



Cultural perspectives on Responsible
Leadership:
A qualitative comparison between
Germany and Portugal

Felicia Kristin Haug

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Nuno Moreira da Cruz

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Abstract

This study explores cultural perspectives on Responsible Leadership (RL) between Germany and Portugal, focusing on perceptions, enablers, barriers and benefits in these two different cultural contexts. Using a qualitative research approach, semi-structured interviews analyse German leaders' subjective perceptions and compare them with findings from a previous study of Portuguese leaders.

The findings indicate that both German and Portuguese leaders share a holistic understanding of RL, emphasizing employee well-being, although their priorities differ. While Germans prioritize operational efficiency, the Portuguese value adaptability. Key enablers in both countries include experience. Both groups face challenges related to time constraints; additionally, German leaders focus on balancing stakeholder interests, and Portuguese leaders emphasize market volatility. RL is recognized in both countries for improving employee motivation. Furthermore, German managers highlighted improvements in organisational networking, while Portuguese managers noted direct financial benefits.

The findings highlight the critical role of cultural values in the perception and implementation of RL and provide valuable insights for global leaders on the importance of cultural sensitivity. Future research should expand sample sizes and consider dynamic cultural models to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

Keywords:

Responsible Leadership, cultural differences, Germany, Portugal, qualitative research, perceptions of leaders

Title:

Cultural perspectives on Responsible Leadership: A qualitative comparison between Germany and Portugal

Author: Felicia Kristin Haug

Sumário

Este estudo explora as perspectivas culturais sobre a Liderança Responsável (LR) entre a Alemanha e Portugal, centrando-se nas percepções, facilitadores, barreiras e benefícios nestes dois contextos culturais diferentes. Utilizando uma abordagem de investigação qualitativa, entrevistas semi-estruturadas analisam as percepções subjectivas dos líderes alemães e comparam-nas com os resultados de um estudo anterior sobre líderes portugueses.

Os resultados indicam que tanto os líderes alemães como os portugueses partilham um entendimento holístico da LR, dando ênfase ao bem-estar dos colaboradores, embora as suas prioridades sejam diferentes. Enquanto os alemães dão prioridade à eficiência operacional, os portugueses valorizam a adaptabilidade. A experiência é um fator-chave em ambos os países. Ambos os grupos enfrentam desafios relacionados com restrições de tempo; além disso, os líderes alemães concentram-se em equilibrar os interesses das partes interessadas e os líderes portugueses dão ênfase à volatilidade do mercado. A LR é reconhecida em ambos os países por melhorar a motivação dos colaboradores. Além disso, os gestores alemães destacaram melhorias na rede organizacional, enquanto os gestores portugueses referiram benefícios financeiros diretos.

Os resultados destacam o papel crítico dos valores culturais na percepção e implementação do LR e fornecem informações valiosas para os líderes globais sobre a importância da sensibilidade cultural. A investigação futura deve alargar a dimensão das amostras e considerar modelos culturais dinâmicos para obter uma compreensão mais abrangente.

Palavras-chave:

Liderança Responsável, diferenças culturais, Alemanha, Portugal, investigação qualitativa, percepções dos líderes

Título:

Perspetivas culturais sobre Liderança Responsável: Uma comparação qualitativa entre a Alemanha e Portugal

Autor: Felicia Kristin Haug

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List of Abbreviations

RL	Responsible Leadership
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
HR	Human Resources

AI Disclaimer

This document has been reviewed using AI tools for linguistic refinement and clarity.

1. Introduction

Over the past three decades, the global economic landscape has undergone substantial transformations. As economic integration between countries accelerates, a considerable number of businesses are investigating new avenues for growth and expansion in international markets through increased internationalisation (Golo, 2015). This expansion has significantly impacted our understanding of cross-cultural management, as international business research has highlighted the complexities and opportunities involved in managing across diverse national and cultural boundaries. As Bird and Mendenhall (2016) observe, “the nature of the global business context has evolved” (P.115), emphasising the importance of examining leadership in the context of cross-cultural differences. Alongside globalisation, a growing number of other factors indicate that profound changes are taking place in world views (Inglehart, 2000). In addition to conventional material considerations, managers have demonstrated an understanding that organisations are active social entities, and thus must consider the diverse factors and expectations of society in their actions (Carrasco, 2007). In recent years, the occurrence of corporate scandals in globally renowned organisations has prompted a comprehensive discourse on the role of organisations in society, encompassing their legitimacy, obligations and responsibilities (Maak & Pless, 2006; Voegtlin, 2011; Waldman & Siegel, 2008). The scandals that have occurred in recent years, involving Enron, Tyco, Arthur Andersen and Worldcom, among others, have led to the perception that firms are amoral, corrupt, lacking ethical leadership and a sense of social responsibility. Consequently, organisations and their leaders are increasingly held to account by multiple stakeholders and by society as a whole for their actions and inactions (Antunes & Franco, 2016; Fry & Slocum, 2008). In light of the considerable influence wielded by major corporations, it is becoming increasingly evident that leaders are expected to assume a more proactive stance, particularly in light of their shared responsibility for addressing the world's most pressing issues, including the safeguarding and promotion of human rights, the pursuit of sustainability, and the eradication of poverty. (Maak, 2007). It is therefore beyond dispute that the majority of individuals engaged in business activities would not challenge the necessity of adhering to the economic and legal responsibilities that are fundamental to the survival and growth of their enterprises (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). Those in positions of leadership operate within a global network of stakeholders, where there is an expectation that they will engage actively as responsible members of society (Antunes & Franco, 2016). The concept of Responsible Leadership (RL) is a growing area of interest within the academic literature, particularly in the context of

addressing the demands of globalisation. This has led to a shift in focus within leadership studies, moving away from a traditional emphasis on leader-subordinate relationships towards a greater consideration of leader-stakeholder relationships. (Maak & Pless, 2006) In this context, Yukl (2013) posits the notion that it is of paramount importance to identify discrepancies among nations with regard to their beliefs concerning effective leadership. This intercultural perspective is particularly relevant as, in response to the demands of globalisation, RL is expanding the scope of corporate social responsibility to a worldwide scale (Maak & Pless, 2006). Leaders are facing an increasing level of pressure from a variety of stakeholders, including governments, local communities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and consumers, to engage in self-regulation and assume an active role as global citizens. (Stahl & Sully De Luque, 2014)

The objective of this research is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the diverse cultural perceptions of RL, with a particular focus on a comparison between Germany and Portugal. The study will explore how German executives perceive and practice RL and will compare these findings with existing research from Portugal. By examining the similarities and differences in RL perceptions between these two cultural contexts, the research will provide insight into how cultural factors influence leadership approaches. Accordingly, the thesis will address the following research questions:

- 1. How do German leaders perceive RL, and how do these perceptions relate to those of Portuguese leaders?*
- 2. What are the enablers and barriers to the implementation of RL in Germany, and in what ways are they similar or different to those identified in Portugal?*
- 3. What benefits do German leaders associate with RL, and how do these views vary from those held by Portuguese leaders?*

Therefore, the present research adopts a qualitative research methodology in order to account for the intricacies and variety of perspectives pertaining to the topic. Semi-structured interviews are utilised to gain a more profound understanding of the perceptions held by both countries.

The significance of the study lies in its contribution to understanding how cultural differences shape perceptions of RL in two distinct European contexts. It provides valuable cross-cultural insights, enhances global leadership effectiveness, bridges the gap between theory and practice,

addresses challenges posed by globalization, contributes to leadership literature, offers practical implications for multinational corporations, and fosters intercultural understanding.

This dissertation is structured into *six chapters*:

Chapter 1, which *introduces* the subject, is followed by *Chapter 2*, which continues with a comprehensive *literature review*. The review firstly defines leadership and then examines various leadership styles, including RL, Authentic Leadership, Transformational Leadership, and Servant Leadership. A comparative analysis of RL against the other three leadership styles is conducted, highlighting differences and similarities. The review then explores the impact of cultural differences on leadership practices and concludes with an investigation into the perception of RL among Portuguese leaders. *Chapter 3* provides a comprehensive overview of the *methodological framework* employed in this study. The section delineates the research design, encompassing the sampling strategy, the methods of data collection, and the analytical approaches that have been employed in the study. *Chapter 4* presents the *findings* in four key categories: Perceptions of RL, Enablers of the adoption of RL, Barriers of the adoption of RL, and Benefits of the adoption of RL. In *Chapter 5*, the *discussion* compares the results with existing research, incorporating interpretation. Additionally, this chapter addresses the limitations of the study and outlines potential areas for further investigation. *Chapter 6* provides a concise *conclusion* of the thesis.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Leadership

In management and educational research, the words 'leader' and 'leadership' are one of the most frequently used expressions (Malik & Azmat, 2019). Researchers often develop their own definitions of leadership, focusing on the particular characteristics or elements of the concept that interest them (Yukl, 2013). This diversity of perspectives is echoed by Stogdill (1974) who, after a comprehensive analysis of leadership studies, observed that “there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept” (P.7). Numerous definitions of leadership vary widely in terms of who influences, the goal of the influence, how it is exercised, and the outcomes of these efforts. Most definitions of leadership assume that it is a process in which intentional influence is exerted on others to direct, structure and promote actions and relationships within a group or organisation. (Yukl, 2013).

Silva (2016) analyzed and discussed various definitions of leadership and came to the conclusion that “leadership is the process of interactive influence that occurs when, in a given context, some people accept someone as their leader to achieve common goals.” (P.3)

Malik & Azmat (2019) define leadership as “a process in which a person or persons inspire(s) and motivate(s) the people to meet the shared goals or objectives which may be changed or added as per the needs and challenges. Leadership connects with the people beyond superficial or formal level, and creates a bond that motivates them to do things rather than forcing them.” (P.8)

Chemers (1997) already outlined that “leadership is a process of social influence in which one person is able to enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task.” (P.1) Because of the widespread acceptance among scholars (Kesting et al., 2016), Chemers' definition is adopted as the conceptual basis for this master thesis.

2.2 Leadership styles

An individual's leadership style is characterised by a unique set of behaviours used to influence and shape the actions of others (Northhouse, 2018). A leader's style is a critical determinant of their decision-making, communication and motivational strategies, as well as the working environment they create. It is an expression of the leader's broader leadership philosophy, encapsulating his or her personal values, preferences and beliefs about how to lead effectively. Different leadership styles have a strong impact on organisational culture, team dynamics and

productivity, underlining the importance of aligning leadership approaches with organisational goals and contexts (Bwalya, 2023).

The concept of RL is introduced and explored in depth, followed by an examination of various leadership theories that align with its principles. Particular attention will be placed on leadership theories that emphasise the importance of the same core values, including Authentic, Transformational and Servant leadership.

2.2.1 Responsible Leadership

RL has gained significant academic prominence in the early 21st century and continues to attract growing interest due to the increasing importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the broader focus on sustainable development (Maak & Pless, 2009). The core idea is based on the normative assumption that organisational leaders, as global citizens, share responsibility for addressing critical global challenges such as poverty, lack of access to clean water and climate change (Maak & Pless, 2009; Voegtlin et al., 2012). It argues that we need responsible global leaders who are aware of the world's pressing problems, who care about the needs of others, and who strive to make this world a better place (Maak & Pless, 2009). One of the first studies on the concept of RL was conducted by Maak & Pless (2006). They defined RL as “a relational and ethical phenomenon, which occurs in social processes of interaction with those who affect or are affected by leadership and have a stake in the purpose and vision of the leadership relationship.” (P. 103) Freeman et al. (2006) already noted RL is both a relational and ethical concept that takes place through social interactions with individuals who are either affected by or influence the leadership. These individuals also have a vested interest in the goals and vision shaped by the RL. This relational and ethical dimension means that RL does not occur in isolation, but is created through interaction with stakeholders and is based on values and principles that prioritise the well-being of all involved (Freeman et al., 2006; Maak & Pless, 2006). Researchers in this area generally agree that RL addresses both theoretical gaps and practical issues in leadership (Pless & Maak, 2011). It also provides the missing element of responsibility in current leadership approaches, which is fundamental to effective leadership (Waldman & Galvin, 2008) and is in a global setting “the ability to effectively address and meet the demands of a global stakeholder environment” (Miska et al., 2013, p. 552). In the view of Shi and Ye (2016), a responsible approach to leadership offers a more focused perspective on the leader-stakeholder relationship, addressing the complexities of an interconnected global environment with both prudence and discernment. It enables leaders to navigate the complexities of a diverse stakeholder landscape (Voegtlin et al., 2012) by fostering value

creation for both internal and external stakeholders (Marques et al., 2018). In essence, RL aims to clarify the meaning of responsibility in a leadership context. Moreover, accountability for actions, transparency in decision-making, and building reliability and trust are not just different interpretations of responsibility, but deeply relational concepts. RL focuses on the needs of others and raises questions about what leaders are responsible for and to whom they are accountable. While this may seem self-evident, it remains one of the least explored yet most important concepts in leadership studies (Pless & Maak, 2011).

2.2.2 Authentic Leadership

The concept of authenticity has been the subject of considerable interest within the field of humanistic psychology (Kernis & Goldman, 2006) and became more relevant during the early years of the 21st century because of the rising significance of ethical behavior and integrity in leadership studies (Almutairi et al., 2024). Walumbwa (2008) describes the concept of authentic leadership as “a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development” (P. 94.). Authenticity is the genuine expression of one's fundamental self in daily activities (Kernis, 2003; Walumbwa et al., 2008). Authentic leaders are characterised by their high level of authenticity, which is defined by a deep understanding of their identity, core values and beliefs. These leaders consistently act in accordance with their values, ensuring that their behaviour is guided by their inner principles. Additionally, they are transparent in their interactions with others, fostering trust and openness. The concept of authentic leadership can be understood through key characteristics such as self-awareness, balanced information processing, transparent relationship building and an internalised sense of morality (Wesche & Fleig, 2023). The perception of authenticity is dependent upon the impression that the leader creates. It is therefore not possible for a leader to simply declare that they are authentic; rather, this is a characteristic that must be recognised by others (Goffee & Jones, 2005).

2.2.3 Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership theory has received significant attention from researchers in the field of organisational leadership. The theory was initially developed by Burns (1978) and subsequently refined by Bass (1999) and other scholars. Transformational leadership is characterised by a leadership approach that empowers followers to move beyond their

immediate personal interests. This is achieved through the leader's charismatic presence, inspirational vision, intellectual stimulation, and personalised attention. The process fosters growth in followers by elevating their values and aspirations, while also cultivating a sense of responsibility towards personal achievement, self-fulfillment, and the welfare of others, the organisation, and society at large (Bass, 1999). Yukl (2013) mentioned, that in the context of transformational leadership, followers develop emotions of trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect towards the leader, which in turn motivates them to exceed initial expectations. This leadership style elevates and inspires followers by enhancing their awareness of task significance, encouraging them to prioritise the interests of the organisation or team over their own (Yukl, 2013).

2.2.4 Servant Leadership

The concept of servant leadership, as it is known in the present day, dates back to the ancient (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002), but was then revived by Robert K. Greenleaf (2002) and applied in modern organisations. Often servant leadership is seen as a Christian leadership paradigm, but it has actually shaped and been shaped by many cultures around the world (Gandolfi et al., 2017). In Greenleaf's definition of servant leadership, Spears (2004) identified ten attributes that characterize servant leadership: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth of people, and building community. Servant leaders are, according to Sendjaya & Sarros (2002), individuals who develop and empower others to meet their highest potential. Servant leadership, a concept that focuses at the individual level, primarily emphasises the growth and development of followers. It posits the question of whether those served by the leader are experiencing personal growth. A positive answer indicates that the leader is performing well (Gregory Stone et al., 2004). Consequently, servant leadership is a distinct approach to leadership that contrasts with the self-serving tendencies observed in many leadership examples, where leaders prioritise their own interests over those of their constituents (Gregory Stone et al., 2004; Pless & Maak, 2011).

2.3 Comparison of leadership styles with RL

RL shares similarities with authentic leadership, particularly in terms of its emphasis on self-awareness and self-regulation (Pless & Maak, 2005). In addition a responsible leader is one who has cultivated a profound understanding of the emotions and values of others, and who engages in introspection to evaluate the congruence between their own emotions and values and those of others (Donaldson & Dunfee, 1999; Pless & Maak, 2005). Both theories recognise

the significant impact of leadership on organisational outcomes, by helping employees find meaning in their work and fostering sustainable performance and growth (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). In addition to seeking beneficial outcomes for organisations, which both theories advocate, RL broadens its scope to increase social capital and value through active stakeholder engagement, ultimately seeking to promote positive social change (Maak, 2007; Pless, 2007). The concept of RL is distinguished by its alignment with the principles of transformational leadership, emphasising factors such as vision, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and personalised attention. However, it also exhibits notable divergences from transformational leadership, particularly in its approach to defining the term “followers”. Contrary to conventional perspectives, RL adopts an expansive view of followers, acknowledging their role not only as internal stakeholders within the organisational structure but also as stakeholders in the external environment (Pless & Maak, 2011). Transformational leadership is primarily concerned with optimising performance and achieving organisational goals. In contrast, RL is centred on engaging a variety of stakeholders to support and pursue objectives aimed at broader social benefits across both the corporate and societal dimensions. This approach reflects a shift from prioritising shareholder interests to embracing a more expansive stakeholder perspective (Maak & Pless, 2006; Waldman & Galvin, 2008). Thirdly, RL is less concerned with individual characteristics and more focused on involvement, collaboration and cooperation with different stakeholders (Maak & Pless, 2006).

Responsible and servant leadership share a common basic assumption: The leadership activity is primarily focussed on the leader's constituency, i.e. the followers or stakeholders. This implies that the leader's task is to serve the needs and legitimate interests of others (Greenleaf, 2002). Furthermore, leaders and followers should motivate each other to achieve higher levels of motivation and morale in order to achieve shared goals (Burns, 1978). Nevertheless, while RL and servant leadership both emphasise the concept of service that transcends self-interest, the responsible leader does not pursue "self-sacrificial servanthood" (Sendjaya et al., 2008, p. 405). The role of a responsible leader is to align with the organisation's mission and address the requirements of stakeholders both within the company and societal contexts. This mission extends beyond mere assistance to others; it encompasses objectives at both corporate and societal levels. The primary aim, therefore, is not merely to serve others, but rather to address their interests and needs effectively. RL entails the provision of services to the needs of stakeholders both within and outside the organisation. This leadership model is characterised by its commitment to social change. The primary distinction between RL and the more traditional servant leadership model lies in the motivation and contextual factors, which are

frequently not adequately addressed in extant literature on the subject of servant leadership. (Pless & Maak, 2011).

2.4 Cultural differences on leadership in Portugal and Germany

Culture is defined as a set of beliefs, norms, values, traditions, and behavioural patterns that are shared or held in common by a group. It is argued that culture exerts a significant effect on leadership because it functions as a form of programming of the mindset that determines the group's identity. This is analogous to the way in which personality determines the identity of an individual (Schein, 2010). As Segunde (2022) mentioned in addition, culture is an integral component of societal thought and praxis, it exerts a profound influence on leaders, who in turn shape the behaviours of employees and the functioning of organisations as a whole. Chamorro-Premuzic and Sanger (2016) furthermore posit that studies indicate that the geographic region in which leaders operate has a significant influence on their decision-making processes, communication styles, and propensity towards negative behaviours. It is reasonable to hypothesise that values are likely to be internalised by leaders who have grown up in specific culture. These values will then have a unconscious influence on their attitudes and behaviour. In addition, it can be argued that cultural values are mirrored in social norms about the way people interact with each other (Yukl, 2013).

The theoretical basis for the understanding of cultural differences is Geert Hofstede's extensive studies on cultural differences, which provide a deep insight into the divergent values and behaviours between Portugal and Germany.

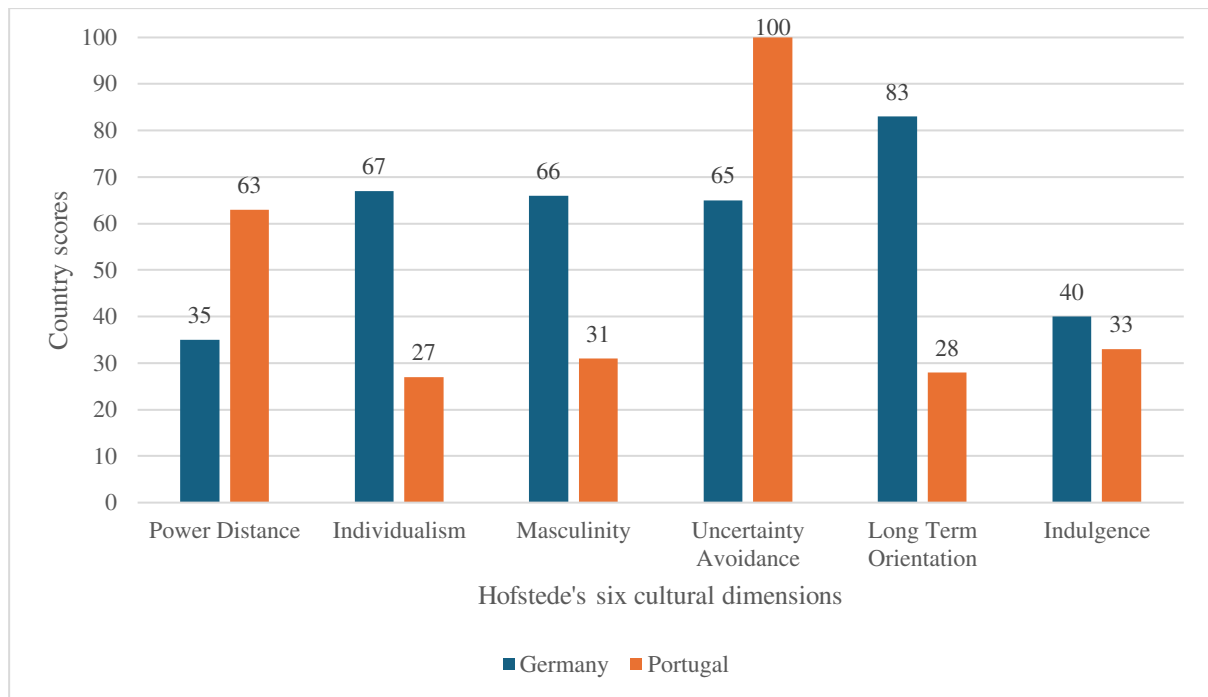


Figure 1: Comparative analysis of Hofstede's cultural dimensions between Germany and Portugal (Country Comparison Bar Charts. Geert Hofstede, n.d.)

As illustrated in Figure 1, Hofstede's six cultural dimensions encompass Power Distance, Individualism, Masculinity, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long Term Orientation and Indulgence. The diagram also presents the scores of the two countries, Portugal and Germany, and their respective comparisons. The positioning of each country relative to other countries has been determined by means of a score on each dimension (Hofstede, 2011; Źemojtjel-Piotrowska & Piotrowski, 2023).

Power Distance is a concept that measures how societies deal with inequality in the distribution of power. It reflects the extent to which less influential members of organisations and institutions accept and anticipate unequal distribution of power (Hofstede, 2011; *Power Distance: Definition and Examples - Organizational Psychology Degrees*, 2025). The Power Distance scores indicate that Germany (35) manifests characteristics of a small Power Distance culture, while Portugal (63) exhibits characteristics of a large Power Distance culture. This suggests that German society likely values more egalitarian relationships, with less emphasis on hierarchical structures and more openness to questioning authority. By contrast, Portuguese society tends to accept hierarchical order more readily, with greater respect for authority figures and a clearer distinction between those in power and subordinates (Hofstede, 2011).

Individualism is defined as the degree to which a society values personal independence and self-reliance over collective goals and group harmony. The measurement of this concept is

determined by the degree to which individual achievements and rights are prioritised in comparison to the needs of the larger community or society (Minkov & Kaasa, 2022; Zhang et al., 2016). A comparison of Germany and Portugal on the Individualism scale reveals that Germany (67) exhibits a higher degree of Individualism, indicating a society that prioritises personal goals, autonomy, and self-expression, meaning that Germans have been observed to place a strong emphasis on independence and to place greater emphasis on individual accomplishments. Portugal (27) demonstrates a more collectivist orientation, suggesting a culture that emphasises group cohesion, loyalty to family and social networks, and interdependence. Portuguese society is likely to value harmony within groups and to consider collective interests in decision-making.

The concept of Masculinity in cultural dimensions is defined by the degree to which a society prioritises qualities such as assertiveness, achievement, and material success, as opposed to characteristics such as relationships, modesty, and quality of life (Hofstede, 2011; Zhang et al., 2016). In this context, Germany's higher Masculinity score (66) signifies a society that is more competitive and success-oriented, where performance and achievement are highly valued. In contrast, Portugal's lower score (31) points to a society that places greater emphasis on work-life balance, caring for others, and overall quality of life.

Uncertainty Avoidance is characterised as a societal tendency to exhibit tolerance for ambiguity and unpredictability. Cultures that exhibit high Uncertainty Avoidance are characterised by a preference for structure, clear rules, and stability. In contrast, cultures with low Uncertainty Avoidance demonstrate a greater capacity to tolerate ambiguity and change (Hofstede, 2011; Zhang et al., 2016). Portugal's notably elevated score of 100 indicates a pronounced inclination towards structure and explicit regulations. This finding suggests that Portuguese culture places significant value on predictability and meticulous guidelines to mitigate uncertainty. In contrast, Germany's moderately elevated score of 65 reflects a comparable appreciation for certainty, yet it permits greater flexibility in dealing with ambiguous circumstances. This suggests a harmonious balance between adherence to rules and adaptability.

The notion of Long Term Orientation in society refers to the degree to which a given society is oriented towards the pursuit of future benefits rather than immediate gratification. This concept is indicative of the extent to which a culture fosters planning, perseverance, and pragmatic problem-solving strategies with the aim of achieving long term success (Hofstede, 2011; Khlif, 2016). Germany's high score of 83 indicates a strong emphasis on long term planning and sustainability, suggesting that Germans prioritise future benefits. In contrast, Portugal's low

score of 28 reflects a more short term orientation, where social obligations and immediate results are valued over long term planning

Indulgence is a cultural dimension that measures a society's tendency to allow free gratification of basic human desires related to enjoying life. This dimension reflects the extent to which people try to control their impulses and desires (Hofstede, 2011). Germany's score of 40 and Portugal's score of 33 on this dimension indicate that both countries lean slightly towards restraint, with Portugal being marginally more restrained. These findings imply that both societies tend to regulate the gratification of needs through social norms, albeit to different extents.

The analysis of Hofstede's cultural dimensions shows that there are clear cultural differences between Germany and Portugal,

2.5 Perception of RL by Portuguese leaders

It is acknowledged that individual perspectives on RL may be influenced by the prevailing cultural context and diverge from one country to another (Miska et al., 2016). In order to examine the differences in perception of RL between German and Portuguese leaders, the perceptions of the latter, as outlined in the report by Estronca et al (2022), are described.

2.5.1 Perception of RL

RL, as perceived by the Portuguese executives, is characterised by a holistic and dynamic approach that prioritises long-term societal impact alongside business results. These leaders stress the importance of seeing the big picture and making decisions that may not guarantee immediate economic returns, but are the right choices for long-term benefits. They emphasise the need to normalise failure as a learning opportunity essential for growth and innovation, and promote transparency, ethical practices and individual accountability. The culture associated with RL values honesty with all stakeholders and an individualised approach, ensuring that all voices are heard and taken into account. In addition, Portuguese leaders believe that leadership inherently involves a deep sense of responsibility - not just for business results, but also for people and the wider community. This includes a commitment to educating consumers and going beyond what is required by law. In addition, Portuguese leaders assert that RL involves removing barriers and creating enablers that facilitate ethical business practices. They see the leader as a driver of responsible business, a motivator and a role model, tasked with creating a shared vision and ensuring that the impact of decisions is aligned with sustainability across multiple dimensions. Among the most important personal qualities that a responsible manager

should possess are the courage to change and to overcome challenges, as well as adaptability and ethical integrity, which are crucial for providing clear ethical direction and adapting to change. Communication skills are also essential. Humility and self-reflection allow leaders to acknowledge and learn from mistakes, fostering an environment of honesty and continuous improvement. According to respondents, these leaders are characterised by authenticity and consistency in their actions, aligning their personal values with the organisation's goals. Furthermore, the ability to exercise firmness when necessary, coupled with a willingness to acknowledge personal deficiencies, is integral to the role of a responsible leader. An aptitude for leadership underscores a natural inclination to lead others, further enhancing a leader's effectiveness in fostering a responsible organisational culture (Estronca et al., 2022).

2.5.2 Enablers of the adoption of RL

According to Portuguese leaders, the adoption of RL is facilitated by a combination of internal and external enablers. Learning from past leadership mistakes as a tool for learning and practical experience in the field are crucial, as they help leaders develop a deeper sensitivity to the nuances of RL. The importance of a strong willingness to learn, the role of mentors, and the significance of networking in training initiatives are also emphasised. Organisational factors are of equal significance, with the composition of the team being of the utmost importance. A shared sense of purpose and aligned values within the team help to create an environment in which RL practices can thrive. Investing in employee development and fostering strong interpersonal relationships within the organisation further enhances this environment, enabling leaders to effectively implement and sustain responsible practices. The framework is further enriched by organisational enablers such as talent management, team development, and a robust organisational culture that fosters a sense of belonging, common interests, and joint efforts. Elements like trust, face-to-face work, and feedback mechanisms serve as critical enablers, alongside the recognition and support of informal leaders within the organisation, all contributing to connecting with people and meeting employees' interests. According to Portuguese leaders, external factors are also enablers of the adoption of RL. The development and spread of digital technologies have been identified as a key enabler in this process, due to the way in which they have simplified access to information and allowed leaders to familiarise themselves with global best practices. Government regulations and industry standards have also compelled organisations to adopt more responsible practices. In addition to this, partnerships and collaborations with entities focused on social responsibility provide essential support and resources, enabling the adoption of good practices and the exploration of new business models.

The nature of the industry can also influence the extent of responsibility required, with certain sectors being subject to greater scrutiny and pressure to adopt sustainable and ethical practices. This is further reinforced by regulatory bodies, which establish frameworks that organisations must comply with (Estronca et al., 2022).

2.5.3 Barriers to the adoption of RL

Portuguese leaders have identified several barriers to the adoption of RL within organisations, both from an external and internal perspective. Externally, the prevailing context of unpredictability and uncertainty, compounded by the actions of public authorities, poses significant challenges. Furthermore, the lack of societal education in responsible practices contributes to the complexity of the situation. In terms of the external environment, interviewees emphasised that Portugal's status as a relatively small country can impede the adoption of leadership styles that encompass the entire population. Within organisations, many leaders are committed to conventional leadership practices, which are often challenging to modify. This commitment is further rooted by a lack of accountability and inadequate training in the principles of RL, thereby worsening the situation. It is frequently expressed by those in managerial roles that there are concerns regarding the financial consequences of sustainable practices. It is noted that high costs and complexity are significant barriers to this. In addition, the decision-making process is often time consuming and characterised by difficulties in balancing short-term pressures with long-term benefits. The discrepancy between the profit motive and responsible corporate governance is characterised by obstacles such as conflicting goals and the pressure to achieve immediate results. Organisational culture and structure are also significant barriers. The cultivation of a culture that fosters such leadership practices necessitates a considerable investment of time and frequently encounters resistance from individuals familiar with traditional methods. The increasing trend towards remote work amplifies these challenges, as it has the potential to weaken team cohesion and reduce the direct human interactions that are essential for cultivating a RL ethos. The prevailing organisational culture and structure, as well as inherent resistance to change, are often additional barriers (Estronca et al., 2022).

2.5.4 Positive consequences of the adoption of RL

Portuguese leaders see many positive outcomes from adopting RL practices. Externally, such leadership enhances the credibility of the organisation, building trust with stakeholders and improving the company's reputation. Moreover, the implementation of RL has been

demonstrated to foster intrinsic value for the organisation, thereby facilitating streamlined external processes and enhancing the effectiveness and harmony of interactions with the market and the broader community. Internally, RL has a significant impact on financial performance and people. From a financial perspective, RL is not limited to ethical considerations; rather, it is a critical factor for survival, resulting in enhanced financial outcomes through sustainable operations and strengthened stakeholder relationships. Furthermore it is an integral part of sustaining the business in challenging times by attracting and retaining top talent. RL also has a positive impact on the people within the organisation. It fosters a more humane and inclusive workplace that promotes diversity and equality, leading to greater innovation and adaptation. Empowering employees through ethical leadership practices increases their engagement and loyalty, further improving productivity and reducing turnover. In addition, the implementation of RL practices smoothes internal processes by creating a cohesive and supportive working environment that increases efficiency and reduces friction. This leads to increased social responsibility within the organisation as employees feel empowered and valued. Overall, leaders emphasise that RL is not just a moral obligation, but a strategic asset that brings significant benefits to all facets of the organisation (Estronca et al., 2022).

3. Methodology

This chapter provides a comprehensive and detailed explanation of the research methodology, the techniques used to collect data and the processes involved in analysing the data collected.

3.1 Research Methodology

Research methods can be divided into quantitative, qualitative or a combination of the two (Mulisa, 2022). Researchers utilizing qualitative methods seek to explore the complexities of individuals' lives by examining how individuals understand and interpret their experiences within specific contexts (Maxwell & Reybold, 2015). Maxwell and Reybold (2015) also underscored the pivotal function of qualitative research in comprehending cultural perspectives, documenting unique events, recording oral histories, and narrating stories. The focus of this study is on analysing the subjective perception of German leaders. The findings are then used to draw a comparison between two different cultures. For this reason, in addition to the secondary data used in the literature review, a qualitative approach was chosen, enabling the collection of detailed insights into the experiences, beliefs, and viewpoints of the participants (Hammarberg et al., 2016).

The interview constitutes one of the most widely utilised and recognised forms of qualitative research methods (Ruslin et al., 2022). In this dissertation, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Semi-structured interviews are a qualitative research method that combines the capacity to explore emergent themes with the utilisation of a structured interview framework (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This method provides both consistency across interviews and the flexibility to adapt the order of questions or introduce new ones based on the flow of the conversation, allowing for a richer exploration of the topic, which may further enhance the understanding of the topic being assessed (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021; Karatsareas, 2022). The open-ended nature of these interviews allows participants to respond according to their instincts, sharing their insights, beliefs and personal experiences in their own words, which can add valuable depth to the research (Malhotra et al., 2017). Accordingly the qualitative research methodology was chosen as it allows to capture the multi-layered perceptions of RL in Germany and to draw a detailed comparison with the existing findings from Portugal, enabling a comprehensive understanding of cultural influences on RL.

3.2 Sample strategy

Table 1: Demographic data of the interviewees

Participant	Gender	Age	Organisation size (Number of employees)	Number of subordinates
P1	Female	33	> 250	5
P2	Male	53	> 250	48
P3	Male	44	> 250	35
P4	Male	45	> 250	40
P5	Male	64	> 250	6
P6	Male	73	10 - 49	30
P7	Male	48	> 250	18
P8	Male	48	> 250	22
P9	Female	40	50 - 249	6
P10	Male	35	> 250	10
P11	Female	60	> 250	800
P12	Male	47	> 250	60
P13	Female	44	50 - 249	13
P14	Female	36	> 250	600
P15	Female	58	10 - 49	30

Participants were selected using the same criteria as for the Portuguese study, ensuring diversity in terms of age, gender and size of organisation. Interviewees were recruited through personal networks to make sure leaders from different industries and regions are included, thus capturing a wide range of perspectives. Table 1 shows that six women and nine men between the ages of 33 and 73 and from a wide range of company sizes were interviewed. In addition, the number of subordinates varies greatly between the participants, which also ensures a diverse range of perspectives.

Moreover, the interview guide was developed following an examination of the extant literature in the field. The interview guide incorporated the following key questions, which reflected the structure employed in the Portuguese study so that a comparison of results could be made in the final discussion:

- What does it mean to you to be a Responsible Leader? Can you provide examples?
- What barriers do you encounter in your daily practice when trying to implement RL actions?

- What enablers do you experience in your daily leadership practice that support responsible actions?
- What competencies were developed in the trainings you participated in, and how do these contribute to your role as a Responsible Leader?
- What benefits do you perceive for companies that implement RL styles?

3.3 Data Collection

To answer the research questions, 15 individual semi-structured in-depth interviews with German leaders were conducted. The interviews lasted between 12 and 32 minutes and were held during the 10th of October and the 10th of December 2024 virtually using Microsoft Teams. The implementation of this system facilitates personalised interactions and a trusted environment, while concurrently maintaining efficiency and overcoming geophysical limitations. Prior to the interviews, the participants were informed about the objectives of the research, the procedures to be followed, and the confidentiality of the information. Informed consent was obtained for the recording and transcription of the interviews. Furthermore, the anonymisation of all data ensures that participants are able to provide detailed answers to the questions posed.

3.4 Data Analysis

The qualitative method used to analyse the interview data is thematic analysis, in line with the approach used in the Portuguese study. Thematic analysis is a method of analysis for qualitative data. It involves the process of identifying and documenting patterns within a dataset. These patterns are then interpreted for their intrinsic meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Liebenberg et al., 2020).

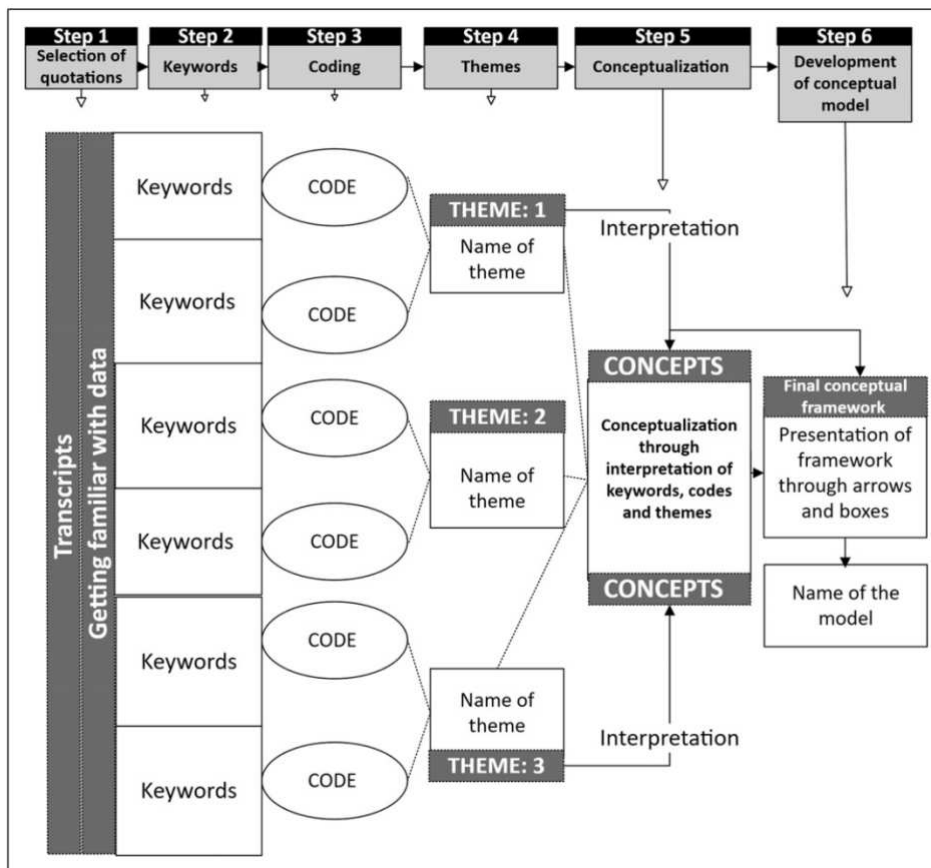


Figure 2: A six-step method for developing conceptual models in qualitative research through systematic thematic analysis (Naeem et al., 2023).

As shown in Figure 2, according to Naeem et al. (2023), thematic analysis is a methodological process that is divided into six phases. These are:

- 1) Initial generation of transcripts and familiarisation with the data
- 2) Identification of key terms.
- 3) Selection of relevant codes
- 4) Formation of themes
- 5) Interpretation of the data by examining keywords, codes and themes
- 6) Final construction of a conceptual framework

The thematic analysis process is organised in a logical sequence of steps, with each subsequent phase building on the preceding one. This methodological approach ensures the systematic collection of information, thereby enhancing the reliability and reproducibility of the results. It establishes a clear link between the collected data, its analysis, and the derived conclusions. By employing this structured methodology, research achieves enhanced accuracy and reduces the potential for bias (Naeem et al., 2023). Moreover this methodology allows a direct comparison between the perceptions of RL in Germany and Portugal, as this approach was also employed in the Portuguese study. Conducting and analysing interviews under the same conditions and using the same questions ensures the comparability of the data collected.

4. Findings

The analysis of the qualitative data revealed key themes for each research question that emerged from a total of 15 semi-structured interviews with German leaders. The results are presented below and supported by quotations from the interviews. Participants were anonymised for this purpose and numbered consecutively, and are referred to below as PX, where P stands for participant and X stands for a number. This serves to facilitate the allocation of quotations without revealing the identity of the participants. The themes identified provide valuable insights and form the basis for the subsequent discussion and conclusions.

4.1 Perception of RL

German participants identified a wide range of aspects concerning the perception of RL. These perceptions were categorised into three distinct themes: a people-centred approach; strategic and visionary guidance; and operational effectiveness and accountability.

4.1.1 People-centred approach

A recurring theme in the discourse was the holistic approach to leadership, which includes the recognition that individuals have unique characteristics that require tailored management strategies. Consequently, the establishment of a comprehensive understanding and the demonstration of sensitivity towards the personal dimensions of each employee are regarded as essential for RL.

“In my opinion, every employee has to be managed and guided differently.” - #P1

“I always find the topic of considering the individual needs or the individual characteristics of each employee a very important aspect, because people are very different and I think you just have to try to adjust to, to engage with and to address the particular characteristics, special features of the respective person.” - #P7

“So also seeing the person in the team, not only as a workforce but also really as a full whole person.” - #P9

This holistic approach includes the capacity for emotional intelligence. Responsible leaders should possess a keen sense of how individuals are feeling, including a proactive awareness of personal issues that may affect their well-being and performance.

“But it is precisely this emotional intelligence and emotional leadership that I find very important.” - #P1

“That means, responsibility not only somehow for the business model or for the business conviction, but also for the individual person, ... Is well-being okay? ... What about health?” - #P9

According to the interviewees the consideration of individual personal characteristics involves in addition the integration of supporting, and challenging employees in diverse domains. This

includes operational tasks, serving as a sparring partner and defending employees against other parties. Furthermore, a significant number of respondents highlighted the importance of shaping and developing employees as a core element of RL. This process involves recognizing and fostering individual strengths, as well as supporting all team members in their personal and professional development and learning processes.

“That means that I really try to always be there as a sparring partner, always be there as a supporter, always be there as a path clearer, somehow left and right, if there are hurdles, but also as a defender ...” - #P9

“So there is ... the topic of promoting and challenging. So that I realize what my employees are good at, how I can then also use them. But that I also see where there may still be deficits.” - #P3

Moreover, the element of empowerment is of importance. In a RL context, employees should be encouraged to express their opinions, and it is essential that all individuals have the opportunity to contribute their perspectives. Each person should be vested with the authority to make decisions.

“The next point is actually empowerment. That people are really empowered to be decision-makers themselves and within their decision-making authority are also challenged and supported to make these decisions themselves and not always go through their superiors.” - #P8

Furthermore, it is expected of a responsible leader that communication is open, clear and transparent. Additionally, the art of listening is often overlooked but is of essential importance.

“Then, of course, the topic of what is part of my responsibilities is, of course, the topic of information, i.e. communication. That is, on the one hand, that I provide them with all the information, but, of course, also get feedback.” - #P2

As part of the people-centred approach, various characteristics of a leader are also mentioned. A fundamental aspect of RL that was repeatedly emphasised is the role of being a trustworthy leader. This entails not only embodying trustworthiness oneself, but also extending trust towards employees, ensuring humanly fair treatment for all.

“So we maintain a very open, but also honest, relationship with each other. Of course, this requires mutual trust, including trust in employees, and fair treatment. That is the basis.” - #P2

In addition, a responsible leader should be passionate, authentic and a source of inspiration.

“I think as a manager it is extremely helpful to be authentic. And I think it's important to be reliable ... too. These two things are important to me, to build a basis of trust with someone else, a) that they are authentic and b) that they are reliable.” - #P4

4.1.2 Strategic and visionary guidance

In addition to focusing on the employees, a responsible leader must also consider the company's success. According to the interviewees, this includes the responsibility for the business model, developing corporate goals, supporting the mission, and the company's growth objectives. Another critical aspect is diversity. It is essential to ensure that the company is diverse and fosters an environment of openness to all individuals, regardless of gender, culture, age, and experience.

“But also diversity, so that of course, everyone with their view of things and their perspective is simply valued, regardless of gender, culture, age, and experience.” - #P8

“That means you hopefully secure a corporate success and at the same time offer the employees the space and the opportunity to execute it.” - #P9

4.1.3 Operational effectiveness and accountability

The final theme that was identified is operational effectiveness and accountability. In the context of RL, a leader is also accountable for the efficient management of tasks. This responsibility includes task prioritisation and delegation. It is the role of leaders to formulate and ensure that target agreements are complied with, and to monitor progress.

“And as I said, what I often think is: I have now understood the role of a managing director, doing it myself is the second-best solution. And that's why the topic is delegation ...” - #P12

4.2 Enablers of the adoption of RL

The analysis of interview data yielded several key factors that facilitate and support RL practices. These enablers were categorised into three overarching classifications: organisational factors, communication and exchange and experience and development.

4.2.1 Organisational factors

Interviewees frequently emphasised the critical role of Human Resources (HR) in fostering RL within organisations. They highlighted how HR provides essential support through well-defined development pathways to ensure that leaders are equipped to lead and support their team members effectively. HR's support ranges from providing second opinions, enhancing the quality of decision-making and supporting overall strategic alignment within the organisation.

“Yes, what we have, and this is a very important pillar for me, is that we naturally have a so-called business partner from the HR department, who is available to me for my department-related issues. So not just for replacement purchases, but also when it comes to development or a second opinion.” - #P2

Regular employee satisfaction surveys and risk assessments are key tools cited by German leaders for maintaining open lines of communication and proactively addressing workplace issues. These tools help managers stay connected to the well-being of their teams and respond effectively to their needs.

“There are also things like employee satisfaction surveys, which are done every year, which are being done again right now. Then you get such a result, for example, how satisfied people are, how they see their perspective in the team, how much they like it here, would they recommend working here.” - #P8

The organisation's basic rules and mission serve as a backbone for leaders, guiding their decisions and ensuring a consistent approach to leadership throughout the organisation. Leaders rely on these established guidelines to reinforce responsible practices and ensure consistency.

“In the technical field, it's very clear, there are simply rules and standards that you have to follow. And that's practically my backup, with which I can then also guide people accordingly ...” - #P5

4.2.2 Communication and exchange

Effective communication and robust networking were identified as key enablers of RL. Leaders value the exchange with peers, colleagues and external networks for sharing knowledge, experience and best practice. These interactions help leaders stay informed and gain fresh perspectives needed to make complex decisions.

“What is much more useful to me is the exchange, that is, the exchange with peers who have had similar experiences or others. I do this both with colleagues here ..., and especially with mentors from my old work context. And I'm also involved in a women's network.” - #P1

According to the respondents enablers also include a strong team. A strong team is characterised not only by its ability to work towards common goals, but also by the deeper interpersonal dynamics that a supportive environment fosters. Leaders report significant benefits when they responsibly lead teams that emphasise trust, openness and a willingness to engage authentically. This includes open communication within the team, where sharing weaknesses is encouraged without fear of judgement and where giving and receiving feedback is practised regularly.

“But the team also supports me in this. That means, the better and more open we are with each other and allow it and are somehow honest and also admit to each other that help is needed, – both I, but also the team from me –, yes, we can better navigate through it.” - #P9

In addition, a supportive corporate environment helps leaders to exercise RL. A company that values freedom and flexibility and is receptive to employee suggestions creates a culture where leaders are empowered and supported in their decision-making, enhancing their ability to act responsibly and effectively.

“And on a larger scale, I can of course say that I believe that I am in a company that does a lot for its employees, that is open to suggestions from employees. And that of course makes it much easier to act that way.”
-#P13

4.2.3 Experience and development

Interviews highlight the importance of structured training and development programmes as a support for RL. Managers often emphasise the value of leadership curricula that are specifically recognised and requested by employees, and are a direct response to their development needs. Such programmes not only address general leadership skills, but are also tailored to enhance management skills in practical, situation-based contexts, developing leaders who are adept at both strategy and people management.

“In addition, there are also training courses for junior managers in the company, i.e. when you are new to a management position, that go in that direction” - #P3

Leaders' insights also underline the importance of personal experience in cultivating RL. The ability to make informed decisions independently of others' suggestions emerges as a key theme. This self-sufficiency is developed through years of accumulated practical experience, allowing leaders to apply an empathetic and authentic leadership style without the need for external tools.

“I think that at the beginning, it is always about being empathetic and authentic.” - #P14

Respondents also point to the role of continuous learning through various media, such as podcasts and magazines, in supporting their leadership practice. These resources provide a platform for leaders to keep up to date with the latest trends and theories in leadership and management. Engaging with these materials helps leaders broaden their understanding and apply new ideas to their leadership approach, keeping their methods both innovative and in line with contemporary best practice. This ongoing engagement with learning content is seen as essential to maintaining an informed perspective and responding to the evolving demands of RL.

“So I think reading is good, but you don't always take the time for it, which is why podcasts was also a great and actually almost my most valuable source of information when it comes to leadership, further development, everyday work, entrepreneurship and so on.” - #P1

4.3 Barriers of the adoption of RL

In the exploration of the barriers encountered by leaders in the practice of RL, three themes have been identified: Culture and structure of the organisation, stakeholder alignment, and the

mindset and perception of barriers. Each theme encompasses multiple dimensions that influence leaders' capacity to implement RL in an effective manner.

4.3.1 Culture and structure of the organisation

One significant barrier within this theme is time. Leaders are often pressed for time, which can affect their ability to engage deeply with team members or develop long term strategic initiatives. Time constraints not only rush decisions, but also limit leaders' ability to foster a nurturing and supportive work culture.

“I would say that my main difficulty is really time So with all the projects and tasks, I would say that something like that falls by the wayside relatively quickly, and you just put it off. ... Since I became a manager, it has always been an issue that I say, “I don't have the time that I actually want to or should spend on it” - #P2

The challenges of remote working, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, are also highlighted. The shift to remote working environments has created difficulties in maintaining consistent communication and engagement with team members. This barrier particularly affects the cohesion and relationship dynamics within teams, potentially leading to disengagement and a decline in the sense of community among employees.

“This is also given, especially now of course, by Covid, the topic of New Work, remote, hybrid working world. That's great, I also like to work remotely from time to time, but there are limits ... You can quickly lose touch with colleagues or you don't know exactly what's going on. What does the person actually think now in retrospect? Of course, you can still interpret a lot from facial expressions and gestures, but a lot is lost there.” - #P1

A critical barrier that leaders often encounter within the structure of their organisations is a lack of sufficient decision-making authority. This limitation is often the result of hierarchical constraints, where important decisions require approval from higher levels of management. Leaders find themselves having to advocate for decisions rather than making them autonomously, which can dilute the effectiveness of leadership and slow the implementation of responsible practices.

“So I don't have everything in my own hands, but many things that we do must still be supported and approved by higher management levels. So, approved. Even if I want it, ... for something that my employees want to achieve ..., it usually still requires approval from a higher management level and I have to advocate for it.” - #P8

Another important aspect is the challenge of generational dynamics. Different generations within the workforce bring different expectations, values and working styles, requiring leaders to navigate a complex landscape of needs and perspectives. This diversity requires leaders to

be versatile and empathetic in their approach to management, often acting as mediators and translators between differing views.

“People are always talking about Generation Z, but in my opinion, you can honestly say that one or two generations before that, they have a different understanding of it. How they want to be led.” - #P1

4.3.2 Stakeholder alignment

Stakeholder alignment within organisations often faces the fundamental obstacle of balancing profitability with the interests and well-being of employees. This dilemma poses a critical challenge for leaders seeking to lead responsibly. On the one hand, corporate strategy must ensure profitability and sustainability from a financial perspective, which is the primary concern of shareholders and top management. On the other hand, there is an increasing need to address the personal interests and professional development of employees, which is essential for long-term organisational health and employee satisfaction.

“Responsibility also means finding a way to work with these employees, to find a balance between your own corporate goal, i.e. maximizing profits.” – #P6

In times of rapid change, transparent communication becomes a critical issue. Leaders face the challenge of ensuring that all team members are equally and appropriately informed, which is essential to maintaining trust and fairness within the organisation.

“And I think that keeping communication going in these ever- changing times, being reliable, is really becoming more and more difficult.” - #P4

4.3.3 Mindset and perception of barriers

Despite perceived barriers, some respondents argue that there are no real barriers and that challenges are primarily a matter of mindset and perception. They emphasise that issues are simply problems to be solved. This perspective involves identifying the root causes of problems and finding solutions or compromises. Experience tends to foster a more confident approach to these problems, enabling leaders to tackle them more assertively.

“I wouldn't say that I necessarily encounter obstacles. These are basically tasks that you face and solve.” -#P6

“Actually there are no obstacles. There are different paths.” - #P14

4.4 Benefits of the adoption of RL

A close examination of the advantages inherent in the implementation of RL has led to the identification of three fundamental themes: prerequisites for success, organisational network, and employee motivation and retention.

4.4.1 Prerequisite for success

Interviewees emphasised that RL is key to maintaining a long-term competitive position in the market. RL helps to forge a shared vision and mission, thereby fostering a unified effort to achieve organisational goals. Leaders reported that without this alignment, it is very difficult to achieve sustainable success.

“What advantages? For me, it is a prerequisite for a company to remain on the market in the long term.” - #P2

“It is difficult for me to imagine that a company that does not practice this can be successful” - #P13

4.4.2 Organisation's network

According to the feedback from the interviews, the strength of an organisation's network - both internally and externally – is significantly enhanced by RL. Leaders who focus on building and maintaining strong relationships facilitate new partnerships, which are essential for navigating market complexities and seizing new opportunities. Internally, a strong network fosters an environment of open doors, support and collaboration where ideas and innovation can flourish.

“The second point, however, is also to build up network contacts that can be valuable for the company again ... I come from an innovation and startup context, so I immediately think of the fact that I can scout a startup where employees might be able to go over at some point or a partnership or something like that might arise.” - #P1

4.4.3. Employee motivation and retention

Participants emphasised that the real driving force behind any successful organisation is its people, who are significantly shaped by the practice of RL. They emphasised that employees don't just leave companies; they leave leaders who fail to engage them in a meaningful way. Effective RL builds the trust that not only retains employees, but also intrinsically motivates them. This motivation creates an environment where employees feel supported and valued, which is essential for their loyalty and productivity. Leaders noted that fostering trust creates a productive atmosphere where people are willing to share their true selves and discuss their needs and challenges openly and without fear. This open communication contributes significantly to problem solving and innovation as employees feel safe to express their ideas and concerns. By creating a working environment that values openness and authenticity,

organisations benefit from increased employee engagement and commitment. The result is a workforce that is not only aligned with the organisation's goals, but actively contributes to its success and resilience in the marketplace. This approach is key to overcoming challenges and fostering a sense of belonging and achievement among employees.

“So from that point of view, I believe that leadership is the instrument in the market to make a difference, because again, we work with the same machines, the same IT systems. People make a difference. That means we have to get the brightest minds here and keep them here.” - #P4

“And that's actually just the people behind it ... This also allows each individual to grow, identify better with it, motivate them and also give them the feeling of being a very important part of fulfilling the solution. And then you can identify with it again, not just with the company and the products in our case in particular, but also really being part of this vision and mission, ... and thus simply make this a good environment in which everyone can be themselves and support the success of the company.” - #P9

“I think that when you have a leadership style based on trust, you get something back from your employees when you give them trust, when you show them trust. And that brings productivity and trust to the company.” -#P5

5. Discussion

The discussion will explore the similarities and differences in RL perceptions across Germany and Portugal. It will also interpret the findings in light of cultural factors, address the study's limitations, and propose future research directions.

5.1 Comparative analysis between Germany and Portugal

This section presents a comparative analysis of RL perceptions between Germany and Portugal. It will draw upon the findings from the present study on German executives and the research conducted by Estronca et al. (2022) on Portuguese leaders, providing a comprehensive view of RL across these two European settings.

5.1.1 Perception of RL

Both German and Portuguese leaders embrace a holistic approach to leadership that goes beyond business results to include the well-being and development of employees. This involves recognising the unique characteristics and needs of each individual within the organisation. German leaders emphasise the importance of tailoring management strategies to individual employees, as interviewee 1 noted: "Every employee needs to be managed and led differently". Similarly, Portuguese leaders stress the importance of an individualised approach, ensuring that all voices are heard and taken into account. Furthermore ethical behaviour, transparency and accountability emerge as central tenets of RL in both the German and Portuguese contexts. Portuguese leaders emphasise the need to be honest with all stakeholders, while German leaders stress the importance of building trust through open and honest relationships. Open, clear and transparent communication is also considered essential by leaders in both countries. German leaders specifically mention the importance of listening and feedback as an integral part of responsible communication. Both groups also recognise the importance of continuous improvement and learning from mistakes.

The perception of RL also differs between the two groups. In terms of personal qualities, Portuguese leaders emphasise courage, adaptability, humility and self-reflection as critical attributes of a responsible leader. German leaders, on the other hand, emphasise trustworthiness, passion and inspiration. Finally, German leaders show a greater focus on operational effectiveness and accountability, including prioritising tasks, delegating and monitoring progress. While Portuguese leaders value long term impact, the emphasis on efficient task management is more pronounced in the German perspective.

5.1.2 Enablers of the adoption of RL

The significance of experience and development programs is emphasised by both German and Portuguese managers. German managers advocate for structured training and development tailored specifically to employee needs, while Portuguese leaders underscore the importance of learning from practical experiences and mistakes. Another shared value is the support of a nurturing organisational culture. In Germany, a culture that cherishes freedom, flexibility, and active employee participation is seen as beneficial for RL. In contrast, Portuguese managers emphasise a culture that fosters a sense of belonging, shared interests, and collaborative efforts, which they deem to be essential for effective leadership. The exchange of ideas and communication are also recognised as crucial by leaders in both countries. German leaders value interactions with colleagues and external networks, which help to broaden perspectives and enhance decision-making. Portuguese leaders, meanwhile, underscore the significance of feedback mechanisms, viewing them as vital for continuous improvement and engagement. Trust and open communication within a team are recognised as foundational in supporting RL. Though notable differences in approach emerge. German managers highlight HR as a pivotal element in promoting RL, with HR providing support through defined developmental pathways and offering second opinions. This explicit mention of HR's role is absent in the perspectives shared by Portuguese leaders. Additionally, German managers implement regular employee surveys and risk assessments to maintain open lines of communication and promptly address workplace issues. This proactive approach contrasts with that of Portuguese executives, who place greater emphasis on external factors such as digital technologies, government regulations, and industry standards, viewing them as significant enablers of RL. However, these factors are not highlighted in the German context.

5.1.3 Barriers of the adoption of RL

Common to both countries is the recognition of time pressures and resource constraints as key barriers. In particular, German leaders cite a lack of time as a key barrier to engaging deeply with team members and developing long term strategic initiatives. In Portugal, leaders highlight the lengthy nature of decision-making processes and the difficulty of balancing immediate pressures with the benefits of long-term planning. Remote working is another key challenge shared by both countries. In terms of organisational culture and structure, both German and Portuguese leaders identify these as critical barriers. In Germany, hierarchical constraints limit decision-making capabilities, while in Portugal the effort required to cultivate a culture that supports RL practices is often met with resistance and requires a significant investment of time.

Despite these similarities, there are notable differences in focus and approach between the two leadership environments. German leaders frequently discuss the need to balance stakeholder interests, in particular balancing profitability with employee well-being, a dilemma that is less pronounced in Portuguese discourse. In addition, the challenge of integrating different generational expectations within the workforce is clearly highlighted by German leaders, but is not mentioned in Portuguese discussions. Conversely, Portuguese leaders are clearly concerned with external factors such as the unpredictability of markets, uncertainty and a general lack of social awareness of responsible practices. They also point to Portugal's small size as a constraint, highlighting specific national circumstances that influence leadership strategies. Finally, the German perspective often frames challenges as primarily issues of mindset, suggesting that viewing problems as solvable can significantly mitigate perceived obstacles. This proactive approach to problem solving is noticeably absent from Portuguese responses, suggesting a potential cultural divergence in dealing with leadership challenges.

5.1.4 Benefits of the adoption of RL

Both German and Portuguese executives recognise that RL significantly improves employee motivation and retention. German leaders emphasise that employees often leave managers, not companies, especially when managers fail to engage them meaningfully. Effective RL fosters trust, which not only retains employees but also intrinsically motivates them. Portuguese leaders emphasise how ethical leadership practices increase employee engagement and loyalty, thereby increasing productivity and reducing turnover. In addition, leaders in both countries agree that RL is instrumental in improving internal processes. In Germany, strong internal networks create an open-door environment that encourages collaboration and promotes innovation. Portuguese executives believe that the implementation of RL practices optimises internal processes by creating a cohesive and supportive working environment, thereby increasing efficiency and reducing friction. There is also a consensus on the role of RL in maintaining long-term competitiveness.

Nevertheless, there are notable differences in how the effects of RL are perceived and emphasised. German executives emphasise the improvement of an organisation's network, both internally and externally, as being significantly strengthened by RL. They focus on building and maintaining strong relationships that facilitate new partnerships, which are crucial for navigating market complexities and seizing new opportunities. This particular emphasis on network building is not explicitly mentioned in Portuguese sources. From a financial perspective, Portuguese leaders claim that RL has a positive impact on finances. They argue

that RL goes beyond ethical considerations and becomes a key factor for the survival of the organisation, leading to improved financial results through sustainable operations. This direct financial benefit is not explicitly emphasised by German sources.

5.2 Interpretation of findings

An exploration of the relationship between Hofstede's cultural dimensions and the perceptions of RL in Germany and Portugal reveals both alignments and divergences, thereby highlighting the nuanced influence of cultural frameworks on leadership practices. Hofstede's analysis provides a foundational understanding of how cultural values are likely to shape leadership behaviours and organisational dynamics. However, the specific manifestations of these dimensions indicate complex interactions between cultural predispositions and contemporary leadership practices.

The Power Distance index, as delineated by Hofstede, offers insight into the different management styles preferred in each country. It can be observed that Germany's low score aligns with its leaders' preference for participative management styles that minimise hierarchical distinctions, in line with the transparency and employee involvement emphasised by German leaders. In contrast, Portugal's higher power distance index is associated with a greater acceptance of hierarchical structures, as evidenced by the Portuguese leaders' focus on ethical governance and top-down leadership approaches that guide societal and organisational change.

In the context of Individualism, the differences in leadership approaches between the two countries are marked. Germany's high score on Individualism correlates with a leadership focus on personal autonomy and recognition of individual achievement, supporting Hofstede's assertion that individualistic cultures value personal success and independence (Hofstede, 2011). Conversely, Portugal's collectivist orientation is reflected in its leaders' emphasis on community and group cohesion, demonstrating how cultural values prioritise leadership focus - from individual achievement in Germany to communal well-being in Portugal.

However, the Masculinity dimension represents a notable departure from Hofstede's theoretical expectations. Despite Germany's high Masculinity score, indicating a culture that values competition and achievement, there is a significant emphasis on diversity and inclusion in German leadership practices. These elements, typically associated with more feminine cultures, highlight a departure from the cultural prescriptions suggested by Hofstede. This suggests that German leadership may embrace a broader range of values, combining a competitive drive with a commitment to inclusive and equitable practices.

Uncertainty Avoidance is another dimension where both countries exhibit high scores, yet their application in leadership varies subtly. Portugal's exceptionally high score suggests a strong preference for structured environments and clear regulations, as reflected in Portuguese leaders' adherence to rigorous ethical standards and structured leadership strategies. In contrast, Germany's moderately high score indicates a preference for certainty but with sufficient flexibility to adapt to new challenges, embodying a balance between structured approaches and adaptability within leadership practices.

The divergent scores on the Indulgence and Restraint dimension appear to contradict the active engagement in innovation and ethical practices observed in both German and Portuguese leaders. Despite lower scores on indulgence, which might predict a conservative approach, leaders in both countries actively promote change and innovation, particularly in ethical leadership. This discrepancy from Hofstede's predictions suggests that while cultural dimensions can guide understanding of general societal trends, specific leadership behaviours can reflect more complex and adaptive responses to organisational and global challenges.

In summary, while Hofstede's cultural dimensions provide valuable insights into the expected behaviours and practices within different cultural contexts, the actual leadership behaviours in Germany and Portugal exhibit both adherence to and deviations from these cultural norms. These findings emphasise the dynamic nature of leadership, which adapts not only to cultural backgrounds but also to modern business imperatives and ethical considerations. The synthesis of cultural dimensions with RL perceptions enriches the understanding of how cultural underpinnings shape, and are shaped by, contemporary leadership challenges and practices. This analysis highlights the importance of considering both theoretical cultural frameworks and practical leadership applications in understanding the full spectrum of leadership in a globalised world.

5.3 Limitation of research

This thesis explores the perception of RL in Germany and Portugal using semi-structured interviews within these two cultural contexts. Although this qualitative approach provides in-depth insights, the number of 15 interviews limits the generalisability of the findings to larger populations. The sample of 15 German leaders, though diverse, is small and potentially biased due to recruitment through personal networks. The restriction to only two countries is a limitation in terms of the generalisability of the findings, given the potential for significant cultural, social and economic variations across regions. The study's focus on RL perceptions

may also have overlooked other relevant contextual factors, such as recent historical events or industry-specific characteristics, which could have an impact on perceptions of RL. The inherent subjectivity of thematic analysis means that the findings may be influenced by the researcher's biases, despite efforts to maintain objectivity. Furthermore, the comparability of the findings with the Portuguese study may be constrained by discrepancies in study contexts, including variations in data collection timing or industry. Utilising Hofstede's cultural dimensions as an analytical framework provides a structured approach; however, it may result in an oversimplification of the intricate nature of cultural dynamics. Cultural values are inherently dynamic and influenced by numerous global and local factors, suggesting that an overreliance on Hofstede's model might not fully capture the diversity of cultural identities.

5.4 Recommendations for further research

In order to enhance the understanding of RL, it is recommended that future research focus on expanding and diversifying the sample size, incorporating participants from various regions, industries, and backgrounds in Germany and Portugal. Employing random or systematic sampling methods would help to minimise selection bias and enrich the findings. Additionally, conducting comparative studies across different countries and cultural contexts would enable researchers to generalise the results more effectively and understand the nuances of cultural differences and similarities in RL practices. The incorporation of mixed-methods approaches could also prove beneficial, combining the in-depth insights of qualitative interviews with the statistical robustness of quantitative surveys. This would allow for a more comprehensive analysis of RL across different settings. Moreover, longitudinal studies would be invaluable in observing the evolution of RL practices over time, helping to capture the dynamic nature of leadership and its adaptation to changes in organisational culture and external economic or societal influences. Exploration of dynamic cultural models, as opposed to reliance on static frameworks such as Hofstede's dimensions, would facilitate a more precise depiction of evolving cultural landscapes. The acknowledgement of subcultural variations within countries would also furnish a more profound comprehension of internal cultural diversity and its influence on leadership practices. By addressing these domains, future research could considerably enhance the comprehension of RL, thereby yielding actionable insights that could influence both academic theories and practical leadership development.

6. Conclusion

Cultural differences in the perception of RL between Germany and Portugal were investigated in this dissertation. The results show that in both countries RL is understood as a holistic approach that goes beyond purely economic objectives and emphasises the well-being and development of employees. Ethical behaviour, transparency and accountability are central in both contexts. However, German leaders emphasise trustworthiness, passion and inspiration, while Portuguese leaders focus on courage, adaptability, humility and self-reflection. In addition, German leaders place greater emphasis on operational effectiveness and accountability. The thesis identifies several enablers and barriers to implementing RL, with similarities and differences between the countries. Both recognise the importance of experience and development programmes and a supportive culture. German managers see HR as a key factor in promoting RL, while Portuguese managers emphasise external factors such as digital technologies and government regulations. Time and resource constraints, as well as the challenges of remote working, are faced by both groups. German leaders often discuss the need to balance stakeholder interests, while Portuguese leaders point to external factors such as market volatility and a lack of social awareness. Both German and Portuguese managers recognise that RL significantly improves employee motivation and retention. German managers note improvements in organisational networking through RL, while Portuguese managers significantly more often see a direct financial benefit. All agree that RL contributes to long term competitiveness. The results show that cultural values influence the perception and implementation of RL, as analysed through Hofstede's cultural dimensions. However, leadership practices in both Germany and Portugal both adapt to and deviate from these cultural norms of Hofstede, highlighting the dynamic nature of leadership and the need to consider additional contextual factors. Limitations of the study include its qualitative methodology, sample size, focus on only two countries, subjectivity of data interpretation, comparability with the the Portuguese study, reliance on Hofstede's cultural dimensions, and overlooking other relevant contextual factors. Future research should address these limitations by using larger and more diverse samples, including additional cultural contexts, using mixed methods approaches, conducting longitudinal studies, considering dynamic cultural models and analysing the impact of RL on different stakeholders. In conclusion, this thesis makes a valuable contribution to the understanding of RL in the context of cultural differences. The findings can help global leaders to appreciate the importance of cultural sensitivity and have practical implications for

multinational companies. Despite its limitations, the study provides important insights and suggestions for further research.

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Appendix

Example of an interview script.

All other interview scripts available on request.

[00:00:00.220] - Speaker 11

Exactly.

[00:00:01.140] - Felicia Haug

Okay. Exactly. First of all, I would like to tell you briefly what the goal of my research project is. My master's thesis is about cultural perspectives on RL. In other words, I'm making a qualitative comparison between Germany and Portugal. And the Portuguese side, so to speak, has already been covered by others in a paper and I am now doing the same study for Germany. In other words, I'm looking at how German managers live RL. How they perceive and implement it in practice. And that's exactly what it's about. I would of course keep the interview completely confidential and if that's okay with you, I would also record it. Does that suit you?

[00:00:50.450] - Speaker 11

You're very welcome to do that.

[00:00:53.680] - Felicia Haug

Great, thank you. Okay, and then I would like to give you the floor. Could you briefly introduce yourself, who you are.

[00:01:02.140] - Speaker 11

Alright. So, [REDACTED]. I am 60 years old. I'm a managing partner in [REDACTED] together with my father and my brother [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. And [REDACTED] is divided into two divisions. Maybe I'll get to that later. Let's stay a little longer with myself. Exactly, I studied business administration in Passau and graduated with a degree in business administration, which was before the Bologna reform, and then initially worked at the [REDACTED], where I was able to take on a small management role in the corporate customer area. Even back then, I was the only woman in charge of corporate banking. It wasn't always easy in the 90s either. And then, after [REDACTED] was born, I joined my parents' business in 1998 and have been Managing Director of [REDACTED] since 2007 and a partner since 2012. Exactly, I myself

have been responsible for the plants in Germany for eight years now. So we operate internationally. My brother manages the foreign plants and I manage the German plants. And as part of an organisational and structural process, we have also identified various other areas. I still do HR, I do the whole issue of training, further training.

[00:02:46.420] - Speaker 11

That's very close to my heart anyway and I've done a lot in that area in the meantime. And the topic of, I'll call it communication, internally, externally, there too. And that's where everything interlocks, from employer marketing to education, further training, management training. It all dovetails together. And I actually work relatively operationally too. That means I also go to our plants and am on site, talking to the people there. I think it's very important. I try to have very direct leadership. I am a big fan of very flat hierarchies and we have simply structured our organisation accordingly. Then I also have voluntary work. I'm on the [REDACTED] of the Industrial Association for [REDACTED] and I'm delegated to the [REDACTED] via our industry association. And I sit on the executive committee there as vice president.

[00:04:05.220] - Felicia Haug

Okay, exciting.

[00:04:06.640] - Speaker 11

Exactly. And then I also do two voluntary activities here in my home town. I've been running the [REDACTED] Action Group for 15 years. It looks after children and young people up to the age of 18 who live in poverty. And we collect money and initiate projects, support the projects to give these children the chance to participate in social life and education.

[00:04:39.090] - Felicia Haug

Great.

[00:04:39.440] - Speaker 11

This brings me full circle with the topic of education. And I've also been on the board of trustees of the music school in [REDACTED] for, I think, 18 years now, including education.

[00:04:58.860] - Felicia Haug

Great, thanks for the insights first of all. Can I ask you then, how many people are under you in the company? Do you have a rough number so that it can be categorized?

[00:05:15.500] - Speaker 11

Well, we have 800 employees in Germany and if you like, these 800 employees are under me.

[00:05:24.490] - Speaker 11

We've actually been sharing the management since 01.10.2024 Before that we had regional management and now we're doing Germany here from the holding company and we're sharing that. I have a young female colleague. We are two women, quite exceptional in our industry, and [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and I are jointly responsible for Germany.

[00:05:45.590] - Felicia Haug

Great. Then I'd like to get straight into the topic. And that is: What does it mean to you to be a responsible leader? Do you have any examples of what characterizes you?

[00:06:04.720] - Speaker 11

So responsibility is, I think, also a very, very big task, also a very big role, because we are not only responsible for numbers, but above all for the people who work for us. And so that they ... Well, our philosophy is also: we want people to be able to make a living from it and live from it at this location, with their families. And I see that as a huge challenge, as well as a responsibility to focus on the individual person here. And then I also understand it to mean that we understand the individual person. That means finding the skills in that person and developing them accordingly. And to do that, we simply have to talk to people. So communication is very important as a manager. And the power of words - in a positive sense, the power of words - must not be underestimated or overestimated. It's very important to be very delicate when communicating with these people and to actually pick them up. You have the ones you have and you have to work with them. You can complain on the one hand and say on the other: "What are their strengths and skills and how can we develop them?"

[00:07:25.460] - Speaker 11

And what tools do we need to develop so that we are good as a team and hold our own in the market? And then I am firmly convinced that the figures we want will come out at the end. And then we will also be successful. I think that's the responsibility we have. It's all about

sustainability and sustainability in terms of ecology, but above all economics and social issues. And these are very diverse issues that have to be taken into account, but I think that's a very big task.

[00:08:04.470] - Felicia Haug

Totally. And when you try to lead responsibly, are there any obstacles that you experience in everyday life that you notice, that prevent you from acting as you would like to?

[00:08:23.190] - Speaker 11

I have too few hours. Exactly. It's always up to you how you set it and how you approach it. So, I'm also a big fan of finding solutions. Let me give you an example. We have simple activities in our plants, in the [REDACTED]. The goods come in, we hang them on traverses, then they run through the process and then they have to be unhooked again. This traversing, up and down, is a very simple job. You don't need a university degree for it. Also, because our industry is so small, there is no apprenticeship. So who did we get? We got the people who couldn't really get anything anywhere else. And we said, we have to change something and we also need - there's this [REDACTED], lots of chemistry, three years of school. That's far too challenging for our employees. And together with the industry location, where I was a co-initiator, we developed the [REDACTED] specialist a few years ago. This is a training course that we are unfortunately not allowed to call an apprenticeship. It lasts one year and during this year they work, earn their money and are trained by the association for one year.

[00:10:02.070] - Speaker 11

It's all online, we give them an iPad and they have access to this iPad and can work through modules. And throughout the whole process, there are these modules where they learn the background. So: What do I have to bear in mind when traversing? How many kilos can I hang on it? How do I have to hang it? What happens in the pre-treatment process? What chemicals are there? How does it all work in sequence? And so on. They are trained on all the processes. As I said, this takes over a year. We would like this training to be recognized, also in recognition of our employees, but unfortunately ... The Chamber of Industry and Commerce says: "It's not a two-year course, so we don't recognize it." And in this respect, we're coming up against a bit of granite. We are very politically active through the association and are trying to initiate this, and we also have support. For example, [REDACTED] who is the education policy spokesperson for the [REDACTED], is a young, very active woman who says: "Something has to be done." And there

are certainly other sectors that have the same issue and have also initiated something. We have actually also found the industries.

[00:11:21.540] - Speaker 11

In nursing, for example, they have reduced the training to one year because they have such a great shortage of staff and say: “We have to get them into the permanent labor market after one year and then we said: ”Well, then we have to work with them, if they can do it, it must be possible.” In the meantime, that has actually happened. The federal government has seen that there are excesses and actually positive excesses and personal initiatives and is now trying to bundle and structure this and then recognize it. And I find that very pleasing. We're on the right track in terms of recognition. And I believe that we simply must not let up. It's often a tough row to hoe, but you have to see how you can find a solution. And if it's not through the IHK, I simply have to find a way. So there will be some way and we have to go down it. So I think you have to recognize what's holding me back and where there might be a plan B or a plan C to find a solution.

[00:12:22.980] - Felicia Haug

Yes, I see.

[00:12:25.310] - Speaker 11

Yes.

[00:12:25.940] - Felicia Haug

Okay. And are there any aspects that you perceive as supporting you in your everyday life to act responsibly, that support you in what you would like to do?

[00:12:43.080] - Speaker 11

What do you mean by that?

[00:12:44.590] - Felicia Haug

It can actually be anything. It can be people around you or some kind of support, for example training. Are there any things where you have the feeling, “This has helped me and supported me in my way of leading?” Or is it actually all your experience or personal views on how you do it?

[00:13:10.600] - Speaker 11

I think these networks, also in different areas, are very enriching, because then you also get other insights, especially about [REDACTED], where you then have to deal with poverty. For us, who are very SME-oriented and experienced, these are insights that you simply wouldn't otherwise have. And that sometimes changes things or brings in new approaches: What can I do? What is the priority for these people? Also, having an understanding. So I think these networks, these insights, these different activities at different levels are good and enriching. Also very important for us.

[00:13:59.890] - Felicia Haug

You said that you had previously held a management position in another company. At some point in your career, did you also have some kind of further training in “How to lead?” Something along those lines? And if so, were there any specific skills that you hoped to learn? Was there anything along those lines?

[00:14:25.950] - Speaker 11

I actually had a great training course with [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] it was a three-part course called “Me, you and us”. And you learned a lot about yourself: Where do I stand? What are my strengths? I also got to know these so-called auditory images. So what are you sending me? What do I hear and what do I send back? In classic terms: How do misunderstandings arise? What do we contribute to them? Or: How do we communicate with each other? How do we deal with each other? I learned a lot from that. Thank God I learned at a very young age. I was also very lucky that I had a very visionary superior who was a very good manager in my eyes. I learned an incredible amount from him. I still have phrases in my head today that I simply got from him. He was actually very much like that. So he tried out different things, from. His name was [REDACTED] I think. That was ages ago. But he really brought in very different topics, which was actually revolutionary for the time.

[00:15:55.530] - Felicia Haug

Exciting.

[00:15:56.920] - Speaker 11

Yes, thank God I was allowed to have such experiences in my 20s. In my 20s. Great, yes. Yes. And it shaped me a lot. Yes.

[00:16:07.360] - Felicia Haug

Okay. Yeah, perfect. That also answered the next question, whether you feel like it prepared you for your future in any way. But it sounds like it definitely did something for you.

[00:16:20.070] - Speaker 11

Exactly. You don't really know until you come in. And I also think that you only... Which was also when I went straight into management here, so many people said: "Oh, her mother's big footsteps." Then I said: "Yes, but my mother is a completely different type to me. My mother has left her own footprints and I'm leaving mine too." So I think that was an important realization for me. Exactly. However, I also had coaching for a while in my early 40s. That also made me more aware, because I was in a technical field here and sometimes I heard: "Yes, she can do that, but technology is just missing." So this well-rounded thing. But I always had the feeling that I lacked this well-roundedness until I actually realized through coaching: I'm good at what I can do and others are good at the other things. So this acceptance of that. Exactly. And even today: I had another coaching session a year ago and it turned into more of a performance because I was on a big stage and I'd had a coaching session before that.

[00:17:48.960] - Speaker 11

And then she asks, "What's your problem?" And then you do the exercise and then she says, "What's your problem?" Exactly, and there too. You actually still learn something about yourself and I find that really exciting. And I want to continue coaching with her. I think it's really important. It's also a kind of reflection.

[00:18:13.570] - Felicia Haug

I think so.

[00:18:14.350] - Speaker 11

Yes. So anyway, what I take away from the late 20s is that reflection is very important. Reflecting on what you do and how you act. And situations always happen that are unfortunate.

[00:18:30.150] - Felicia Haug

Yes.

[00:18:30.700] - Speaker 11

They end unhappily. That's not bad either. The important thing is that you reflect on it afterwards: Where was the point? Where did it fail? Where could the course have been set differently? Or was it okay the way it went? In other words, simply play through the situation again.

[00:18:51.700] - Felicia Haug

Yes, good. Then I would like to tell you the definition of RL from the literature. More precisely, how it was defined in the Portuguese study, how it is presented there, so to speak. And then I have another question. If it's too long, I can send it to you here. Sometimes I find it difficult if you can't read it yourself. But let's just give it a try.

[00:19:15.100] - Speaker 11

We'll give it a try.

[00:19:16.890] - Felicia Haug

“RL is the art and ability to build, maintain and develop responsible relationships between different stakeholders inside but also outside the organisation and to coordinate responsible action to achieve a common and meaningful corporate vision.” What would you say are the advantages of a company whose managers practice this leadership style? To what extent does this have a beneficial effect?

[00:19:53.070] - Speaker 11

Internal-external communication? Indispensable. It simply doesn't work without it. The biggest problem is breaking down the visions into goals and communicating them. That's probably the biggest challenge and most people will find it difficult to do that.

[00:20:23.980] - Felicia Haug

And then I have two or three small questions: RL is described as a relationship phenomenon. What are groups or which groups do you now count as your stakeholders, i.e. as your interest groups that you deal with in your everyday life?

[00:20:53.920] - Speaker 11

I'm involved in politics. I also work a lot in federal politics. I deal with the association, [REDACTED]. We deal with the authorities. We have to deal with external consultants who help us deliver to the authorities. In principle, I deal with potential employees. So today, this so-called employer marketing only means that I should present myself as a company or myself as a person via social media in such a way that it corresponds to our philosophy and that they can interpret it that way. And then I also have the overarching association, the [REDACTED], in which I am active and which I use in parallel, with which I work together and try to combine common interests. We also try to invite some NGOs that are now working in the field of sustainability, from the [REDACTED] to, I don't know, I've actually had so many contacts. I can think of a Norwegian one right now that I've never heard of before, but it's also really exciting. We simply try to invite them into the political discussions we have in our works to show them who we are: Who are we? What do we do? What does sustainability mean to us? Because I think it's always important to know when you're talking about industry: What do they do and what is their philosophy?

[00:22:43.420] - Felicia Haug

Exactly. And of the different groups that you just mentioned, which one do you devote most of your time and attention to in your everyday life? Is there one or two where you can say, definitely them? Or is it balanced?

[00:23:01.370] - Speaker 11

Of course I devote most of my time to our employees. That's clear. And then the association should come next, and at the moment also the trade association for [REDACTED] because we're in a major structural process there. Exactly. And there are also political discussions. But I simply represent our industry and try to achieve a lot. Exactly, two weeks ago [REDACTED] was invited.

[00:23:33.360] - Felicia Haug

Really? Exciting.

[00:23:35.680] - Speaker 11

It was nice. It was a very nice meeting. Exactly. Very exciting. Yes, it was.

[00:23:40.660] - Felicia Haug

I think that it's very exciting to have conversations with people like that.

[00:23:44.980] - Speaker 11

Yes, exactly. Yes.

[00:23:51.890] - Felicia Haug

Okay, perfect. Then we're done with my questions. Thank you very much. And then I'll stop the recording.