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DOI: 10.15290/oes.2023.03.113.11

## THE ROLE OF A LEADER IN CREATING BUSINESS SUCCESS IN THE EXAMPLE OF A START-UP ORGANIZATION<sup>1</sup>

### Summary

*Purpose* – The aim of the article is to identify the desired leadership competencies and behaviors that affect business success, with particular emphasis on innovative start-up organizations.

*Research method* – The publication was created based on the analysis of the existing data. In addition, the quantitative research results (2020–2021) in Lublin Voivodeship were analyzed for the doctoral thesis. The focus was on the competencies and behaviors of start-up leaders/founders that influence success. A survey questionnaire was used in the study.

*Results* – The most crucial task of a leader is to focus on employees, inspire them to carry out tasks according to the organization's interests, and skillfully use their distinguishing features and competencies. Success in a start-up is possible when its leader/founder focuses on the decision-making process and relational capital and is convinced of the success of the assumed goals.

*Originality/value/implications/recommendations* – The completed research are essential from the perspective of the further search for leadership competencies and behaviors that affect success in various types of organizations, with particular emphasis on modern business models. The use of appropriate competencies and behaviors by the leader/founder of a start-up guarantees: the transition to the next stage of the start-up's development, increase in its value, increase in the strength of internal relations, implementation of the assumed social goals and deepening cooperation with external stakeholders.

**Keywords:** leader, leader competencies, leader behavior, organizational success, start-ups.

**JEL classification:** M12, M13, M54

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<sup>1</sup> Article financed by the Institute of Management and Quality Sciences at the Faculty of Economics of the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin.

Article received on 15.09.2022, accepted on 28.06.2023.

## 1. Introduction

The dynamically changing external environment conditions mean modern entrepreneurs are forced to manage existing borders/barriers [Carnall, 2014]. Changing management paradigms oblige entrepreneurs to create organizations based on the added value of mutually provided services within the internal market economy [Płoszajski, 2000]. As a result, to give the organization the right direction of change, contemporary leaders must create a vision that will give an idea of the expected condition of the company in the future [Sanborn, 1996; Bennis, Nanus, 2010].

A leader focused on achieving success is obliged not only to adapt the organization dynamically to the diversity of the environment, but also to anticipate and create the surrounding reality [Peters, 2001]. The leader must intensively involve all employees in achieving the assumed goals by operating in a business environment characterized by high expectations from contractors and stakeholders and a competitive market. Namely, skillful management of human resources aimed at maximizing the effectiveness of activities, proper use of intellectual potential, and skillful combination of it with technical potential contribute to the dynamic success of the organization [Williams, 2009; Simerson, Venn, 2010]. However, it should be emphasized that innovation is the basis for growth and success. They promote profit, growth, and success [Hyvärinen, 1990], with success defined as a sign of economic viability (increased productivity and profits) [Heunks, 1998].

In connection with the above, leaders, through their decisions, adopt strategies and skillful influence on their subordinates, impacting the fate of their business [Kaiser, Hogan et al., 2008]. A review of the existing research in this area shows a research gap regarding the role of a leader in creating the success of start-ups. So far, scientists analyzing a leader's role in achieving success in organizations have not conducted research in this regard in start-up units. Therefore, the following research question was formulated in the work: How do the competencies and behaviors of a leader affect the success of start-ups? The aim of the article is to identify the desired leadership competencies and behaviors that affect the achievement of business success. As part of this study, the following research hypotheses have been verified:

**H1:** There is a relationship between leader behavior and start-up success.

**H2:** There is a link between leadership firmly focused on people and relationships and the success of start-ups.

- H3:** There is a relationship between leadership firmly oriented toward implementing goals and tasks and the success of start-ups.
- H4:** There is a relationship between the level of leadership competence and the success of start-ups.
- H5:** There is a relationship between cooperation with the external environment and the success of start-ups.

The research includes an analysis of existing data - a review of the current state of knowledge in this area – and an analysis of quantitative research results conducted for the doctoral thesis in 2020–2021.

## **2. Competences and behaviors of a leader affecting the success of an organization – a review of previous research**

In today's civilizational changes, technological progress, and broadly understood globalization, there is a discrepancy between the traditional approach to monitoring activities and the modern mechanism of value creation. In addition to financial and physical resources, intellectual assets are becoming extremely important [Kamukama et al., 2010]. In the course of the changes mentioned above, the leader plays a vital role. On the one hand, he strives to strengthen the identity of individual employee teams and makes people integrate with the goals and values of the company. On the other hand, he creates the conditions necessary for his subordinates to take on risky challenges and promote unlimited creativity. Managing modern enterprises contributes to the perception of an effective leader constantly striving to achieve success. As a result, it is noteworthy to create good relations with one's subordinates and emphasize the importance of the desired activity, enabling the achievement of the success mentioned above [Załoga, 2014, p. 96].

The work of a leader is based on his competencies, thanks to which it is possible to perform the function of a manager in the company properly. The concept of competence reflects a kind of ability that enables the performance of activities within a function or profession while acting by expected standards. Undoubtedly, competencies are closely related to the transfer of knowledge and skills in new situations in the context of the profession. Managerial competencies include knowledge, skills, personality traits, and attitudes characteristic of managers who achieve high results [Rakowska, Sitko-Lutek, 2000].

According to the considerations of J.T. Tompson [Małota 2012, p. 24], the leader's competencies should be inextricably linked with the stages of the company development (Table 1). The author mentioned above distinguishes three types of leadership: absolute, team, and global. The first is extremely important in the initial stage of the organization's development when pursuing the goal despite numerous difficulties, strategic thinking, energy, and perseverance in implementing numerous tasks. In turn, team leadership plays a vital role in the middle stage of development due to the pursuit of teamwork, delegation of powers, and effective motivation. The last type of leadership (global leadership) refers to mature enterprises, focusing on experience, knowledge dissemination, organizational learning, and establishing a network of external relations.

TABLE 1  
Managerial competencies at individual stages of organization development

Development stage	Kind of leadership	Competence
Beginning of development – start-up	Absolute leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– strategic thinking and planning skills</li> <li>– resistance to adversity</li> <li>– multitasking</li> <li>– lots of energy and perseverance</li> </ul>
The average level of development	Team leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– team building and development</li> <li>– delegating responsibility</li> <li>– motivating</li> </ul>
Mature organizations and large corporations	Global leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– experience synthesis</li> <li>– building external alliances</li> <li>– strategic communication skills</li> <li>– high level of emotional intelligence, empathy</li> <li>– the ability to recognize and celebrate achievements</li> <li>– an attitude that allows you to treat making mistakes as a form of learning</li> <li>– acceptance of different leadership styles</li> </ul>

Source: author's own elaboration based on: [Małota, 2012, p. 24].

Current literature reports and practitioners' opinions are consistent with the assumption that modern leaders positively impact the individual team members they lead, mainly if they focus on promoting creative solutions, instilling

essential values, making tough decisions, and helping subordinates imitate the leader. As a result, a manager focused on leading people should [Simerson, Venn, 2010, pp. 17–18]:

- believe in their own beliefs,
- skillfully share the knowledge that enables success,
- inspire creative ideas,
- scrupulously analyze and spot current and upcoming opportunities and threats,
- think about both the present and the future,
- systematically analyze the organization's situation to notice, support and develop positive behavior.

In addition, research [Rakowska, 2007, p. 10; Sitko-Lutek, 2013, p. 145] shows that the essential skills of a modern manager include planning, self-management, motivating, negotiating, managing change, making decisions, and solving problems based on a creative and rational approach. Such personality traits should also guide a leader as entrepreneurship, willingness to take risks, motivation to learn, energy, openness, self-confidence, flexibility in thinking, resistance to stress, and considerable autonomy. In the era of rapid technological changes, broadly understood innovation management is vital. It is necessary to have such competencies as generating and implementing innovative solutions. On the other hand, when it comes to success, the need for self-realization becomes more critical, which, combined with the willingness to learn, change and take risks, contributes to shaping the competence of a modern manager.

The literature on the subject provides many other considerations about the characteristics of a successful leader. According to R. Kaptur [2020], the features of an effective leader include: creativity and innovation, honesty and integrity, commitment and passion, emotional intelligence, confidence, humility, skills and abilities, accountability, instructional strategies, delegation and empowerment, empathy, teamwork, vision and purpose, resilience, and transparency. Additionally, R.S. Kaplan [2015] claims that the way to use leadership potential is based, firstly, on acquiring strategic skills (articulating a vision, creating alignment, setting priorities), which can be improved and developed in practice by aspiring leaders. Secondly, this path is based on developing explicit beliefs regarding the actions taken (strategic and ethical) and a bold approach to running a business.

In conclusion, the leader plays a significant role in any enterprise. Thanks to the extraordinary features of his personality and distinctive competencies, he skillfully uses the opportunities coming from the environment. He implements

strategies to succeed in a highly turbulent and competitive environment. However, despite civilization and technological progress, people are still the priority resource that enables them to achieve satisfactory results. Thanks to the employees, the leader can develop his business, enter new markets, create innovative products/services, and thus be successful. As a result, the critical challenge for a modern manager is to focus on human potential, inspire subordinates to integrate with the company's goals, build their career paths, and enable employees to develop and acquire new competencies. The most important thing is to treat your employees as the company's most valuable asset, which should be nurtured, developed, and continuously invested in.

### 3. Research methods

The research was carried out in Lublin Voivodeship in 2020–2021. The survey questionnaire was addressed to 350 leaders/founders of Lublin start-ups. The sample was selected on purpose, assuming that the surveyed start-ups have at least one characteristic – they go through the first phase of the life cycle, they are at an early stage of development, they cooperate with the environment effectively using the synergy effect, they dynamically adapt to changes on the market by introducing innovative solutions, or operate in conditions of extreme uncertainty, taking a high risk. On the other hand, according to the assumptions adopted in the research process (based on tools developed by various institutions, e.g., Startup Poland Foundation and using Key Performance Indicators), a start-up is successful when there is at least one premise. There has been an increase in revenues, the assumed profitability has been achieved, there has been an increase in the position against the competition, the commercialization of innovations has taken place, the quality of the products/services has increased, the number of loyal customers has increased, there was an increase in customer relations, there was a transition to the next stage of start-up development, there was an increase in the value of the start-up, the assumed social goals were achieved, the strength of relations within the start-up increased, or cooperation with external stakeholders deepened.

The anonymous survey questionnaire consisted of a specification and closed questions, in which a five-point Likert scale was used (where 1–I strongly disagree, and 5–I strongly agree). The survey was addressed to the leaders/founders of individual start-ups via the internet. Respondents received a link that directed them to an electronic survey questionnaire.

The questions contained in the questionnaire related to the assessment of a start-up leader's experience, behavior, and competence. Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agree with statements directly related to them as start-up leaders. Individual items concerned the characteristics, behaviors, and work carried out by leaders (promotion of values and beliefs, decision-making, sense of mission, coaching, individual approach to employees, their development, attitude to the future, problem-solving, delegation of powers, responsibility), as well as leadership in start-ups (focused on people and relationships, or oriented on achieving goals and tasks). Next, the respondents indicated their competencies in particular areas (management, finance, personnel policy, use of IT, techniques/technologies, marketing activities, innovations, logistics, supplies, service activities, and relations with the environment). They also defined their attitude to the external environment through statements regarding the legitimacy of cooperation, building relationship capital, joint innovative projects, research initiatives, new business solutions, development, and activities to benefit the local community. Next, the effects of start-up activity were examined, where the respondents determined to what extent in the presented areas (revenues, profitability, market position, innovations, products/services, customers, stage of development, values, social goals, internal relations, cooperation) their start-up succeeded. The metric asked respondents about their education (vocational, secondary, university) and experience in running a start-up (first start-up or previous running a certain number of start-ups).

In the statistical analysis of the data, the significance of the relationship was assessed at  $p < 0.05$ . Cronbach's alpha coefficients, calculated for five-point scales in the prepared questionnaire, indicated the correct arrangement of the scale and its reliability (values above 0.7 confirmed the reliability of the analyzed scales). In the question assessing the behavior of the start-up director/founder, this coefficient was as high as 0.92; when assessing the competence of the start-up founder in a given area -0.76, and when examining the relationship of the start-up director/founder with the external environment -0.78. When analyzing the scale's reliability when assessing a start-up's success level in relation to individual factors, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.88.

In the research process, 97 correctly completed questionnaires were obtained. Data analysis was carried out using, among others: arithmetic means analysis, the chi-square test, and Pearson's correlation coefficient.

#### 4. Research results

The conducted own research focused on the correlations between the level of success of Lublin start-ups and the following elements:

- education and experience of a start-up leader/founder,
- leadership behaviors and competencies,
- relations of the start-up director/founder with the external environment,
- the level of start-up success in relation to individual factors.

Considering the relationship between education, experience, and a start-up's success level, only one statistically significant relationship was noticed out of the 12 analyzed areas. Namely, the experience in running a start-up positively contributed to the increase in the value of the business ( $p = 0.01$ ,  $\text{Chi}^2 = 9.48$ ).

Analyzing the assessment of leadership behaviors and the level of success of a start-up (Table 2), five statistically significant relationships were noticed based on the average success rate ( $X_{\text{avg}}$ ) and three statistically significant relationships using the average assessment of leadership behaviors ( $X_{\text{avg}}$  1–15). The high level of success was directly proportional to leadership behaviors referring to moral and ethical considerations on the consequences of decisions made ( $X_{\text{avg}} = 0.26$ ), an optimistic ( $X_{\text{avg}} = 0.24$ ) and convincing ( $X_{\text{avg}} = 0.20$ ) vision of the future about the achievement of the assumed goals ( $X_{\text{avg}} = 0.23$ ) and re-examination of the assumptions to check whether they are appropriate ( $X_{\text{avg}} = 0.20$ ). In turn, the averaged assessment of leadership behaviors indicated that the most positive statistically significant correlations occurred in the case of such success factors as the transition to the next stage of development of a start-up ( $X_{\text{avg}} = 0.29$ ), increase in value ( $X_{\text{avg}} = 0.29$ ), and increase in strength relations within the start-up ( $X_{\text{avg}} = 0.35$ ). It should be emphasized that the strongest statistically significant relationship (among the analyzed ones) was noticed when the increase in the start-up's value was correlated with the founder's considerations regarding the moral and ethical consequences of the decisions made ( $X_{\text{avg}} = 0.48$ ).

Based on the research (Table 2), it should also be stated that there was a directly proportional statistically significant relationship between leadership firmly focused on people and relationships and the average success rate ( $X_{\text{avg}} = 0.23$ ). On the other hand, an inversely proportional relationship, statistically insignificant, was noticed by correlating leadership firmly oriented to the implementation of goals and tasks with the average success rate ( $X_{\text{avg}} = -0.02$ ). However, it was noticed that the leader's focus on the implementation of goals and tasks has an inversely proportional effect on the increase in revenues of start-ups (statistically significant relationship,  $X_{\text{avg}} = -0.20$ ).



When examining the correlations between the individual elements of success and the high level of leadership competencies in a given area (Table 3.), it was observed that the averaged success rate indicates the existence of two strong, statistically significant dependencies between competencies in the area of innovation ( $X_{avg} = 0.27$ ) and relations with the environment ( $X_{avg} = 0.31$ ) and success. In turn, the average level of competence correlates with the transition to the next stage of development of a start-up ( $X_{avg} = 0.33$ ), an increase in the value of a start-up ( $X_{avg} = 0.32$ ), an increase in the strength of relationships within a start-up ( $X_{avg} = 0.32$ ) and increasing the position in relation to the competition ( $X_{avg} = 0.22$ ). In addition, it should be emphasized that the total average success of start-ups is directly proportional to the average level of competence in the analyzed areas ( $X_{avg} = 0.22$ ). However, in the conducted research, one statistically significant inversely proportional relationship was noticed, correlating the increase in customer relations with the high competence of the founder of the start-up in the area of supply ( $X_{avg} = -0.20$ ). In addition, it is worth noting that the strongest statistically significant relationship (among those analyzed) was noticed when correlating the transition to the next stage of start-up development with the high competence of the start-up founder in the area of relations with the environment ( $X_{avg} = 0.44$ ), as well as correlating the increase in the value of start-up with high competences of the founder of the start-up in the area of innovation ( $X_{avg} = 0.44$ ).

Focusing on the study of the relationship between the level of success and the assessment of the start-up's cooperation with the external environment (Table 4.), it was noticed that the total averaged cooperation index ( $X_{avg}$  1–6) is strongly correlated (statistically significant relationships) with the level of success in relation to the achievement of the assumed social goals ( $X_{avg} = 0.30$ ), increase in the strength of relations within the start-up ( $X_{avg} = 0.30$ ) and deepening cooperation with external stakeholders ( $X_{avg} = 0.28$ ). On the other hand, the averaged success rate indicates one statistically significant dependence - the cooperation of a start-up contributes to building the relationship capital with another enterprise ( $X_{avg} = 0.24$ ). It should also be emphasized that the strongest statistically significant relationship (among the analyzed ones) was noticed by correlating the implementation of the assumed social goals with the start-up's cooperation with the government and local government institutions, which enables the implementation of projects for local communities ( $X_{avg} = 0.40$ ).

Correlation coefficients – the level of start-up success in relation to individual factors and the assessment of leadership behavior

Itemization	As a director/founder of a start-up...															X <sub>avg</sub> 1-15		
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.			
There was an increase in revenues	-0.14	-0.06	-0.04	-0.09	-0.08	0.02	0.08	0.06	-0.04	0.05	-0.07	-0.02	-0.13	0.04	-0.16	-0.06	0.09	<b>-0.20</b>
The assumed profitability was achieved	-0.13	0.03	0.09	-0.02	-0.01	0.04	0.19	0.11	0.04	0.13	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.12	0.03	0.06	0.15	-0.15
There was an increase in the position in relation to the competition	-0.06	<b>0.20</b>	0.03	-0.05	0.12	0.18	<b>0.22</b>	0.17	0.13	0.17	<b>0.22</b>	<b>0.22</b>	0.08	0.16	-0.02	0.15	<b>0.20</b>	0.03
Innovation has been commercialized	0.06	<b>0.24</b>	0.03	0.18	0.10	0.09	-0.02	0.08	0.10	0.13	0.11	0.02	0.14	0.04	-0.05	0.12	0.18	-0.07
The quality of the products/services offered has increased	-0.01	<b>0.22</b>	-0.06	0.08	0.13	0.10	0.02	0.12	0.12	0.13	0.05	0.08	0.19	0.03	0.01	0.11	<b>0.21</b>	0.02
The number of loyal customers has increased	-0.19	0.04	-0.12	-0.02	0.04	0.08	0.13	0.09	0.04	0.08	0.07	0.07	0.03	0.08	-0.08	0.02	0.12	-0.04
There has been an increase in customer relations	<b>-0.24</b>	-0.09	-0.17	-0.07	-0.08	-0.05	-0.08	-0.08	-0.04	-0.01	-0.13	-0.08	0.06	-0.01	-0.13	-0.12	0.09	-0.02
There has been a transition to the next stage of start-up development	0.07	<b>0.29</b>	0.15	0.08	0.17	<b>0.24</b>	<b>0.31</b>	<b>0.34</b>	<b>0.32</b>	<b>0.22</b>	<b>0.23</b>	<b>0.26</b>	<b>0.30</b>	0.15	0.01	<b>0.29</b>	0.18	0.10
There has been an increase in the value achieved	0.10	<b>0.48</b>	0.17	0.07	0.14	0.17	<b>0.25</b>	<b>0.33</b>	<b>0.30</b>	<b>0.25</b>	<b>0.38</b>	<b>0.32</b>	<b>0.25</b>	0.06	-0.05	<b>0.29</b>	0.14	0.05
The assumed social goals were achieved	-0.05	<b>0.30</b>	<b>0.23</b>	0.17	0.01	0.07	<b>0.24</b>	0.05	0.17	<b>0.24</b>	<b>0.29</b>	0.12	0.18	0.04	-0.15	0.18	0.16	-0.01
The strength of relations within the start-up has increased	0.05	<b>0.31</b>	<b>0.32</b>	<b>0.21</b>	<b>0.21</b>	<b>0.28</b>	<b>0.33</b>	<b>0.23</b>	<b>0.35</b>	<b>0.31</b>	<b>0.28</b>	<b>0.25</b>	<b>0.25</b>	<b>0.26</b>	0.11	<b>0.35</b>	<b>0.22</b>	0.17
Cooperation with external stakeholders has deepened	-0.03	0.14	0.19	<b>0.29</b>	0.05	0.06	<b>0.21</b>	0.06	0.17	0.12	0.15	0.11	0.13	0.08	-0.03	0.17	0.10	0.04
X <sub>avg</sub>	-0.07	<b>0.26</b>	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.16	<b>0.24</b>	0.19	<b>0.20</b>	<b>0.23</b>	<b>0.20</b>	0.16	0.18	0.13	-0.06	0.19	<b>0.23</b>	-0.02

Symbols: rP > 0.195 statistically significant relationship

As a director/founder of a start-up...

1. I often talk about my most important values and beliefs. 2. I consider the moral and ethical consequences of my decisions. 3. I emphasize the importance of a collective sense of mission. 4. I spend my time teaching and coaching. 5. I approach employees individually, taking into account their various needs, abilities and aspirations. 6. I help others develop their strengths/advantages. 7. I am optimistic about the future. 8. I talk enthusiastically about what needs to be achieved. 9. I express a convincing vision of the future. 10. I am confident that the objectives will be achieved. 11. I re-analyze the assumptions to see if they are appropriate. 12. I look for different ways to solve problems. 13. I allow others to look at problems from many different perspectives. 14. I skillfully delegate powers. 15. I let others take responsibility for my tasks. 16. In our start-up, leadership is firmly focused on people and relationships. 17. In our start-up, the leadership is firmly focused on achieving goals and tasks.

Source: author's own elaboration based on the conducted research.

TABLE 3

Correlation coefficients – the level of start-up success in relation to individual factors and the level of leadership competencies

Itemization	As the founder of a start-up, I have high competencies in the area of:										X <sub>avg</sub> 1–11	
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.		11.
There was an increase in revenues	0.08	0.05	0.06	-0.07	-0.11	0.14	-0.03	0.09	0.14	0.10	0.03	0.08
The assumed profitability was achieved	0.09	0.07	0.17	-0.09	-0.10	0.08	0.00	0.02	0.13	0.06	0.08	0.08
There was an increase in the position in relation to the competition	0.11	0.14	0.14	-0.01	0.05	0.18	<b>0.20</b>	0.03	0.13	0.12	<b>0.26</b>	<b>0.22</b>
Innovation has been commercialized	0.07	0.04	-0.06	-0.03	0.10	0.14	<b>0.20</b>	-0.02	0.03	0.14	0.11	0.12
The quality of the products/services offered has increased	0.05	-0.06	0.05	0.14	0.20	0.09	<b>0.20</b>	-0.03	-0.04	0.08	<b>0.23</b>	0.16
The number of loyal customers has increased	0.03	-0.07	-0.05	-0.03	-0.01	<b>0.20</b>	0.11	-0.16	-0.03	0.07	0.10	0.02
There has been an increase in customer relations	-0.03	-0.17	0.02	0.04	0.03	0.07	-0.02	-0.19	<b>-0.20</b>	0.02	0.00	-0.07
There has been a transition to the next stage of start-up development	<b>0.24</b>	0.12	<b>0.31</b>	0.13	<b>0.22</b>	0.14	<b>0.39</b>	-0.01	0.01	0.05	<b>0.44</b>	<b>0.33</b>
There has been an increase in the value	0.12	0.14	<b>0.25</b>	0.19	<b>0.27</b>	0.06	<b>0.44</b>	0.02	0.03	0.08	<b>0.33</b>	<b>0.32</b>
The assumed social goals were achieved	0.05	0.03	0.15	0.12	<b>0.20</b>	-0.08	<b>0.20</b>	0.00	0.00	0.03	<b>0.27</b>	0.16
The strength of relations within the start-up has increased	0.15	0.01	<b>0.28</b>	<b>0.25</b>	<b>0.24</b>	0.19	<b>0.36</b>	0.00	-0.03	0.08	<b>0.37</b>	<b>0.32</b>
Cooperation with external stakeholders has deepened	0.03	-0.12	0.03	0.13	0.07	-0.03	0.17	-0.03	-0.10	-0.08	<b>0.30</b>	0.06
X <sub>avg</sub>	0.12	0.02	0.17	0.09	0.14	0.14	<b>0.27</b>	-0.03	0.01	0.09	<b>0.31</b>	<b>0.22</b>

Symbols: rP > 0.195 statistically significant relationship

As the founder of a start-up, I have high competencies in the area of:

1. management; 2. finance; 3. personnel policy; 4. IT use; 5. use of technique/technology; 6. marketing; 7. activities; 8. innovation; 9. logistics; 10. supplies; 11. service activities (after-sales services); 12. relations with the environment

Source: author's own elaboration based on the conducted research.

TABLE 4

Correlation coefficients – the level of start-up success in relation to individual factors and the assessment of the start-up's cooperation with the external environment

Itemization	Relations between the start-up director/founder and the external environment						
	1.	Cooperation of our start-up:					X <sub>avg</sub> 1–6
		2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	
There was an increase in revenues	-0.01	0.06	-0.03	-0.11	0.01	0.01	-0.03
The assumed profitability was achieved	0.12	0.16	0.00	0.00	0.10	-0.03	0.07
There was an increase in the position in relation to the competition	0.14	<b>0.20</b>	-0.19	-0.13	-0.06	0.06	-0.02
Innovation has been commercialized	0.03	-0.06	-0.15	-0.12	-0.14	-0.11	-0.15
The quality of the products/services offered has increased	0.08	0.08	-0.15	-0.19	-0.15	0.00	-0.10
The number of loyal customers has increased	0.10	0.18	0.03	0.00	0.02	-0.03	0.06
There has been an increase in customer relations	0.08	0.18	0.07	-0.07	-0.01	-0.05	0.04
There has been a transition to the next stage of start-up development	0.15	<b>0.24</b>	0.02	0.06	0.10	<b>0.21</b>	0.19
There has been an increase in the value	0.06	0.14	-0.05	-0.11	-0.04	0.11	0.02
The assumed social goals were achieved	0.01	<b>0.22</b>	0.08	0.17	<b>0.27</b>	<b>0.40</b>	<b>0.30</b>
The strength of relations within the start-up has increased	0.19	<b>0.27</b>	0.12	0.17	<b>0.21</b>	<b>0.27</b>	<b>0.30</b>
Cooperation with external stakeholders has deepened	<b>0.23</b>	<b>0.23</b>	0.13	0.18	<b>0.20</b>	<b>0.20</b>	<b>0.28</b>
X <sub>avg</sub>	0.15	<b>0.24</b>	-0.01	-0.02	0.07	0.13	0.12

Symbols:  $rP > 0.195$  statistically significant relationship

1. I highly value cooperation with external stakeholders

Cooperation of our start-up:

2. with other enterprises contributes to building relationship capital; 3. with another start-up, it enables the implementation of joint innovative projects; 4. with the scientific community, it contributes to joint research initiatives and the creation of new business solutions; 5. with business environment institutions influences its development; 6. with government and local government institutions, it enables the implementation of projects for local communities

Source: author's own elaboration based on the conducted research.

## 5. Conclusions

A leader who skillfully uses his distinguishing features and competencies contributes to the implementation of the strategy and thus strives to succeed in a competitive market. The leader's most important task is to focus on employees, inspire them to carry out tasks according to the organization's interests, expand their competencies, reward them for effective work, and emphasize that they are the company's most valuable resource.

Taking into account the research hypotheses, it should be stated that:

**H1:** There is a relationship between leader behavior and start-up success – it has been confirmed. The correlation coefficient between the average level of success of start-ups and the average level of individual leadership behaviors is  $rP = 0.19$  – the correlation is positive, bordering on error.

**H2:** There is a link between leadership firmly focused on people and relationships and the success of start-ups – it has been confirmed. The correlation coefficient between the average level of success of start-ups and people- and relationship-oriented leadership is  $rP = 0.23$  – the correlation is positive and statistically significant.

**H3:** There is a relationship between leadership firmly oriented toward implementing goals and tasks and the success of start-ups – it has not been confirmed. The correlation coefficient between the average level of success of start-ups and leadership oriented toward the implementation of goals and tasks is  $rP = -0.02$  – the correlation is negative and statistically insignificant.

**H4:** There is a relationship between the level of leadership competence and the success of start-ups – it has been confirmed. The total average success of start-ups is directly proportional to the average level of competence in the analyzed areas and amounts to  $rP = 0.22$  – a positive, statistically significant correlation.

**H5:** There is a relationship between cooperation with the external environment and the success of start-ups – it has been confirmed. The correlation coefficient between the level of start-up success to the deepening cooperation with external stakeholders and the average level of evaluation of the start-up's cooperation with the external environment is  $rP = 0.28$  – a positive, statistically significant correlation.

In addition, the own research shows that in Lublin start-ups:

1. the education of the founders of start-ups has no impact on the level of success, and experience has little impact on it;
2. the behaviors of leaders affecting the success of their start-ups include focusing on the moral and ethical consequences of the decisions they make, an opti-

- mistic approach to the future, a convincing vision of the future, conviction about achieving the assumed goals, and re-analysis of assumptions to check their adequacy;
3. success in start-ups is possible when the leader is firmly focused on people and relationships, uses high competencies in the area of innovation and relations with the environment, and bases his cooperation on contacts with another enterprise;
  4. an appropriate level of leadership in start-ups enables them to move to the next stage of development, increase the start-up's value, increase the strength of internal relations, achieve the assumed social goals, and deepen cooperation with external stakeholders.

This study is a prelude to more in-depth research identifying leadership competencies and behaviors that affect success. The subject of the study is an interesting research area for both researchers and practitioners. A comparative analysis of the role played by a leader in individual modern business models may deepen the research conducted so far.

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