of client-centric communication strategies. Respondent 9 (R9) highlighted, "Clients want to feel involved and informed. It's our responsibility as leaders to keep them engaged without overwhelming them with unnecessary

details." This balance, providing essential information without overloading, is a hallmark of effective client communication.

3.3. Cultural awareness on project leadership across Baltic States

The Baltic States, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, share historical and geographic ties, but their cultural differences significantly influence project leadership. Each country has distinct professional norms and communication styles, requiring leaders to adapt their approaches. Respondent 1 (R1) explained, "In Lithuania, people appreciate direct communication, while in Estonia, autonomy is highly valued. Latvia often strikes a middle ground between these approaches."

These cultural nuances extend to decision-making styles. Respondent 3 (R3) shared an example: "During a cross-border project, I had to adjust my leadership style for each country's team. The Estonian team wanted minimal supervision, but the Latvian team preferred regular updates." This adaptability is not limited to the legal sector. In global industries such as pharmaceutical manufacturing or logistics, understanding and accommodating cultural preferences are critical for project success.

Legal regulations also play a role in shaping leadership practices in the Baltic States. Respondent 7 (R7) observed, "The regulatory environment often shapes how decisions are made. Leaders need to be aware of these nuances to navigate effectively." For instance, Estonia's leadership in digital innovation has influenced its regulatory landscape, encouraging a more agile approach to project management. In contrast, Latvia's regulatory frameworks may lean more toward traditional practices, requiring leaders to adopt a more structured approach.

The complexities of international collaboration further underscore the importance of cultural intelligence. Respondent 2 (R2) remarked, "Cross-border projects require leaders who can manage varying expectations and legal frameworks simultaneously." In this context, effective project leadership involves not only technical and managerial skills but also the ability to mediate between different regulatory and cultural contexts.

In the Baltics, with small populations and close communities, each Country holds tight to its unique identity. It's not about opposition but pride. Each Country has its distinct way of communicating, working, and even joking, adding layers of variety to a seemingly similar landscape.

After conducting interviews, it's clear that the main idea is that we all have unique backgrounds, yet we can work ideally together when we speak the same "language." Leadership language, if I may. When well-skilled leaders gather in one room, the differences become strengths that will drive significant results at the local and Baltic levels.

The book *The Culture Map* (Meyer, 2015), analyses how cultural differences shape communication, decision-making, and trust. But there is no one answer to what builds a true team. Sometimes, it could be a very comfortable environment when all the employees feel like they are in the „right place”, and sometimes, opposite, very different cultures, out of their comfort zone, making a significant effort and creating a mega-effective leading team.

3.4. Dominant leadership styles

Based on the interview responses, transformational leadership is the most frequently mentioned leadership style across the firms. Respondents emphasized the importance of inspiring and motivating teams, setting clear visions, and aligning team goals with organizational objectives. As exemplified by Respondent 4 (R4), "A project leader inspires the team to exceed expectations, especially in high-pressure legal cases," this resonates closely with Bass and Riggio's (2021) concept of transformational leadership, which emphasizes the role of leaders in fostering innovation and driving performance through motivation and vision.

Transactional leadership also plays a role, though to a lesser extent, in ensuring that tasks are completed on time, and that accountability is maintained. Respondent 2 (R2) highlighted the need for leaders to implement structured processes and maintain clear communication to ensure that deadlines and regulatory requirements are met, aligning with the principles of transactional leadership, which prioritize clear roles and reward systems for task completion.

In terms of servant leadership, a few respondents noted its importance, particularly in enhancing team cohesion and reducing stress in high-pressure environments. Respondent 7 (R7) mentioned, "Leaders need to recognize emotional cues within a team to maintain cohesion," underscoring the value of emotional intelligence and the ability to support and nurture team members, which is central to the servant leadership approach (Spears, 2020).

The interviews provided actionable recommendations for improving leadership practices in law firms. One of the most pressing suggestions was the need for leadership development programs that blend technical legal skills with emotional intelligence, cultural

competence, and adaptive decision-making skills. Many respondents emphasized the importance of balancing the technical expertise with leadership abilities, which is crucial for managing multidisciplinary teams and navigating complex legal projects. Respondent 6 (R6) suggested, "Leaders must embrace emotional intelligence to lead teams effectively, especially when managing high-stakes projects."

The need for adaptive leadership was also evident, as several respondents noted the challenges of navigating rapid changes in client expectations, technological advancements, and market competition. Respondent 10 (R10) pointed out, "Leaders must pivot quickly in response to client demands and market changes," echoing the views of Heifetz et al. (2020) on the importance of adaptability in leadership, particularly in fast-changing environments like law firms.

Additionally, the interviews highlighted the critical role of cross-cultural communication within the Baltic States, where legal professionals from different countries (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) need to adjust their leadership styles to suit diverse cultural expectations. Respondent 1 (R1) explained, "In Lithuania, people appreciate direct communication, while in Estonia, autonomy is highly valued," which aligns with Hofstede's (2019) cultural dimensions theory, which emphasizes the importance of adapting leadership styles to regional and cultural differences.

3.5. Leadership competencies and training gaps in project leadership

Leadership in law firms requires a unique blend of skills, spanning technical expertise, interpersonal abilities, and strategic vision. Respondent 4 (R4) noted, "Bringing together different disciplines requires a leader who understands how to leverage diverse expertise." This is particularly important in interdisciplinary teams, where collaboration between lawyers, accountants, and IT professionals is becoming more common.

Understanding team dynamics is another critical competency. Respondent 1 (R1) observed, "Each team member's strengths and weaknesses are critical knowledge for a leader to effectively allocate tasks." Respondent 7 (R7) added, "Building strong interpersonal relationships within the team is as important as technical expertise."

Despite the growing recognition of these skills, training gaps remain a significant challenge. Respondent 8 (R8) stated, "Trust is the cornerstone of leadership. Without it, no skill or strategy will succeed." Many respondents emphasized the need for structured training

programs that focus on both technical and interpersonal skills. Respondent 7 (R7) remarked, "Training programs should address the evolving nature of leadership by incorporating cross-disciplinary skills."

From all the data analysis we can synthesize the skillset for project leaders.

- **Soft Skills:** Emotional intelligence, active listening, empathy, and adaptability.
- **Technical Skills:** Strategic thinking, technological literacy, and legal expertise.
- **Cultural Skills:** Cross-cultural competency, negotiation, and sensitivity to diverse team dynamics.
- **Organizational Skills:** Mentorship, team development, and agile decision-making.

3.6. Client-Centric metrics for project leadership success

Client satisfaction was a top priority for most respondents. Respondent 5 (R5) noted, "A successful project isn't just about meeting deadlines; it's about ensuring the client feels their needs were understood and addressed." Respondent 9 (R9) added, "Delivering value goes beyond technical execution. It's about aligning with the client's broader goals."

Respondent 7 (R7) emphasized, "Regular feedback loops with clients are crucial. They help us refine our approach and build trust." Respondent 10 (R10) stated, "The client's perspective should guide project decisions. It's the leader's role to ensure the team is aligned with this vision."

Respondent 3 (R3) reflected on a learning experience: "Once, we focused too much on internal efficiency and missed key client expectations. That was a wake-up call about prioritizing the client's viewpoint." Respondent 6 (R6) summed it up: "A client-centric approach isn't optional anymore. It's what differentiates a good leader from a great one."

3.7. Future trends in project leadership

The future of project leadership in the Baltic States brings both challenges and opportunities. Like other professional service industries, law firms are at a turning point where adapting to new trends is crucial for staying relevant and successful. One significant challenge is Resistance to change. Respondent 10 (R10) noted, "Resistance to change is a major barrier. Many leaders are set in their ways and unwilling to adapt to new methods." This reluctance to evolve is common across industries and can slow progress and innovation.

Leadership development is another area that needs attention. While many firms recognize the importance of building more assertive leaders, the most essential skills are often not prioritized. Respondent 8 (R8) pointed out, "While firms offer some training, they often overlook soft skills like empathy and negotiation. These are critical for leadership." Other sectors, such as consulting and IT, have made significant strides in leadership programs that blend technical and interpersonal skills. These programs can serve as examples for law firms in the Baltic States.

Another challenge is balancing leadership training with the demands of daily work. Respondent 6 (R6) shared, "Balancing billable hours with leadership development is tough. Many lawyers see leadership training as a distraction from client work." This reflects a common struggle in many industries: focusing too much on short-term goals like productivity and not enough on long-term growth. Some global companies address this by embedding leadership development into everyday tasks through mentorship programs and structured learning, which Baltic law firms could also adopt.

Mentorship plays a key role in shaping future leaders. Respondent 4 (R4) emphasized, "Leaders should actively mentor younger team members, but that's often missing in our field." Mentorship is more than just teaching technical skills; it creates a space for sharing knowledge and building connections. Fields like finance and healthcare have long used mentorship to develop future leaders, and law firms have a chance to build similar programs.

Despite these hurdles, there is significant potential for firms ready to embrace change. Respondent 5 (R5) said, "Leadership isn't something you can learn overnight. It requires ongoing development and a willingness to evolve." This highlights the need for leaders to learn and adapt to stay ahead of industry changes constantly.

In the future, technology and strategic thinking will be essential for project leadership. Respondent 3 (R3) stated, "The future of leadership lies in combining legal expertise with strategic and technological skills. Leaders need to be versatile." Technology, such as AI and project management tools, can make processes more efficient and allow leaders to focus on big-picture decisions. Leaders who are comfortable using these tools will have an edge in delivering value to clients and improving team performance.

Agility will also become a defining quality of successful leaders. Respondent 10 (R10) observed, "Agility will be key. Leaders must pivot quickly in response to client demands and market changes." Agility goes beyond quick decision-making involves being proactive,

adapting to changes, and helping teams confidently navigate uncertain situations. These skills are essential as industries experience rapid technological changes and client expectations.

Innovation is another important factor. Respondent 8 (R8) noted, "Innovation isn't just about technology; it's about rethinking how we approach leadership itself." This includes breaking from rigid hierarchies, encouraging creativity, and building environments where new ideas can thrive. Other industries, like advertising and technology startups, have shown how this approach can lead to great success. Law firms can also benefit by adopting similar practices.

Technology is reshaping project leadership across industries, and law firms are no exception. Emerging tools such as artificial intelligence (AI) and project management software are revolutionizing how legal projects are managed. Respondent 6 (R6) stated, "Leaders who embrace AI and other tools can enhance efficiency and deliver better outcomes for clients."

The integration of technology into project leadership involves more than just adopting new tools. It requires a shift in mindset and a willingness to innovate. Respondent 8 (R8) commented, "Technology isn't just an enabler; it's reshaping how we lead. The ability to leverage tech effectively is becoming a core leadership skill." For example, AI can streamline routine tasks such as legal research, freeing up leaders to focus on strategic decision-making.

However, effective technology adoption requires discernment. Respondent 2 (R2) pointed out, "Integration isn't about using every tool available; it's about selecting the right ones to enhance outcomes." This selective approach ensures that technology complements, rather than complicates, the team's workflow. In sectors like architecture and engineering, similar practices have shown how technology can improve efficiency and collaboration without overwhelming the team.

Finally, collaboration and inclusivity will play a central role in shaping the future of leadership. Respondent 2 (R2) said, "Leaders who foster collaboration and inclusivity will stand out. The ability to build cohesive teams will be a competitive advantage." Respondent 9 (R9) added, "Leadership in the future will be defined by adaptability, empathy, and the ability to integrate diverse perspectives." These qualities signal a shift from traditional top-down leadership styles to more open, people-focused approaches that value teamwork and relationships.

In conclusion, the future of project leadership in Baltic law firms will require a mix of tradition and innovation. Addressing current gaps, adopting new technologies, and fostering a culture of collaboration will help redefine leadership in the region. This transformation will

depend on making structural changes and shifting mindsets to embrace continuous learning, mentorship, and adaptability.

3.8. The Key Features for Project Leadership and Its Implementation in the Legal Sector Across Baltics

The legal sector in the Baltic States operates in a complex environment that requires leaders to balance multiple demands, including adaptability, effective communication, and a strong client focus. These features were consistently identified in interviews as essential for project leadership. Respondent 7 (R7) noted, "Leadership in the legal sector requires balancing individual accountability with collaborative decision-making to address complex client needs."

Adaptability is a cornerstone of leadership in law firms, particularly in the Baltic States, where legal frameworks, client expectations, and team dynamics vary significantly. Leaders who can quickly adjust their strategies to respond to unexpected challenges or shifting client priorities are better positioned to succeed. In industries such as consulting and technology, adaptability has long been recognized as a key driver of success. The legal profession, traditionally slower to change, is now seeing a similar trend.

Communication also plays a central role in effective leadership. Respondent 4 (R4) observed, "The ability to navigate interpersonal dynamics and maintain focus under pressure is what sets exceptional leaders apart." Leaders must be able to clearly articulate goals, provide timely feedback, and foster open dialogue within teams. In the Baltic States, where cultural nuances influence communication styles, leaders need to be particularly skilled at tailoring their approach to different audiences. For example, Estonian professionals may prefer a more autonomous working style, while Lithuanian teams might value direct and frequent communication.

Client-centric approaches are another defining feature of strong project leadership. Respondent 9 (R9) remarked, "Understanding the client's business context and aligning legal strategies with their broader goals are crucial." In professional services industries like management consulting, client-centricity has become the gold standard, with firms tailoring their solutions to meet the unique needs of each client. Legal leaders in the Baltic States are increasingly adopting similar practices, emphasizing the importance of building long-term relationships based on trust and shared objectives.

Structured leadership development programs tailored to the unique demands of the legal sector were advocated by many respondents. Respondent 8 (R8) noted, "Training programs should focus not only on technical expertise but also on soft skills like empathy, negotiation,

and cross-disciplinary collaboration." Such programs are critical for preparing future leaders to navigate the complexities of modern legal practice. Some global law firms have implemented leadership academies or rotational programs to expose potential leaders to different aspects of the business, a model that Baltic firms could adopt to great effect.

Moreover, collaboration within teams and across disciplines is becoming increasingly important. The nature of legal work often requires input from professionals with diverse expertise, such as financial analysts, IT specialists, and marketing professionals. Respondent 3 (R3) emphasized, "Collaboration is no longer optional; it's a necessity for addressing complex client challenges and delivering comprehensive solutions."

The implementation of these leadership features in the Baltic legal sector will require a strategic approach. Firms must prioritize investment in training, foster a culture of openness and innovation, and embrace technologies that enhance efficiency and collaboration. By doing so, they can equip their leaders with the tools and mindset needed to thrive in a competitive and rapidly changing environment.

3.9. Alignment of Research with Literature Analysis

The findings from the research align closely with the theoretical part of the thesis, showing a strong connection between the ideas explored in academic literature and the practical insights gathered during interviews. One of the main themes in the theoretical framework was the importance of leadership styles, particularly transformational and adaptive leadership. This was clearly reflected in the research, where respondents frequently emphasized the need for leaders who inspire their teams and adjust to challenges as they arise. For example, Respondent 4 noted that a leader's role goes beyond task management to motivating the team to achieve more. This supports the idea of Bass and Riggio (2021) that transformational leaders play a crucial role in creating a shared vision and inspiring performance beyond expectations.

Another area where the research aligns with the literature is the role of emotional intelligence in project leadership. The theoretical framework discussed emotional intelligence as a key factor in successful leadership, particularly in high-stress environments like law firms. Several respondents echoed this and stressed the importance of understanding team dynamics and empathizing with team members' needs. Respondent 7 mentioned that recognizing emotional cues within a team can make a significant difference in maintaining cohesion and focus. This ties directly to Goleman's (2020) assertion that leaders with high emotional intelligence can build trust, enhance collaboration, and improve team performance.

Communication was another central theme in the theoretical part and the research findings. The literature emphasizes that clear, consistent communication is central to effective leadership, and the respondents reinforced this idea. Many highlighted the importance of keeping both teams and clients informed. Respondent 2 shared how consistent communication helps to build trust and avoid misunderstandings, while Respondent 5 explained that even minor updates can reassure clients and improve their confidence in the project's direction. This aligns with Northouse's (2022) perspective that communication is the backbone of leadership, enabling alignment across all stakeholders and ensuring project success.

Cultural nuances in leadership, particularly within the context of the Baltic States, also showed a strong alignment between theory and research. The theoretical part highlighted how regional differences in communication styles and decision-making approaches can impact leadership. This was evident in the interviews, where respondents shared examples of how leaders need to adjust their styles when working across Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. Respondent 1 explained that while direct communication works well in Lithuania, Estonian professionals prefer more autonomy, and Latvians often balance the two. These observations align with Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, underscoring the importance of adapting leadership styles to fit cultural contexts (Hofstede, 2019).

The role of technology in modern leadership was another key point in the theoretical part, and the research strongly validated it. Respondents emphasized the importance of AI and project management software in improving efficiency and decision-making. Respondent 6 mentioned how technology is changing how leaders approach their roles, allowing them to focus on strategic tasks rather than administrative ones. This supports Susskind and Susskind's (2021) argument that technology is transforming professional services by automating routine processes and enabling more innovative approaches to leadership.

The research also highlighted the need for improved leadership training, a point strongly emphasized in the theoretical part. While the literature discusses the importance of developing technical and interpersonal skills, the interviews revealed that many law firms in the Baltic States still struggle to provide comprehensive training programs. Respondent 8 pointed out that soft skills like empathy and negotiation are often overlooked, even though they are critical for effective leadership. This gap reflects the findings of Mulder and Eringa (2022), who argue that professional service firms must prioritize holistic training programs that bridge technical expertise with leadership competencies.

Client-centric leadership was another area where the findings and literature aligned well. The theoretical framework highlighted the importance of understanding client needs and aligning project outcomes with their expectations. Respondent 9 reinforced this idea, explaining that successful leaders focus on meeting deadlines and creating value for the client. This aligns with Hodgson and Paton's (2020) argument that client satisfaction should be a key metric for evaluating project success. Leaders must develop strategies that deliver both technical and strategic value.

Finally, the theoretical part discussed future trends in leadership, including the need for agility and innovation. The research findings strongly supported these ideas. Respondent 10 emphasized the importance of adapting quickly to changing client demands and market conditions, while Respondent 8 stressed the need for leaders to rethink traditional approaches and embrace new ideas. These observations align closely with Heifetz's (2020) framework for adaptive leadership, which emphasizes the importance of navigating complex challenges through flexibility and creative problem-solving.

However, one critical distinction noted during the interviews is the blending of leadership and management skills. In the theoretical framework, the difference between legal project management (LPM) and legal project leadership (LPL) was discussed, but the interviews revealed that many law firms do not have a clear distinction between the two roles. Instead, senior lawyers often combine both responsibilities, which could pose challenges in balancing technical expertise with leadership. As one respondent 4 shared, "A project manager ensures tasks are completed, but a project leader inspires the team to exceed expectations." This insight suggests that law firms may benefit from clearer role definitions and targeted leadership development programs.

Overall, the research findings validate and enrich the theoretical framework, demonstrating that the concepts explored in the literature are highly relevant to the realities of project leadership in Baltic law firms. The alignment between theory and practice shows that the thesis provides a well-rounded and professional exploration of this topic, offering valuable insights for both academic and practical applications.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluating project leadership in Baltic law firms was a challenging task. There is little scientific research available on this topic, and the competitive nature of the legal market made it difficult to gather detailed, practical information. Law firms are very active in marketing and business development, but when it comes to sharing their internal processes, challenges, or areas for improvement, they often speak in general terms instead of giving clear, practical examples.

Despite these challenges, this research met its goals. It shows how important leadership is in improving how projects are managed in Baltic law firms. A clear pattern emerged: good leadership helps align the firm's goals, encourages innovation, and makes it easier to handle complex legal projects. The research achieved its objectives, revealing several important **conclusions:**

- **Leadership as the foundation of project management. Many experts, not so many leaders.** Not surprisingly many law firms now are thinking about management (Law firm Ellex encourages partners to graduate from BMI University, Law firm TGS Baltic two years in a row actively coaching team leaders to be more than a lawyer, to be board member or strategic advisor). Many respondents emphasized the importance of balancing technical expertise with leadership abilities, which is crucial for managing multidisciplinary teams and navigating complex legal projects. Respondent 6 (R6) suggested, "Leaders must embrace emotional intelligence to lead teams effectively, especially when managing high-stakes projects." Recommendation to run learn management skills as soon as possible.
- **Dominant leadership styles.** As discussed in the theoretical part and based on the interview responses, *transformational* leadership is the most frequently mentioned leadership style across the firms. Respondents emphasized the importance of inspiring and motivating teams, setting clear visions, and aligning team goals with organizational objectives. *Transactional* leadership also plays a role, though to a lesser extent, in ensuring that tasks are completed on time, and that accountability is maintained.
- **Regional similarities and cultural nuances.** Despite minor cultural differences across Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, the challenges and best practices of project leadership are strikingly similar. The primary differences lie in cultural communication preferences, which can be addressed through deliberate and transparent communication strategies.

- **Client-centric leadership is a necessity.** Successful project leadership extends beyond meeting deadlines and managing budgets. It requires a deep understanding of client expectations and the delivery of tailored, strategic solutions that enhance client satisfaction and foster long-term loyalty.
- **Technology as an enabler of leadership.** Emerging technologies such as AI and project management tools have fundamentally altered the dynamics of project leadership. Leaders adept in leveraging these innovations can streamline administrative tasks, improve decision-making, and focus on value-added activities.
- **A call for holistic leadership development.** There remains a significant gap between the leadership skills lawyers possess and those required to navigate complex projects effectively. Leadership development programs must prioritize emotional intelligence, adaptability, and cultural competence to bridge this divide.
- **Sustainability through leadership.** Law firms must recognize that great leadership is not just about achieving financial success. It is about creating a healthy, sustainable environment where mentorship thrives, teams collaborate effectively, and organizational goals are met without compromising employee well-being.

On an international level, the views of lawyers in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia were surprisingly similar. The main difference between the countries lies in cultural habits, which can be addressed through better communication. This means that while each country has its unique way of working, these differences are not barriers to good leadership in law firms.

Most importantly, this research found that there's no need to separate the Baltic States when talking about leadership challenges and solutions. The region shares common issues, such as the need to develop leadership skills, focus on client needs, and use new technologies. Similarly, successful leadership practices, like emotional intelligence and adaptability, are relevant across all three countries.

The Baltic States can work as one strong unit when exploring ways to improve legal project leadership. Regional cooperation could help law firms strengthen their leadership practices and become more competitive globally. To strengthen project leadership practices and maintain a competitive edge, Baltic law firms should implement the following actionable **recommendations:**

- **Comprehensive leadership development programs.** The interviews provided actionable recommendations for improving leadership practices in law firms. One of the most pressing suggestions was the need for leadership development programs that

blend technical legal skills with emotional intelligence, cultural competence, and adaptive decision-making skills. Include workshops, role-playing scenarios, and mentoring opportunities to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application.

- Theoretical concepts on leadership styles – **servant leadership and adaptive leadership**, were strongly supported by the empirical data. However, there remains a need for more specialized leadership training programs that integrate both leadership competencies and project management skills, particularly in handling complex, multidisciplinary legal projects. Moving forward, Baltic law firms should focus on developing leaders who can seamlessly integrate these styles to meet the evolving demands of the legal sector, especially in the context of a highly competitive and culturally diverse environment. Though **situational leadership** was out of scope of research due to its quite complicated approach, developed by Dr. Paul Hersey and Dr. Ken Blanchard, but it's worth attention to analyze. This leadership model emphasizes the need for leaders to adapt their style based on the development level of their team members. The core principle is that there is no single "best" leadership style; effective leaders adjust their approach to fit the competence and commitment of the individuals they lead. It might be a good start to get closer to employees. To make the DiSC Method discussed earlier and implement situational leadership in daily routine.
- **Enhance communication strategies.** Effective communication is crucial for managing culturally diverse teams and projects. Firms should adopt structured communication protocols, encourage regular feedback loops, and provide training on active listening and conflict resolution.
- **Harness the power of technology.** Equip leaders with the skills to integrate AI-driven tools and advanced project management software into their workflows. These technologies not only improve efficiency but also free up time for leaders to focus on client relationships and strategic priorities.
- **Promote a client-centric leadership approach.** Establish mechanisms for collecting and analyzing client feedback to refine project approaches. Leaders should prioritize understanding the client's industry context and strategic goals, ensuring every project adds tangible value. We already see in the market law firms implementing NPS (net promoter score) and other customer tracking practices. The whole mechanism in law firms is working to understand customer journey and how to improve it. Measuring

customer health has become a daily routine, hygiene and the norm. The same as with lawyers, there is no question that you are a good expert, the question is are you a good leader? And that is the game changer.

- **Foster collaborative and inclusive cultures.** Move away from rigid hierarchical structures to more collaborative leadership models. Empower team members to contribute to decision-making processes and encourage cross-disciplinary collaboration to drive innovation.
- **Regular evaluation and adaptation.** Develop metrics to evaluate leadership performance, such as project success rates, team satisfaction, and client feedback. Use these insights to refine leadership practices continuously.
- **Embrace regional integration and global best practices.** Recognize the interconnectedness of the Baltic States while staying informed of global trends in project leadership. Tailor international best practices to fit the specific needs and cultural contexts of regional law firms.
- **Redefine success in leadership.** Shift the narrative of leadership success from merely financial gains to creating environments where mentorship, collaboration, and well-being are valued. This holistic approach ensures sustainable growth and long-term profitability.

While this thesis doesn't offer a direct guide to making more money, it does show how effective leadership creates the foundation for financial success. Profit is always a goal for law firms and their leaders, but this research aims to shift the focus to what drives profit. The difference is only what lies behind that: management led by stress regarding billable hours or outstanding leadership led by mentorship and a healthy environment. The second approach not only increases profit but also builds long-term success by improving employee satisfaction, team loyalty, and client trust.

This research encourages law firm leaders to look beyond short-term financial results. It invites them to consider how their leadership style affects the overall success and health of their firms. Focusing on great leadership rooted in collaboration, innovation, and well-being sets the stage for lasting growth in a competitive market.

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ANNEX 1

Interview guide

Part 1: General Questions about the Respondent

1. Could you please specify your role at the firm (e.g., partner, associate partner, etc.) and how long have you been practicing law?
2. What is your specific role within the project leadership team (e.g., team lead, partner overseeing projects, project manager, etc.)?
3. Do you agree to have your name and law firm referenced in the research findings? (Yes/No)
4. What are your primary responsibilities and tasks related to project management and leadership in your law firm?

Part 2: Project Leadership Competencies and Challenges

5. Which leadership competencies do you consider most critical for effective project management in law firms, particularly in complex legal projects? *Can you provide an example where one of these competencies played a key role in the success of a project?*
6. How do you balance emotional intelligence versus technical legal knowledge in project leadership? *Do you find that one is more important than the other in certain contexts?*
7. What leadership qualities are necessary to manage projects in a law firm successfully? (e.g., vision, team motivation, taking responsibility, etc.) *Could you share an example of how you demonstrate these qualities in your work?*
8. Does your law firm offer formal training programs or courses for project managers to improve their leadership and management competencies? *How effective do you believe these programs are?*
9. What leadership competencies should be further developed in law firms to enable project managers to work more effectively and address emerging challenges in the legal services sector?
10. If your firm conducts post-project evaluations, what aspects (e.g., project efficiency, teamwork quality, client satisfaction) do you consider most important when assessing the success of a project?

11. What are the most significant challenges you face when leading large, complex legal projects? *What leadership skills do you find most crucial in overcoming these challenges?*

Part 3: Cultural and Regional Aspects of Project Leadership in the Baltic States

12. In your experience, how do cultural differences between Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia influence project leadership? *Are there specific communication styles or decision-making approaches in any of these countries that you find particularly effective in managing legal projects?*
13. What particular differences do you see between Baltic countries when it comes to implementing projects in law firms? *How do these differences affect leadership styles and project outcomes?*
14. What role does culture play when your law firm conducts cross-cultural projects involving lawyers from other countries? *How do you manage the challenges related to different work cultures and practices?*

Part 4: Project Leadership Development in Law Firms

15. How do you see project leadership evolving in Baltic law firms over the next 5 years, particularly with emerging technologies and increasing client demands for efficiency? *What trends do you expect to shape leadership practices in law firms?*
16. What changes would you recommend your firm implement to improve project management and leadership competencies?
17. What do you think are the key factors that will improve project managers' ability to work on international and interdisciplinary legal projects?
18. What leadership practices have you found most successful in managing interdisciplinary legal teams?
19. In your view, what are the biggest barriers to developing effective project leadership in law firms, and how can these challenges be overcome?