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Leadership style and job satisfaction

An exploratory study of Finnish and German employees

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ABSTRACT:

Leadership and job satisfaction remain highly relevant matter for organisations. Previous research has found leadership and job satisfaction to impact various positive outcomes on an organisational and employee level. In addition, previous research suggests that leadership style impacts employee job satisfaction and that suitable leadership style may vary by culture. However, much of the existing leadership research is quantitative and from a single-country context. This thesis aims to fill a gap in research by qualitatively investigating which leadership styles support and damage the job satisfaction of Finnish and German employees and by exploring how similarities and context-specific leadership style perceptions can be explained.

The literature review of this thesis explores four leadership styles: transformational, transactional, servant and authentic. Furthermore, previous research on job satisfaction alongside with the impact of culture on leadership style perceptions in relation to job satisfaction are discussed in the literature review. This research was conducted as a qualitative and abductive research. Data was gathered with semi-structured, in-depth interviews and analysed thematically. This research included eight participants, four participants from each country more specifically.

Based on the interview findings, it is suggested that transformational, servant and authentic leadership styles can support the job satisfaction in Finland and Germany, whereas a leadership style lacking certain elements from those leadership styles can damage it. The results also suggest that transactional leadership can simultaneously support and damage job satisfaction in these contexts. Additionally, it is suggested that passive leadership style, such as laissez-faire leadership style, damages job satisfaction in the Finnish and German contexts. This finding extends the original framework of the thesis. Nevertheless, the results of the thesis are aligned with previous quantitative leadership research. However, this thesis adds to existing research by suggesting that employees do not perceive leadership styles as theories, instead they perceive them as concrete leader behaviours, which can be understood through existing leadership style theories. Furthermore, the findings suggest that while the same leadership styles are perceived as positive or negative in both Finland and Germany, the cultural context can shape which aspects are emphasised as contributing either positively or negatively to job satisfaction. Therefore, this thesis demonstrates that cultural contexts can shape how leadership styles are perceived in relation to job satisfaction.

KEYWORDS: leadership style, job satisfaction, culture, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, servant leadership, authentic leadership

AI Disclaimer

Artificial intelligence, ChatGPT and Microsoft CoPilot to be exact, were utilised as a supportive aid to exchange ideas about the initial structure of the thesis, to improve the flow of the text and to refine the language. Artificial intelligence was not used to gather, analyse, and interpret the results.

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TIIVISTELMÄ:

Johtaminen ja työtyytyväisyys ovat merkityksellisiä jokaiselle organisaatiolle. Aiemman tutkimuksen mukaan johtaminen ja työtyytyväisyys ovat kytköksissä myönteisiin tuloksiin sekä organisaatio- että työntekijätasolla. Lisäksi aiemmassa tutkimuksessa on havaittu, että esihenkilön johtamistyyllillä on vaikutus alaisten työtyytyväisyyteen ja että kulttuuri vaikuttaa siihen, mikä johtamistyyli koetaan sopivaksi kussakin kontekstissa. Suurin osa olemassa olevasta tutkimuksesta on kuitenkin määrällistä ja keskittyy vain yhteen maakontekstiin. Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma pyrkii täyttämään olemassa olevan tutkimusaukon tutkimalla laadullisesti sitä, mitkä johtamistyyliä koetaan Suomessa ja Saksassa työtyytyväisyyttä tukevana, ja mitkä puolestaan sitä vahingoittavana. Lisäksi tämä tutkimus pyrkii selittämään, kuinka nämä kokemukset, niiden samankaltaisuudet ja eroavaisuudet, voidaan ymmärtää Suomen ja Saksan kulttuurikontekstien avulla. Tutkielman kirjallisuuskatsaus käsittelee transformatiivista, transaktionaalista, palvelevaa sekä autenttista johtamistyyliä. Kirjallisuuskatsauksessa käsitellään myös työtyytyväisyyttä sekä siihen liittyvää aiempaa tutkimusta. Lisäksi kirjallisuuskatsauksessa käsitellään johtamistyylien sekä kulttuurin vaikutusta työtyytyväisyyteen. Tämä tutkimus toteutettiin laadullisena ja abduktiivisena tutkimuksena. Aineiston keruuseen käytettiin puolistrukturoituja syvähaastatteluita, jotka analysoitiin teemallisesti. Tutkimuksen otos koostui kahdeksasta haastateltavasta, tarkemmin ottaen neljästä haastateltavasta sekä Suomesta että Saksasta. Tutkielman löydöksenä voidaan esittää, että transformatiivinen, palveleva sekä autenttinen johtamistyyli tukevat työtyytyväisyyttä sekä Suomessa että Saksassa, kun taas puolestaan johtamistyyli, joista puuttuu näiden johtamistyylien piirteitä, vahingoittaa työtyytyväisyyttä näissä konteksteissa. Toisena löydöksenä voidaan esittää, että transaktionaalinen johtamistyyli voi samaan aikaan sekä tukea että vahingoittaa työtyytyväisyyttä Suomessa ja Saksassa. Lisäksi yksi tutkielman keskeinen löydös on, että passiivinen (laissez-faire) johtamistyyli vahingoittaa työtyytyväisyyttä kummassakin kontekstissa. Tämä löydös laajentaa tutkielman alkuperäistä viitekehystä. Tutkielman löydökset ovat linjassa aiemman, määrällisen tutkimuksen kanssa. Tämä tutkielma kuitenkin täydentää olemassa olevaa johtamistutkimusta osoittamalla, että työntekijät eivät koe tai kuvaile johtamistyyliä teorioina, vaan ennemminkin johtajan käyttäytymisenä, jota voidaan sitten tarkastella ja ymmärtää olemassa olevien johtamisteorioiden avulla. Yksi tutkielman keskeinen löydös on, että vaikka samat johtamistyyliä koetaan työtyytyväisyyttä tukevinä tai heikentävinä Suomessa ja Saksassa, maan kulttuurikonteksti vaikuttaa siihen, minkä tekijöiden painotetaan olevan työtyytyväisyyttä tukevia tai heikentäviä. Näin ollen tämä tutkielma osoittaa, että maan kulttuurikonteksti voi vaikuttaa siihen, miten johtamistyyliä koetaan yhdessä työtyytyväisyyden kanssa.

AVAINSANAT: johtamistyyli, työtyytyväisyys, kulttuuri, transformatiivinen johtaminen, transaktionaalinen johtaminen, palveleva johtaminen, autenttinen johtaminen

Contents

1	Introduction	8
1.1	Background of the study	8
1.2	Research question	10
1.3	Research objectives	10
1.4	Structure of the thesis	11
2	Literature review	12
2.1	Leadership styles	12
2.1.1	Transformational leadership	14
2.1.2	Transactional leadership	15
2.1.3	Servant leadership	17
2.1.4	Authentic leadership	19
2.1.5	Brief overview of leadership styles and employee outcomes	20
2.1.6	Culture and leadership styles	21
2.2	Job satisfaction	24
2.2.1	Transformational leadership and job satisfaction	27
2.2.2	Transactional leadership and job satisfaction	28
2.2.3	Servant leadership and job satisfaction	28
2.2.4	Authentic leadership and job satisfaction	29
2.2.5	Summary of leadership styles and their impact on job satisfaction	30
2.3	The theoretical framework	32
3	Methodology	34
3.1	Research approach, method and strategy	34
3.2	Sample	35
3.3	Data collection	37
3.4	Data analysis	39
3.5	Trustworthiness, ethical considerations and data adequacy	40
4	Findings	43

4.1	Leadership style perceptions in Finland	43
4.1.1	General perceptions of leadership	43
4.1.2	Perceptions supporting job satisfaction	44
4.1.3	Perceptions damaging job satisfaction	47
4.1.4	Leadership style expectations	50
4.2	Leadership style perceptions in Germany	52
4.2.1	General perceptions of leadership	52
4.2.2	Perceptions supporting job satisfaction	53
4.2.3	Perceptions damaging satisfaction	56
4.2.4	Leadership style expectations	59
4.3	Synthesis of findings	61
5	Discussion	62
5.1	Discussion about leadership style perceptions	62
5.1.1	Leadership styles supporting job satisfaction	62
5.1.2	Leadership styles damaging job satisfaction	64
5.1.3	Synthesis of findings in relation to existing leadership research	66
5.2	Discussion about understanding the leadership perceptions within the contexts of Finland and Germany	68
5.3	Managerial implications	72
5.4	Conclusion	73
5.5	Limitations of the study	74
5.6	Suggestions for further research	75
	References	76
	Appendices	88
	Appendix 1. Cultural dimensions of Finland and Germany by Hofstede	88
	Appendix 2. Cultural dimensions of Finland and Germany by the GLOBE project	89
	Appendix 3. Interview guide EN	90
	Appendix 4. Interview guide FI	93

Figures

Figure 1. The dimensions of transformational leadership style (adapted from McCalman et al., 2015, p. 77; Northouse 2021, p. 193; Minja & Barine, 2010, pp. 34–35; Burke, 2023, p. 251; Bratton, 2023, p. 136)	15
Figure 2. The dimensions of transactional leadership style (adapted from Govender et al., 2013; Northouse, 2024, p. 189)	17
Figure 3. The dimensions of servant leadership style (adapted from Northouse, 2021, pp. 261–263)	18
Figure 4. The dimensions of authentic leadership style (adapted from Lux, 2024, p. 90)	20
Figure 5. Theoretical framework of this thesis	33

Tables

Table 1. Summary of recent research on leadership styles and their relationship with job satisfaction	31
Table 2. Background information about the participants	37
Table 3. Interview channel, date and duration of the interviews	39
Table 4. Summary of the results and the analysis	71

1 Introduction

The purpose of the first chapter is to introduce the thesis topic. The chapter starts by presenting the background and the research gap of the thesis. Then, the research question and research objectives of the thesis are presented. Lastly, the structure of the thesis is discussed.

1.1 Background of the study

Leadership is recognised as a key priority for organisations today (Schuetz, 2017, p. 74). Muttalib et al. (2023, p. 134) further emphasize the importance of leadership by stating that organisational culture, efficiency as well as the motivation, performance and satisfaction of the employees are affected by leadership. Recent empirical research has found leadership to influence various factors such as the overall work environment, employee engagement, the well-being of employees as well as job and organisational performance (Madhyvadany & Panboli, 2023; Cai et al., 2024; Mishra & Chaganlal, 2025), which indicates that leadership has significant impact on organisations and employees daily. Therefore, the importance and relevance of leadership research is evident.

Job satisfaction refers to the positive or negative attitude an employee has towards their job (Robbins & Judge, 2021, p. 66). Job satisfaction has been researched extensively in organisational studies. Previous research has suggested that the importance of job satisfaction is significant, as it is associated with lower employee turnover and exit intentions, improved organisational productivity, higher customer satisfaction, enhanced financial performance and lower levels of absenteeism (García-Buades et al., 2020; Gunturi, 202; Hedge et al., 2025). Furthermore, these findings highlight the everyday importance of job satisfaction for organisations and its employees. For this reason, job satisfaction was chosen as the outcome of further examination in this thesis.

Leadership style is the typical method a leader uses to influence the followers (Northouse, 2021, p. 109). Researchers have suggested that leadership is one of the most

influential factors of job satisfaction (Muttalib et al., 2023, p. 134). Various recent studies conducted by researchers such as Gaganmale et al. (2023), Notarnicola et al. (2024), Lumbantoruan et al. (2020), Jeong (2025), Westbrook et al. (2022), Baquero et al. (2019), have demonstrated that leadership style can impact job satisfaction positively or negatively. More detailed explanation on these findings is provided in chapter 2.2. Nevertheless, these findings indicate a clear connection between leadership style and the employees' job satisfaction. However, much of this existing research is context-dependent and conducted in one cultural context. Furthermore, a vast majority of recent research is quantitative in nature, which suggests that deeper understanding on the employee perceptions towards leadership style in relation to job satisfaction is limited.

Suitable leadership style may vary across cultures, as national culture shapes the effectiveness of leadership styles and expectations towards leaders (Bajrami, 2020; Bratton, 2023, p. 62; Janićijević, 2019). This can be interpreted to mean that leadership style perceptions may differ across cultural and national contexts. Consequently, this may signal that these research findings on the relationship of leadership styles and job satisfaction are not applicable to all cultural or national contexts.

As discussed, much of the existing research on leadership styles in relation to job satisfaction is focused on one cultural context and is quantitative in nature (e.g. Dai et al., 2025; Edemo et al., 2023; Liu & Wong, 2023; Lumbantoruan et al., 2020; Notarnicola et al., 2024; Salameh-Ayanian et al., 2025; Skopak & Hadzaihmetovic, 2022; Westbrook et al., 2022). Therefore, this thesis aims to fill a gap in existing research by qualitatively examining which leadership styles are perceived as the most supportive or the most damaging in relation to job satisfaction in the Finnish and German contexts. To fill this research gap, Finnish and German employees are interviewed with semi-structured in-depth interviews. Finland and Germany provide two meaningful national contexts for examining how employees perceive leadership styles in terms of job satisfaction. While both are European countries, differences in cultural and workplace norms may shape leadership expectations and interpretations in many ways. For example, Finnish and

German cultures have differences which might affect views towards achievement and success as well as work-life balance (The Culture Factor Group, n.d.). In the context of this thesis, such cultural differences may influence leadership style perceptions and expectations towards leaders, and consequently the relationship between leadership style and job satisfaction.

This thesis contributes to existing leadership research by identifying how employees in Finnish and German contexts perceive different leadership styles in relation to job satisfaction, and by highlighting context-specific patterns as well as broader similarities across the two settings.

1.2 Research question

As stated, the thesis aims to identify what leadership styles Finnish and German employees experience as the most supportive or damaging to their job satisfaction and to analyse how these perceptions can be explained. Therefore, the research question of the thesis is as follows:

Which leadership styles do employees in Finland and in Germany perceive as the most supportive and the most damaging to job satisfaction, and how can these perceptions be understood within each national context?

1.3 Research objectives

The main objective of the thesis is to answer the research question presented in chapter 1.2. In addition to the research question, additional objectives of the thesis are:

- To review relevant literature on leadership styles
- To review relevant literature on job satisfaction
- To identify which leadership styles are perceived as most supportive of employees' job satisfaction in Finland and Germany

- To identify which leadership styles are perceived as most damaging of employees' job satisfaction in Finland and Germany
- To analyse what explains these perceptions in Finland and Germany

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The thesis has five chapters. The first chapter is an introductory one, in which the background, the research question and research objectives are presented. In addition, chapter one presents the structure of the thesis.

Chapter two presents the literature review of the thesis. The literature review consists of two sections. First section is about leadership and therefore, it presents the leadership styles and discusses the culture's impact on leadership. Second chapter discusses about job satisfaction, meaning that the definition and recent research on the topic are presented, while highlighting the importance of job satisfaction. In addition, the justification for choosing job satisfaction as the examined career outcome in the thesis is given in chapter two.

Chapter three focuses on methodology, explaining the research strategy, data collection and sample. Next chapter, chapter four presents the research findings. Lastly, chapter five concludes the key findings of the research. In addition, limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are presented in chapter five.

2 Literature review

This chapter reviews the existing literature on leadership styles and job satisfaction. The literature review is divided in two parts. The first part presents different leadership styles, recent research on them and discusses about the impact that culture has on leadership. In the second part, job satisfaction is defined and its importance is highlighted. Moreover, the second part describes how previous research has connected leadership styles to job satisfaction. Finally, the theoretical framework of this thesis is presented. The purpose of the literature review is to gain comprehensive knowledge on the leadership styles and job satisfaction, which in turn enables answering to the research question and fulfilling the research objectives of the thesis.

2.1 Leadership styles

According to Yukl & Gardner (2019, pp. 22–23), researchers have different definitions to leadership. Some definitions define leadership as a position, while others define it as process of influencing others. Nevertheless, Yukl & Gardner (2019, p. 22) note that throughout the years, many definitions recognise leadership as a process, in which the aim is to influence others. Oshame & Maureen (2023, p. 1388) discuss that leadership is the power of influencing and supporting individuals, while motivating them to reach desired goals. Similar definition by Northouse (2024, p. 4) conceptualises leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal”. Yukl & Gardner (2019, p. 26) define leadership as follows:

Leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives.

Leadership style, according to Northouse (2021, p. 109), refers to the characteristic method a leader uses to influence their followers. Leadership styles can be directive or supportive. In brief, directive leadership style can be manifested through behaviours

such as focusing on giving orders and timelines, setting specific goals from leader to the follower. In contrast, supportive leadership style can be manifested through behaviours such as emphasizing social and emotional support of followers, involving followers in decision-making and praising them for their work. Authors such as Yukl & Gardner (2019, p. 43) provide similar categorisations to leadership styles, stating that they can be task-oriented or relations-oriented. Task-oriented leadership style focuses on getting the job done efficiently and in a reliable manner, whereas relations-oriented leadership style focuses on emphasizing belonging, while creating trust and collaboration mutually.

The theoretical frameworks for leadership styles in this thesis are transformational, transactional, servant and authentic leadership style. In a transformational leadership style, the leader influences the followers through transformation, commitment and motivation (De-Frank Cole & Tan, 2021, p. 72; Minja & Barine, 2010, p. 32). In contrast, in a transactional leadership style, the leader influences followers by ensuring the followers have completed their assigned tasks and then rewards or punishes them accordingly (Govender et al., 2013, p.302; Northouse, 2024, p. 189). This contrast between transformational and transactional leadership style is recognised by Burns (1978) who positioned these two leadership styles as opposites (Lux, 2024, p. 111). In a servant leadership style, the leader influences the followers by serving and prioritising them, while also creating value to the organisation, community and society (Northouse, 2021, p. 253). In an authentic leadership style, the leader influences the followers by being authentic and placing great importance on the relationship with the followers and own morals, integrity and values (Liden et al., 2025; Lux, 2024, p. 90; Niemi et al., 2020, p. 100.). However, there is a difference between these styles. Lemoine, Hartnell, Leroy, 2019 (cited in Northouse 2021, p. 253) note that the difference comes from servant leadership, in which the leader aims to influence various stakeholders, such as the organisation, community and society.

These four leadership styles were selected as theoretical frameworks because in academic literature, they represent the most prevailing leadership styles and have been

widely studied (Lux, 2024; p. 86; Northouse, 2024, p. 179, 245). Moreover, as demonstrated, they all introduce different methods to influence followers. While majority of existing research on leadership styles in relation to job satisfaction has quantitatively focused on one country-contexts, this thesis aims to fill a gap in research by qualitatively exploring which leadership styles are perceived to positively and negatively influence the job satisfaction of Finnish and German employees. Thus, these four different leadership styles are appropriate theoretical frameworks for analysing the experiences of Finnish and German employees and, ultimately, for answering the research question of this thesis.

2.1.1 Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership style focuses on creating purpose while emphasizing trust among leaders and followers (Galloway, 2022, p. 46; Hughes & Wearing, 2021, p. 148). DeFrank-Cole & Tan (2021, p. 72) define transformational leadership style as a process that aims to drive transformation in their followers by fostering engagement, motivation and connection with others. Moreover, Minja & Barine (2010, p. 32) discuss that transformational leadership style fosters and motivates followers to prioritize the team interests over individual interests, as transformational leaders inspire followers to work towards a shared goal together. The goal of transformational leadership style is to create positive change, inspire commitment and facilitate the transformation of followers.

Transformational leadership contains four dimensions, also known as the four I's, which are utilised to explain transformational leadership style (Galloway, 2025, p. 45). These are idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration (Schedlitzki, 2021, p. 76). Utilizing these dimensions, transformational leaders are characterised as highly trusted leaders (Northouse, 2024, p. 214). Figure 1 presents the dimensions of transformational leadership style.

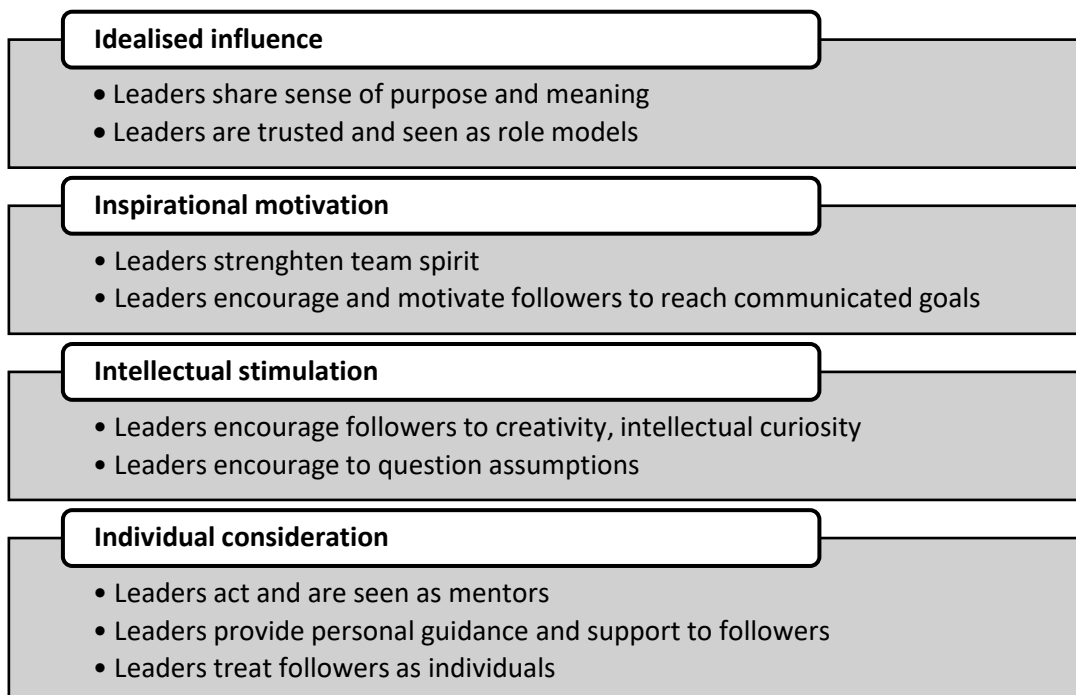


Figure 1. The dimensions of transformational leadership style (adapted from McCalman et al., 2015, p. 77; Northouse 2021, p. 193; Minja & Barine, 2010, pp. 34–35; Burke, 2023, p. 251; Bratton, 2023, p. 136)

2.1.2 Transactional leadership

Transactional leadership style focuses on delegating tasks and rewarding followers based on their performance (Govender et al., 2013, p. 392). These rewards can be economical, social or psychological (Bratton, 2023, p. 135). In addition to rewards that are used to motivate employees, transactional leaders utilise punishment to motivate their followers (Jaqua & Jaqua, 2021). In transactional leadership, the interaction between leaders and followers is seen as an exchange, and as mentioned, followers are rewarded after completing tasks assigned to them (Govender et al., 2013, p. 392.) This exchange between the leader and the follower is considered beneficial for both parties (DeFrank-Cole & Tan, 2021, p. 72). In literature, transactional leadership is often presented complementary to transformational leadership (DeFrank-Cole & Tan, 2021, p. 72; Northouse, 2024, p. 188). However, Northouse (2024, p. 188) discusses that there is an important difference between transactional and transformational leadership style. For instance, in

transactional leadership style, the empowerment of personal development or specifically focusing on the individual needs of the followers is not highlighted.

DeFrank-Cole & Tan (2021, p. 72) discuss that transactional leaders are efficient, and they place great emphasis on time and risk minimisation. Dong (2023) highlights that transactional leader is both confident and determined. Despite these traits being important for successful transactional leader, too strong possession of these traits can be potentially damaging. For instance, team collaboration and unity can be harmed, if transactional leader is overly directive, self-centred and low in empathy.

Furthermore, transactional leadership style includes two dimensions, which, according to Bass (1990) are utilised to explain transactional leadership style (Dickson, 2023, p. 14; Northouse, 2024, p. 189). These dimensions are contingent reward and management by exception, the latter one can be in active or in passive form (Northouse, 2024, p. 189). When considering literature of transactional leadership style, these dimensions are utilised by various authors, such as Northouse (2024), Dickson (2023) and Govender et al. (2013), to describe transactional leadership style. In brief, contingent reward means followers are rewarded for completing their job and meeting the expectations of the leaders (Northouse, 2024, p. 189). Active management by exception means that leaders actively evaluate the performance of their followers and take actions to improve the performance if necessary (Govender et al., 2013, p. 392; Northouse, 2024, p. 189). Contrary to that is passive management by exception, meaning the leader does not intervene or take actions to improve the performance of the follower, but later delivers constructive feedback on their performance (Northouse, 2024, p. 189). Figure 2 below visualises these dimensions.

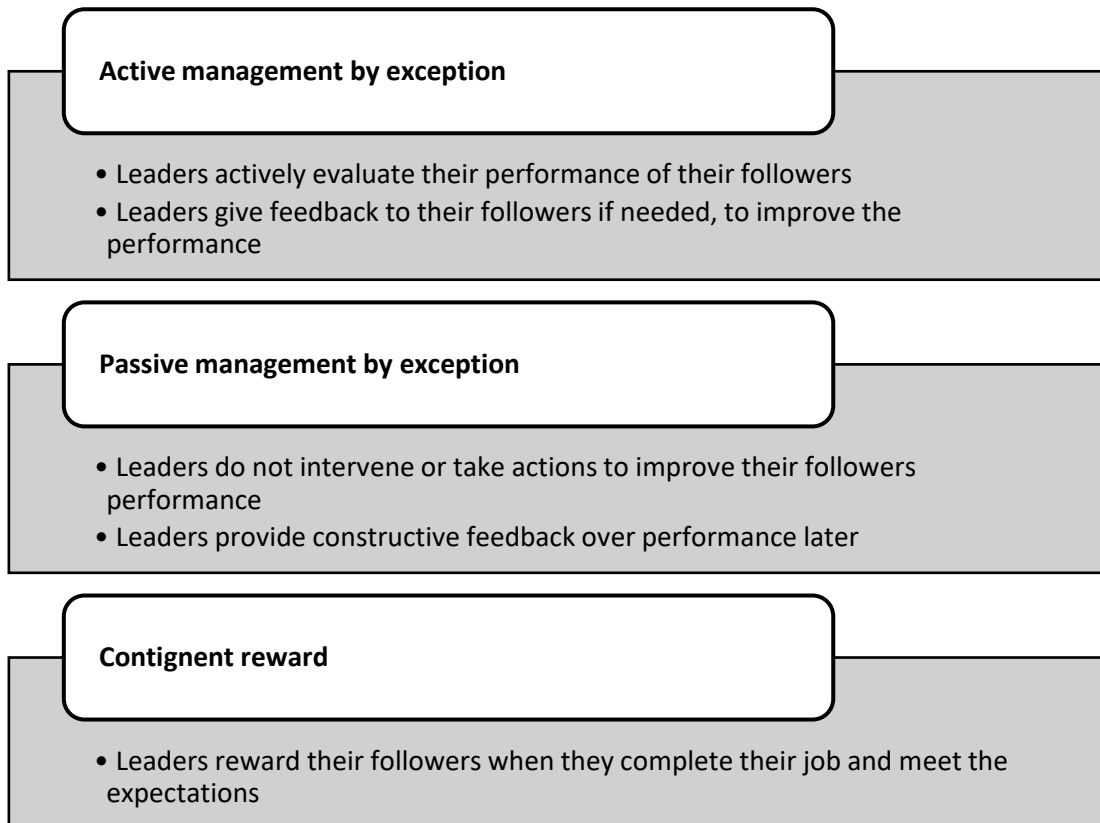


Figure 2. The dimensions of transactional leadership style (adapted from Govender et al., 2013; Northouse, 2024, p. 189)

2.1.3 Servant leadership

The current literature does not provide universal definition to the servant leadership style (Eva et al., 2019, p. 114). However, the most widely recognised definition for servant leadership is from Robert Greenleaf in the 1970s:

The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The best test is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? (van Dierendonk, 2011, p. 1230)

Eva et al. (2019, p. 114) define servant leadership as a leadership style that prioritizes the needs and interests of the follower while focusing on the advancement of the organisation and community.

The core of servant leadership style is the willingness to serve others (Spears, 2005, p. 2). According to Northouse (2021, p. 253), servant leaders prioritize, nurture and empower their followers. Moreover, servant leaders demonstrate empathy towards their followers. Servant leadership style focuses on creating collaborative and engaged organisational environment while participating followers to decision-making (Spears, 2004, p. 8). Servant leader aims to serve in a way that serves the bigger picture; the organisation, the community and the society (Northouse, 2021, p. 253). According to Northouse (2021, p. 258) the outcomes of servant leadership style are enhanced follower and organisational performance, as well as societal impact. The dimensions of servant leadership style, which are visualised in Figure 3, play important part in generating these outcomes.

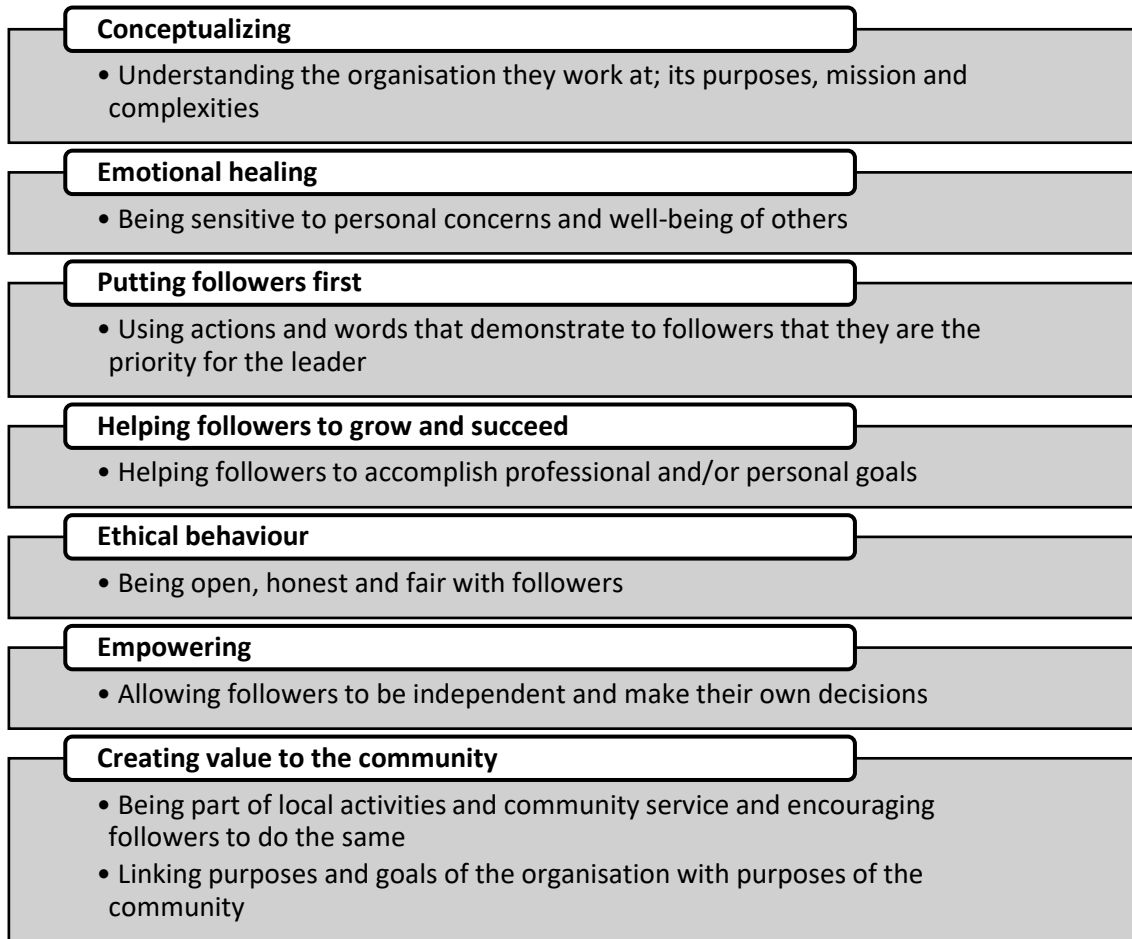


Figure 3. The dimensions of servant leadership style (adapted from Northouse, 2021, pp. 261–263)

2.1.4 Authentic leadership

In recent years, authentic leadership style has gained significant interest among practitioners and academics (Lux, 2024, p. 86). According to Chan (2005), there are different definitions to authentic leadership (Northouse 2024, p. 215). Definition of Galloway (2022, p. 55), states that authentic leadership style is guided by the leader's commitment to change and improvement. Niemi et al. (2020, p. 100) conceptualise authentic leadership style by stating that it emphasises the importance of self-awareness while following personal values and being true to oneself. Consequently, the behaviour of authentic leaders is guided by these principles. Avolio et al. (2004) define authentic leaders the following way:

“We conceive of authentic leaders as persons who have achieved high levels of authenticity in that they know who they are, what they believe and value, and they act upon those values and beliefs while transparently interacting with others.”

In an authentic leadership style, the leaders display authenticity to their followers, which is the very essence of authentic leadership (Liden et al., 2025). In addition, an authentic leader places great emphasis on their relationship with the follower, by emphasizing trust and values bilaterally (Lux, 2024, p. 90). Northouse (2024, p. 221) notes that four key dimensions are utilised to explain authentic leadership style. These are self-awareness, internalised moral perspective, balanced processing and relational transparency. These dimensions are visualised in Figure 4.

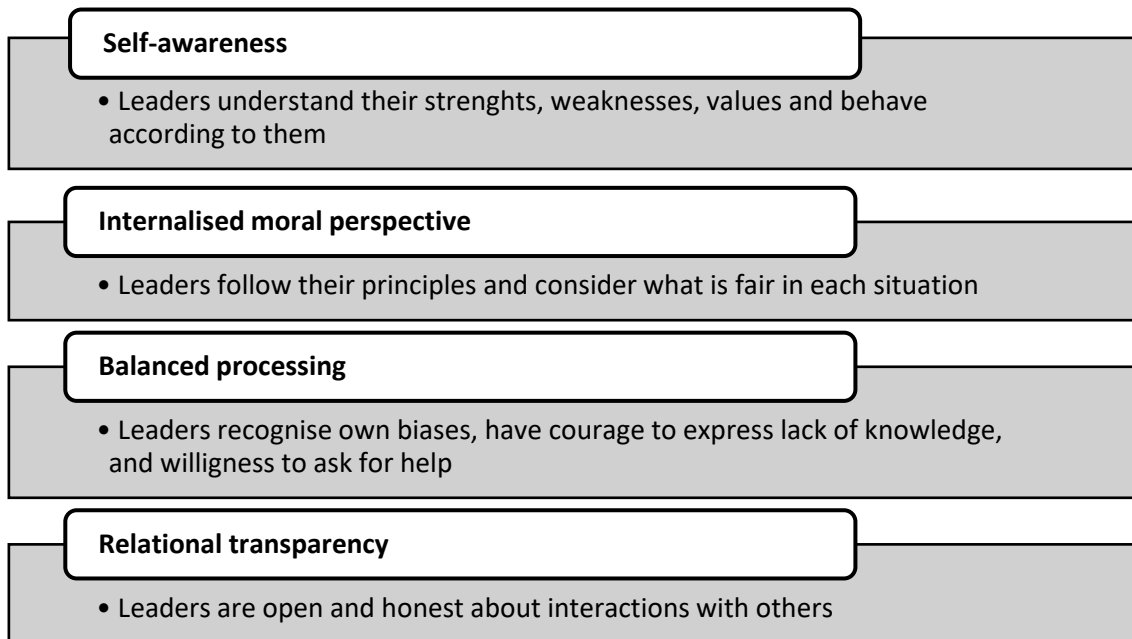


Figure 4. The dimensions of authentic leadership style (adapted from Lux, 2024, p. 90)

2.1.5 Brief overview of leadership styles and employee outcomes

While job satisfaction is the primary outcome of interest in this thesis, it is important to acknowledge that prior research has found leadership styles to affect various other employee outcomes, which in turn could be relevant for shaping job satisfaction as well. Therefore, the following section briefly presents recent research findings on employee outcomes and the four leadership styles applied in this thesis.

Transformational leadership style has been consistently associated with employee outcomes such as enhanced employee performance, well-being and positive career attitudes in different contexts such as Indonesia, Uganda and Ghana (Akosa et al., 2025; Bai, 2025; Kyambade & Namatovu, 2025; Mangkunegara & Miftahuddin, 2016). Similar constant results are suggested concerning servant and authentic leadership styles. Servant leadership is associated with enhanced job performance, team unity and supportive work environment in the Indonesian, North-American and Chinese contexts (Afrianty et al., 2025; Cai et al., 2024, Chiniara & Bentein, 2018), while authentic leadership has been

found to promote employee creativity, performance, well-being and organisational engagement in countries such as Portugal, Serbia and India (Biswas & Sengupta, 2025; Bjekić et al., 2025; Duarte et al., 2021). However, studies suggest that outcomes of transactional leadership are the most often dependent on different factors, such as culture or working models. That is, some researchers suggest that transactional leadership can promote job performance and employee engagement in the cultural contexts of India and Pakistan (Abdelwahed et al., 2023; Madhyvadany & Panboli, 2023), while other researchers, such as Lucjan et al. (2023) and Vâtâmânescu et al. (2025) report conflicting findings from Poland and Romania. This suggests that transactional leadership style, which emphasizes task delegation and stricter supervision of employees, might be suitable for cultures such as Asian, when compared to Polish and Romanian cultures.

In essence, these results suggest that leadership style can impact the employee outcomes in different ways, such as enhancing motivation and engagement, in other words impacting the work experience of the employee. Consequently, these outcomes can be significant to job satisfaction as well. However, these findings are tied to the specific cultural contexts. Bajrami (2020) suggests that leadership style perceptions differ among cultures. This means that while these research results are important for the overview of leadership styles and employee outcomes, they cannot be generalised to apply in all cultural contexts. Therefore, the impact of culture on leadership styles and perceptions is discussed in the next chapter.

2.1.6 Culture and leadership styles

Leadership is affected by the country's national culture, which shapes the leadership style as well as the leadership expectations (Bratton, 2023, p. 62; Janićijević, 2019). Thus, the perception of leadership styles in relation to job satisfaction might be different across cultures.

The most widely utilised cultural frameworks in leadership research are Hofstede's cultural dimensions and the GLOBE project (Galloway, 2022, pp. 126–127). Hofstede's

framework measures social and behavioural cultural differences, whereas the GLOBE project specially focuses on the culture's effect on leadership, suggesting that culture shapes leadership expectations and attitudes (Galloway, 2022, pp. 126–127). Moreover, the GLOBE project suggests that preferred leadership style depends on the culture and measures six leadership expectations for each country (Galloway, 2022, pp. 126–127). Both frameworks suggest that there are similarities and differences in the Finnish and German cultures, which may potentially influence leadership style perceptions in relation to job satisfaction in these contexts. Appendix 1 presents Hofstede's cultural dimension scores for Finland and Germany, while Appendix 2 presents the GLOBE project's cultural dimension scores for the same countries. The following sections briefly discuss how cultural characteristics of each context could be shaping leadership style perceptions in relation to job satisfaction.

As shown in Appendix 1, the Finnish and German cultures both score low in power distance and individualism versus collectivism. Low power distance indicates that both cultures are less hierarchical whereas high individualism refers to individualistic culture (Mooij, 2021, p. 126). In low power distance cultures, it is expected that leaders are participative and employees are consulted when making decisions (The Culture Factor Group, n.d.). In terms of leadership style expectations, this may imply that leadership style emphasizing authority might not be expected in low power distance cultures. In turn, leadership style that involves followers into decision-making progress might be expected more. High individualism suggests that leadership style that emphasizes the follower as an individual and supports autonomy might be expected. Appendix 2 demonstrates that both Finnish and German cultures have average scores in the future orientation and in-group collectivism. In relation to leadership styles and job satisfaction, this could mean that both countries might appreciate leadership style that supports the long-term goals of the employees or the organisation and involving the team in decision-making.

However, as visualised in Appendices 1 and 2, Finland and Germany have unique cultural characteristics, which suggests that leadership style perceptions in relation to job satisfaction in these contexts may be different. For example, as visualised in Appendix 1, Finland and Germany have different attitudes towards achievement and success. German culture places greater emphasis on achievement and success, and leaders are expected to be decisive and assertive (The Culture Factor Group, n.d.). This may imply that leadership style that provides incentives, such as monetary rewards, could be expected by German employees and hence support their job satisfaction. The Finnish culture places greater emphasis on the overall well-being and quality of life (The Culture Factor Group, n.d.). In addition, leaders are expected to be supportive (The Culture Factor Group, n.d.). This may imply that supportive and participative leadership style could be expected from Finnish employees, which in turn could support their job satisfaction. These cultural characteristics are also visualised in Appendix 2, which shows that in the German culture people are more assertive, which in turn could suggest that assertive leadership style is expected from leaders as well in that context.

According to the GLOBE project (n.d.-a; n.d. -b), both in Finland and Germany, charismatic, team-oriented and participative leadership styles are considered outstanding, while self-protective and autonomous leadership styles are considered as less effective leadership styles. This indicates that leadership style sharing vision, emphasizing teamwork and participating employees might be expected in both countries, whereas hierarchical and power-focused leadership styles might be less expected. Consequently, these expectations can be important in terms of leadership perceptions in relation to job satisfaction in each context.

According to Sheposh (2025), cultural differences have been examined in terms of communication preferences, and as a result, cultures have been categorised as high-context and low-context cultures. Finland and Germany both represent low-context cultures. In low-context cultures, communication is clear, direct and words are more important than meanings. Overall, the emphasis is on achievement and the individual (Sheposh, 2025).

Therefore, low-context cultures might expect leadership style that is more focused on task completion and employees as individuals. Furthermore, this might imply that in low-context cultures, it is expected that leaders communicate directly about their expectations towards the followers.

As demonstrated, Finland and Germany have cultural similarities and differences. These cultural factors can shape leadership style expectations, which in turn can affect leadership style perceptions and job satisfaction in both countries. This thesis adds to existing research by qualitatively exploring leadership style perceptions in relation to job satisfaction in the Finnish and German contexts and by explaining these perceptions in each context. This kind of qualitative, context-specific leadership exploration in terms of job satisfaction has been researched limitedly.

So far, the literature review has discussed leadership and leadership styles. In addition, recent empirical evidence concerning the leadership styles and career outcomes as well as culture's impact on leadership has been discussed. Now, the focus of the literature review shifts to job satisfaction. That is, the next section of this thesis aims to define job satisfaction, highlight its importance and present recent empirical evidence on how leadership style has been found to impact it.

2.2 Job satisfaction

According to Baxi & Atre, 2024, p. 35), existing literature provides multiple definitions to job satisfaction, and the definitions can differ among authors. However, most commonly, the definition of job satisfaction is associated with feelings and attitudes. The American Psychological Association (n.d.) defines job satisfaction as follows:

[job satisfaction] the attitude of a worker toward their job, often expressed as a hedonic response of liking or disliking the work itself, the rewards (pay, promotions, recognition), or context (working condition, colleagues).

In this thesis, the following definition for job satisfaction is adopted: job satisfaction refers to either a positive or negative attitude an employee has after evaluating their job (Robbins & Judge, 2021, p. 66). This means that employees who have positive feelings about their job tend to have high levels of job satisfaction, while negative feelings are associated with low job satisfaction (Robbins & Judge, 2021, p. 66).

Job satisfaction was chosen as the outcome of interest in this thesis, as it is widely studied employee attitude and it is consistently connected with various positive organisational outcomes, including enhanced organisational commitment, higher work morale, lower absenteeism and exit intentions (Gunturi, 2025; Hedge et al., 2025). This underscores the importance of job satisfaction and its implications for both employees and organisations. Thus, job satisfaction was chosen as the outcome of this thesis.

The importance of job satisfaction is further highlighted by Robbins & Judge (2021, pp. 68–74) who note that job satisfaction is one of the key predictors of organisational performance. Satisfied employees perform better, which in turn affects the customer satisfaction and loyalty. In addition, satisfied employees are key for organisational productivity. Understanding the importance of job satisfaction is crucial from an organisational perspective. The job satisfaction levels of employees offer the most important explanations for employee performance, turnover intentions, absenteeism and turnover levels for organisations. Researchers such as Hedge et al. (2025), Gunturi (2025), Kosasih et al. (2024) and García-Buades et al. (2020) present empirical results which are in line with the writings of Robbins & Judge (2021) and which highlight the importance of job satisfaction from an individual and organisational point of view. For instance, Hedge et al. (2025) found that job satisfaction strengthens organisational commitment and lowers intentions to exit the company. Research by Gunturi (2025) found that job satisfaction positively correlates with organisational productivity. Moreover, the results suggest that job satisfaction is linked to higher work morale and quality as well as lower levels of absenteeism and turnover (Gunturi, 2025). Kosasih et al. (2024) found that job satisfaction significantly impacts organisational commitment, and García-Buades et al. (2020)

report that the positive influence of satisfied employees affects team performance and creativity, customer satisfaction and financial performance of the company.

Job satisfaction is influenced by different characteristics, for example job conditions, quality of the relationship between the manager, person's own perception of themselves, pay and the alignment of personal and organisational values (Robbins & Judge, 2021, pp. 70–71). This is supported by researchers such as Andreassi et al. (2014), Gupta et al. (2020) and Heimerl et al. (2020). Research by Andreassi et al. (2014) from Asia, Europe, North America and Latin America revealed that sense of accomplishment, recognition, teamwork and work-life balance enhances job satisfaction in all regions studied, whereas Gupta et al. (2024) found that factors such as work-life balance, work environment and remuneration play important role in shaping job satisfaction. Moreover, Heimerl et al. (2020) suggest that the relationship with the manager and opportunities for personal development influence job satisfaction. Overall, these research findings highlight the importance of job satisfaction by demonstrating how significant it is for the organisations and employees. Therefore, investigating the relationship between job satisfaction and leadership style is highly relevant.

Studies suggest that leadership style is a significant factor shaping employees' job satisfaction. Furthermore, previous studies have demonstrated how different leadership styles shape job satisfaction in different contexts. The core purpose of this thesis is to explore which leadership styles are experienced as most supportive and most damaging ones for job satisfaction in the Finnish and German cultural contexts, and to explain these perceptions within each context. Therefore, before moving on to the empirical part and analysing the results, it is essential to explore this recent research on leadership styles and job satisfaction. For this reason, the next sections of the thesis present how previous research has connected different leadership styles to job satisfaction.

2.2.1 Transformational leadership and job satisfaction

Recent empirical research has consistently demonstrated that transformational leadership style is positively associated with job satisfaction. For instance, researchers such as Notarnicola et al. (2024) and Gebreheat et al. (2023) suggest that job satisfaction of health care workers can be supported with transformational leadership style in the Italian and English cultural contexts. Researchers such as Gaganmale et al., (2023), Eliyana et al. (2019), Muguerza-Florián et al., (2025), Khan et al. (2020) and Sunarsi et al. (2021) from countries such as India, Indonesia, Peru and the United Arab Emirates report similar findings from the engineering, logistics, educational, IT and banking sectors. In addition, transformational leadership is found to positively influence job satisfaction in Lebanon, Korea and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Jeong, 2025; Salameh-Ayanian et al., 2025; Skopak & Hadzaihmetovic, 2022).

Taking these results together, the evidence from recent empirical research suggests that transformational leadership style can positively influence job satisfaction across cultures. In other words, the relationship between transformational leadership style and job satisfaction appears to be consistent across cultures and sectors. However, majority of this research is quantitative in nature, which might explain the consistent results. Consequently, this means that a deeper understanding of employees' experiences with transformational leadership style in relation to job satisfaction is not taken into consideration, and this might affect the results. Nevertheless, these recent findings are in line with an older statement of Bass and Riggio (2006), who state that transformational leadership style can be successfully applied in various cultures (Sunarso et al., 2024, p. 8). Arenas & González (2021, p. 404) support this view, as they consider transformational leadership style to be a reliable choice to ensure follower satisfaction in all cultures. Researchers such as Poturak et al. (2020, p. 123) present conflicting findings, suggesting that the suitability of the transformational leadership style is connected to the cultural characteristics of the country. This implies that transformational leadership style might not be a suitable leadership style to support the job satisfaction of employees in all cultural contexts. This can be interpreted to mean that the relationship between transformational

leadership and job satisfaction might vary across cultures, which is in contrast with the recent research findings.

2.2.2 Transactional leadership and job satisfaction

When compared to transformational leadership style, the results from transactional leadership style and its relation to job satisfaction are not as consistent. Transactional leadership style, due to contingent rewards, has positive relationship with job satisfaction in Indonesia, Jordania, and Bosnia and Hertzegovina (Alarabiat & Eyupoglu, 2022; Lumbantoruan et al., 2020; Skopak & Hadzaihmetovic, 2022). Researchers such as Salameh-Ayanian et al. (2025) and Sunarsi et al. (2021), found that the contingent rewards moderately support the job satisfaction of Lebanese and Indonesian employees. On the contrary, the relationship was found to be negative in China (Jeong, 2025) and in Vietnam (Maheshwari, 2021).

Overall, the recent empirical evidence indicates that the impact of transactional leadership style to job satisfaction is not consistent and therefore is more context dependent. All the studies discussed are quantitative in nature, which may mean that more deeper understanding on why transformational leadership style is not considered to support job satisfaction, is lacking. However, various findings suggest that when transactional leadership is found to have positive effect on job satisfaction, it is caused by contingent rewards. This may be interpreted to mean that some cultural contexts might find for example monetary rewards to support their job satisfaction more than other countries.

2.2.3 Servant leadership and job satisfaction

Servant leadership style positively impacts job satisfaction in the educational sectors of Kuwait, Ethiopia, India (Edemo et al., 2023; ElBayaa et al., 2024; Singh & Ryhal, 2021) as well as in the health care sectors in Turkey and USA (Arıcioğlu & Timuroğlu, 2026; Westbrook et al., 2022;). Moreover, Vrcelj et al. (2022) and Liu & Zhao (2022) report similar findings from Serbia and China.

Overall, these recent studies suggest that servant leadership is consistently associated with enhanced job satisfaction across different industries and cultural contexts. In other words, recent empirical evidence suggests that servant leadership can be applied in different cultures and industries to support job satisfaction. However, older studies by researchers such as Hannay (2009) and Liden et al. (2015, cited in Sunarso et al., 2024, p. 8) suggest that servant leadership can be associated with specific cultural characteristics, such as lower power distance and higher collectivism. In terms of job satisfaction, this suggests that servant leadership style might potentially be effective in cultures where the relationship between the leader and the follower is less hierarchical and collaborative work is emphasised. In turn, this implies that relationship between servant leadership style and job satisfaction is not consistent across different cultural contexts, which contrasts with recent research findings. Additionally, the recent studies are quantitative in nature, which can explain the consistent results. Thus, more qualitative data explaining the employee perceptions and experiences on the relationship between servant leadership and job satisfaction are needed.

2.2.4 Authentic leadership and job satisfaction

Dai et al. (2025) found a direct relationship between authentic leadership and job satisfaction in the Chinese medical sector. The relationship was also found to be indirect, as authentic leadership was found to enhance supportive work environment and reduce burnout, which both contribute to higher job satisfaction. Similar results are presented from China by researchers such as Liu & Wong (2023) and Liu et al. (2024). Liu & Wong (2023) suggest that authentic leadership style promotes job satisfaction indirectly by reducing turnover intentions of the Chinese social workers. Moreover, research including participants from various sectors by Liu et al. (2024) found that authentic leadership supports job satisfaction by enhancing work engagement and vigor at work. Lux et al. (2019) report that job satisfaction of Australian employees can be indirectly supported with authentic leadership. That is, having authentic leader increases their trust towards their leader, which in turn positively affects job satisfaction (Lux et al., 2019). Researchers such

as Baquero et al. (2019) and Mrak & Kvasić (2021) found similar results from the hospitality sectors of Spain and Croatia.

Taken together, the recent research results from authentic leadership and its impact on job satisfaction are consistent across cultures and sectors. However, it is notable that the studies are quantitative in nature, which can affect the consistent results. Nevertheless, the results suggest that authentic leadership style can enhance the job satisfaction of employees either directly or indirectly in across cultures and sectors studied. However, Zhang et al. (2021) suggest that cultural differences can affect the relationship between authentic leadership style and its outcomes. In terms of job satisfaction, this suggests that authentic leadership style might not support job satisfaction in a similar way across cultures, hence potentially making it well-suited for some cultural contexts but less effective in others.

2.2.5 Summary of leadership styles and their impact on job satisfaction

Finally, for clarity, the existing research presented on leadership styles and their impact on job satisfaction is summarised in Table 1 below. In other words, the table summarizes how leadership has been found to impact job satisfaction in recent research.

Table 1. Summary of recent research on leadership styles and their relationship with job satisfaction

Leadership style	Summary
Transformational	Consistent positive and direct relationship across cultures and sectors. Majority of studies discussed are quantitative in nature, which may explain the consistency. All studies discussed are from the context of one country.
Transactional	Results are mixed across the cultures and sectors. Thus, the relationship appears to be more context dependent. When the relationship is positive, it is found to be so due contingent rewards. All studies discussed are quantitative in nature. All studies discussed are from the context of one country.
Servant	Consistent positive and direct relationship across cultures and sectors. All studies discussed are quantitative in nature, which may explain the consistency. All studies discussed are from the context of one country.
Authentic	Consistent positive and direct relationship across cultures and sectors. However, the relationship can be indirect as well. All studies discussed are quantitative in nature, which may explain the consistency. All studies discussed are from the context of one country.

As demonstrated in previous chapters and summarised in Table 1, existing research indicates that leadership style has an impact on the job satisfaction of followers. This impact can be direct, indirect, positive or negative. Out of these four leadership styles, transactional leadership style presents more mixed results when compared to transformational, servant and authentic leadership styles. This suggests that transactional leadership style is more context-dependent, making it suitable for only certain types of cultures in relation to job satisfaction, while transformational, servant and authentic leadership styles could support the job satisfaction of employees in various cultural contexts.

However, most earlier studies have examined the relationship between leadership styles and job satisfaction quantitatively and in single-country contexts. Consequently, earlier studies provide limited insights on employee perceptions explaining why certain leadership styles affect job satisfaction positively or negatively. These further highlight the gap in literature concerning qualitative, context-specific research. This thesis aims to address this gap by qualitatively exploring the perceptions and experiences of Finnish and German employees concerning leadership styles supporting and damaging their job satisfaction.

2.3 The theoretical framework

In this thesis, the following leadership styles are explored: transformational, transactional, servant and authentic leadership styles. Previous research, as visualised in Table 1, indicates a connection between leadership styles and job satisfaction, suggesting that leadership style is a significant factor influencing employees' job satisfaction. However, prior studies have found conflicting results from different sectors and national contexts. Bajrami (2020), Bratton (2023) and Janićijević (2019) argue that national culture shapes leadership style and expectations towards it, which suggest that no leadership style is universally applicable and perceived in a similar way in relation to job satisfaction across cultures. The differences between the perceptions across cultures may be influenced by cultural characteristics such as different attitudes towards authority, achievement, teamwork and communication. Therefore, there is a connection between leadership style perception and job satisfaction, and this perception is influenced by national culture.

This thesis proposes that leadership styles influence job satisfaction, but this influence is shaped by cultural context. Although prior studies on leadership styles and their relation to job satisfaction exist from multiple singular countries, qualitative and context-specific research is limited, which highlights a gap in literature. This thesis aims to fill that gap by qualitatively examining which leadership styles are perceived as supportive and harmful for job satisfaction in the Finnish and German contexts, and by explaining these perceptions in each context.

Figure 5 aims to visualise the framework of this study. The arrows demonstrate that leadership style impacts job satisfaction, while the national context influences this relationship. The national contexts of this thesis are Finland and Germany.

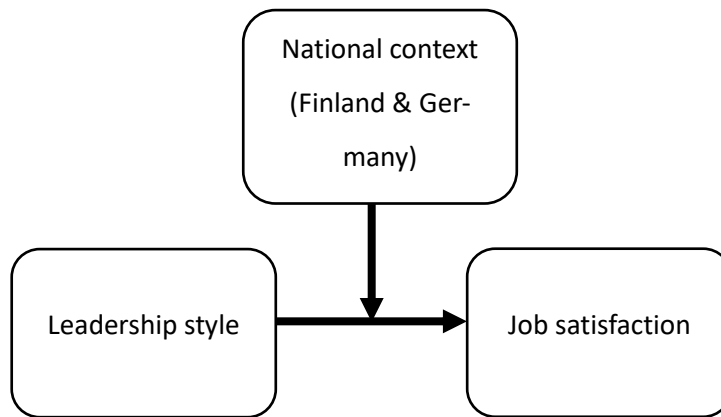


Figure 5. Theoretical framework of this thesis

In this thesis, transformational, transactional, servant and authentic leadership styles are utilised as sensitising theoretical categories to interpret how employees describe leadership styles that support or damage job satisfaction. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is not to measure these leadership styles quantitatively. Instead, the aim is to explore how employees' experiences can be understood in relation to these leadership frameworks and the cultural contexts of Finland and Germany.

This concludes the literature review. The next chapter is chapter three, and it presents the methodology of the thesis. Chapter four presents the research findings, and lastly, chapter five presents the conclusion of this thesis.

3 Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to present the methodology of the thesis and justify it. Firstly, research approach, method and strategy are presented. Next, sample, data collection and data analysis are discussed. Lastly, trustworthiness, ethical considerations and data adequacy of the research are discussed.

3.1 Research approach, method and strategy

According to Saunders et al. (2023, pp. 155–159), there are three research approaches: deductive, inductive and abductive. In deductive approach, a hypothesis is developed and tested, resulting in falsified or verified theory, while in inductive research approach, data is added to build on existing theory. In abductive approach, the data is gathered for comparison with existing theories or conceptual frameworks, while remaining open for new findings to emerge from the data (Saunders et al., 2023, pp. 155–159). This thesis is guided by existing leadership theories but simultaneously remains open for new insights that may confirm, change or extend previous understanding on those. Thus, the research approach of this thesis is abductive.

Research is categorised as either exploratory, descriptive, explanatory, evaluative or a combination of these (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 180–181). Exploratory research aims to provide a deeper understanding of certain issue, problem or phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 180). The aim of this thesis is to gain deeper understanding on leadership style perceptions and their impact on job satisfaction in the context of Finland and Germany, which previous studies have not sufficiently examined. Thus, this research is exploratory in nature. In addition, the relevant literature is explored first, which is followed by interviewing experts on the topic in this thesis. These steps are, according to Saunders et al. (2007, p. 133), the core practises when conducting exploratory research. In addition, Saunders et al. (2007, p. 133) note that focus group interviews can be the last part of exploratory research. Focus groups interviews were not conducted in this research.

Research is most commonly either quantitative or qualitative (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 181). According to Hennink et al. (2020, p. 15) in quantitative research, the data is numerical. This means that surveys and polls are utilised to gather the data, and statistics and diagrams are used to analyse the data. The objective of quantitative research is to recognise patterns in data and to quantify a problem. In contrast, in qualitative research the data is textual, and it is collected by interviewing participants. The objective of qualitative research is to gain understanding about a certain phenomenon and explain participant's experiences, beliefs and behaviour. The suitable research method for this thesis is qualitative, as the aim of this thesis is to explore which leadership styles are perceived as the most supportive and damaging for job satisfaction in Finnish and German contexts and why. Exploring this topic qualitatively is important, as prior studies have focused on examining leadership styles and their relation to job satisfaction quantitatively.

The methodology of this thesis is aligned with its research purpose. It provides an appropriate foundation to explore context-specific leadership style perceptions of Finnish and German employees in relation to job satisfaction, thus filling a gap in existing research.

3.2 Sample

Non-probability sampling is suitable for qualitative research, in which the aim is to gather experiences and understanding of a phenomenon instead of making statistical generalisations (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 293, 295). Therefore, considering the qualitative nature of this thesis, the non-probability sampling technique was utilised.

In practice, potential participants were identified and contacted through the researcher's own networks. During the first communication to the participants, the researcher provided information about the research purpose and asked their interest in participating in the research. The researcher also informed the possible participants that participation is voluntary, confidential and that they could withdraw at any time.

Non-probability sampling offers different methods to sample selection (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 295). In this research, self-selection and snowball sampling methods were utilised to gather the sample. Self-selection sampling refers to a sample collection method in which the researcher asks individuals to take part in the research (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 324). Self-selection sampling was considered suitable sampling method, as according to Saunders et al. (2023, p. 320), it is useful in exploratory research.

In addition, in snowball sampling, initial participants help recruiting more suitable research participants (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 320). In the context of this research, snowball sampling was utilised to reach participants from Germany. However, the researcher made the final decision on participants, based on predefined criteria.

Participant selection was based on the nationality, which had to be either Finnish or German, considering the research question and objectives of the thesis. In addition, it was crucial that the participants had work experience in order to reflect their experiences on leadership and its impact on their job satisfaction. A total of eight participants took part in this research. While four Finnish and four German participants provided useful exploratory insights, it should be noted that they are not enough to represent either national culture fully. Background information about the participants is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Background information about the participants

Participant	Nationality	Work experience
Participant 1 (P1)	Finnish	14 years
Participant 2 (P2)	Finnish	6 years
Participant 3 (P3)	German	15 years
Participant 4 (P4)	German	2.5 years
Participant 5 (P5)	Finnish	20 years
Participant 6 (P6)	German	13 years
Participant 7 (P7)	German	17 years
Participant 8 (P8)	Finnish	About 3 years

3.3 Data collection

The data for this research was collected with semi-structured, in-depth interviews. According to Saunders et al. (2023, p. 494), semi-structured interviews are suitable data collection methods for exploratory research. They also ensure that the collected data is detailed and high in quality. Saunders et al. (2023, p. 443) note that semi-structured interviews can be either in thematic or in distinctive format. In thematic format, the interview has previously identified focus areas, while those are not utilised in distinctive format. In-depth interviews refer to data collection method in which the interviewee is motivated to share their perspectives to the interviewer (Hennink et al., 2020, p. 116). These perspectives can be personal experiences, perceptions, feelings and cultural or economic context (Hennink et al., 2020, p. 116). Hence, the semi-structured in-depth interviews were considered appropriate data collection method.

Interview guide for the semi-structured, in-depth interviews were formulated with the help of the research question, research objectives and theoretical framework of this thesis. The interview guide was utilised in all interviews to maintain a common structure between the interviews. The interview questions were designed to encourage the participants to share their experiences on leadership and to describe situations in which

leadership style impacted their job satisfaction negatively or positively. Semi-structured interview format provided the possibility to ask follow-up questions and thus gain deeper understanding on the participants' responses.

In total, eight interviews were conducted. Since this thesis is exploratory in nature, and the aim of the thesis is not to make statistical generalisations, but gather comparable in-depth leadership style perceptions, eight interviews were considered enough.

The language of the interviews varied, as with Finnish participants the language was Finnish, while English was utilised with German participants. The interviews were conducted between 31.03.2026 and 16.04.2026. They were carried out either in-person or via video or phone call, and the length of the interviews varied from 36 minutes to 1 hour and 6 minutes. At the beginning of the interviews, the participants were reminded about the purpose and anonymity of the research. Six out of the eight interviews were recorded by the built-in recording tool of the researcher's phone, with the permission of the participants. After each recorded interview, a transcript was generated, which was then copied to Microsoft Word by the researcher. Two of the interviews were not recorded, one due to the participant's refusal and one due to technical issues. In these cases, the researcher documented the interviews by carefully taking notes to Microsoft Word. However, the fact that two interviews were not recorded is a limitation of this thesis, as it may have affected the amount of detailed information gathered from those interviews. Overview of the data collection is visualised in Table 3, which presents the interview channel, date and duration of each interview.

Table 3. Interview channel, date and duration of the interviews

Participant	Interview channel	Date and duration
Participant 1 (P1)	Online / Google Meet	31.03.2026, 44 minutes
Participant 2 (P2)	In-person	02.04.2026, 36 minutes
Participant 3 (P3)	Online / Google Meet	02.04.2026, 55 minutes
Participant 4 (P4)	Online / Google Meet	02.04.2026, 1 hour and 6 minutes
Participant 5 (P5)	In-person	09.04.2026, 42 minutes
Participant 6 (P6)	Online / Google Meet	10.04.2026, 46 minutes
Participant 7 (P7)	Online / Google Meet	14.04.2026, 53 minutes
Participant 8 (P8)	Phone call	16.04.2026, 38 minutes

3.4 Data analysis

According to Saunders et al. (2023, pp. 664–665), thematic analysis can be utilised to analyse qualitative data. The purpose of thematic analysis is to identify patterns, descriptions and key themes from the data. Thus, thematic analysis was suitable for this thesis, as the objective is to explore how employees perceive different leadership styles in relation to their job satisfaction and to identify patterns in these perceptions in the Finnish and German contexts.

Firstly, the transcripts from the six recorded interviews were read immediately after each interview while simultaneously listening to the recordings in order to avoid any data loss due to errors in the generated transcripts. In addition, notes from the two unrecorded interviews were revised immediately after each interview to ensure all questions were answered and that all data obtained was clear and understandable.

Secondly, the transcripts and notes were carefully read multiple times to get familiar with the data and to make observations. Third, the interview data was coded by

recognising segments related to leadership experiences and job satisfaction from the text. These segments represented the positive and negative leadership style perceptions, as well as general leadership perceptions and expectations.

Next, the codes were grouped as themes to identify recurring patterns across participants. These themes reflected how leadership styles were perceived as supportive or damaging for job satisfaction in the Finnish and German contexts. To ensure the consistency and distinction between, the themes were reviewed and clarified before conducting the analysis. Finally, the emerged themes from both countries were analysed by interpreting them in relation to the leadership style theories discussed in the literature review, whenever possible. Furthermore, the analysis remained open for new insights that could extend the original framework of the study. The themes and the leadership style interpretations enabled the comparison between Finland and Germany by highlighting the differences and similarities between the countries.

During the interviews, participants were asked to refer to their most relevant recent manager. However, during data collection it was recognised that participants P2, P3, P4, P6, P7 and P8 referred to two different managers when describing positive and negative leadership experiences. Therefore, to keep the distinction clear, these managers are referred to as *positive manager* and *negative manager* when presenting the findings and conducting the analysis.

3.5 Trustworthiness, ethical considerations and data adequacy

To evaluate and demonstrate the overall quality and trustworthiness of a qualitative study, factors such as credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability are evaluated (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 218).

The criterion of credibility aims to secure that the research findings are in line with the experiences and perspectives of the participants (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 218). In this thesis, credibility was secured by utilising semi-structured interviews, which supported

the participants to share their experiences. In addition, interview recordings and transcripts of six interviews and comprehensive notes from two interviews, which were not recorded, enabled the researcher to revisit participants' answers to ensure all relevant data was considered and analysed.

Dependability refers to the consistency and transparency of the research process (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 218). In other words, it means documenting the research process in a way that enables other to evaluate it (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 218). The research process of this thesis was clearly documented, explained and justified in detail, which adds the dependability of this thesis.

Confirmability refers to the objectivity of the findings, ensuring that they are not affected by the researcher's own opinions and preferences (Ahmed, 2024). Confirmability of this thesis was supported by analysing data with the help of codes and themes, which clearly demonstrate that the data is based on the interviews instead of the researcher's own opinions or assumptions. Abductive approach guided the data analysis where appropriate, while being open to new insights to emerge from the data.

The degree to which the research findings can be applied to other context or situations refers to transferability (Stalmeijer & Brown, 2024). Factors such as the context of this research, research participants and data collection process, are described transparently and clearly, which enables the reader to assess the transferability. However, the transferability of this thesis is limited to cultural context like those of Finland and Germany.

Ethical aspects such as respect, relationship with participants, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity need to be considered in qualitative research (Mirza et al., 2023). All participants should be treated respectfully, regardless of their age, gender or any other difference between the researcher (Mirza et al., 2023). This guideline was applied in this research. Formal relationship between researcher and participants minimises the risk of biased data during the process (Mirza et al., 2023). While research

participants were found from the researcher's own network or with the help of it, the relationship between the researcher and all participants was formal, which minimises the risk of biased data. Finally, during the initial contact as well as in the beginning of the interviews, the participants were told that participation is voluntary, that they could withdraw at any time, and that their anonymity is guaranteed throughout the interview, reporting of the findings and data analysis.

Data saturation and information power are methods to evaluate data adequacy (Roberts et al., 2026). Rich and detailed data was collected until it was possible to answer to the research question of the thesis. Information power means that the more relevant information the sample can offer, the fewer participants are needed (Malterud et al., 2015, p. 1753). In this thesis, information power was supported with sufficient variation between the Finnish and German contexts, which allowed gathering meaningful leadership style perceptions in relation to job satisfaction. Despite the small sample size, due to semi-structured in depth-interviews and careful data analysis, the data provided rich and meaningful details into leadership style perceptions and their relation to job satisfaction in both contexts.

4 Findings

This chapter presents the research findings, and it is divided into two sections. First, the findings from the interviews with the Finnish participants are presented. Then, the findings from the interviews with the German participants are presented.

As discussed, the participants were asked to refer to their most relevant recent manager. However, participants P2, P3, P4, P6, P7 and P8 referred to two different managers when sharing positive and negative experiences. Moving forward to the findings and analysis in the Chapter 5, the managers associated with positive experiences are referred to as *positive managers*, while managers associated with negative experiences are referred to as *negative managers*.

4.1 Leadership style perceptions in Finland

4.1.1 General perceptions of leadership

The Finnish participants perceived the leadership style of their most relevant recent manager mostly in a positive way, describing it as low in hierarchy, supportive of the autonomy of the employees and participative in decision-making.

Participant 8 (2026) described that their manager gives them autonomy but in case of questions, the manager is always available for them. Participant 2 (2026) described that the employees are involved in the decision-making whenever possible, stating that *“they ask for employees’ opinions, if something is changing. I mean if it’s something the employees can actually influence, then they ask about it and make decisions based on that.”* (P2, 2026). Furthermore, in one interview, the leadership style was perceived to be empathetic: *“I would say it is an empathetic leadership style. The manager listens and considers their employees, approaches them kindly, and is able to think about what is best for them”* (P8, 2026).

Some of the participants perceived the leadership styles negatively in places, due to lacking presence or communication. Participant 5 (2026) did perceive the leadership style of their most recent manager as supportive of autonomy, but also mentioned that if everything went well, they did not see or hear anything from the manager, which sometimes created a sense of absent manager. Participant 1 (2026) mentioned that providing a lot of autonomy gave the feeling of being trusted but sometimes led to situations in which too many assumptions on certain things were made, without proper discussion. This style was not perceived positively by Participant 1, which described that *“Perhaps too many assumptions were made, so in a way the good side is that it created a kind of feeling of trust. But then again, in my opinion, it might be good to discuss things a bit more.”* (P1, 2026).

4.1.2 Perceptions supporting job satisfaction

When the Finnish participants described situations in which their manager’s leadership style supported their job satisfaction, they consistently highlighted experiences in which they had received feedback, recognition, autonomy and trust from their manager. These experiences were associated with the feeling of being valued, appreciated and trusted as employees. Additionally, in one interview, the perception of empathy was associated with the feeling of being seen and heard as an employee.

Feedback and recognition

Participant 1 (2026) referred to a specific situation in which they spontaneously received feedback with from the team, organised by the manager. This was supporting the job satisfaction of Participant 1, because it created a long-lasting positive experience:

“I was kind of just thinking about why it stuck in my mind so much, and maybe it’s because you don’t actually hear nice things like that often enough in everyday work life. Of course, here at the company we have annual reviews, but apart from those there aren’t really that many situations where you necessarily get more detailed feedback beyond just a thank you, like how my colleagues actually see me as an employee. So that’s probably why it stayed with me.” (P1, 2026)

Participant 2 (2026) talked about a specific situation in which their positive manager rewarded them for their good work by allowing them to choose a product from their organisation's product range. This had a positive impact on their job satisfaction as it created a feeling that the positive manager really sees and values the effort they put in: *"It was positive because it gave a feeling of being appreciated, like when you have done something really well and you can tell the manager has noticed and acknowledged the effort you have put in"* (P2, 2026). Participant 5 (2026) referred to recurring discussions with the manager, in which the manager consistently provided supportive and practical feedback. Participant 5 (2026) experienced this as positively affecting their job satisfaction, as receiving such feedback increased trust in their own abilities and competences.

Autonomy and trust

Many Finnish participants mentioned that being granted autonomy positively affects job satisfaction, because it creates a sense of freedom and being trusted and appreciated as an employee.

Participant 1 (2026) has experienced that their manager provided them a lot of autonomy and independence, which was supporting their job satisfaction. Participant 1 (2026) also added that their manager supported low hierarchy and was able to take things lightly:

"In my opinion, this was quite a kind of low-hierarchy style, so it was, like, fairly easy to approach. It wasn't, like, a micromanaging type, they kind of trusted that if something had been agreed on, they didn't constantly follow up or keep asking about it." (P1, 2026).

"There was this kind of feeling that things weren't made unnecessarily stiff or rigid. Like, if you work in corporate environment, they can be quite hierarchical, with all those processes and things like that. And they, in their own way, sort of removed some of that unnecessary rigidity from certain things. They knew how to straighten things out, cut corners if needed, and also take things more relaxed when it was appropriate" (P1, 2026).

Participant 2 (2026) perceived the leadership style of their positive manager as granting a lot of trust, which affected positively to their overall job satisfaction: *"I feel better at*

work, like it's easier to go to work and work, and it makes me feel appreciated" (P2, 2026). Participant 5 (2026) described that their manager expressed their trust towards the team, which created the feeling of being trusted by the manager. This in turn increased their professional confidence and for that reason supported their job satisfaction.

Experience of empathy

While less prevalent overall, a significant theme identified in one interview was perceived empathy. Participant 8 described that especially during difficult situations, their positive manager has expressed empathy towards subordinates, while also being easy to approach. Therefore, Participant 8 (2026) described feeling seen, heard and valued in these difficult situations, which they perceived as positively affecting their job satisfaction. Overall, the positive impact of the empathetic manager was significant, as according to Participant 8 (2026) it affected to the work motivation and overall well-being at work for Participant 8 was significant: *"It had a positive impact on my work motivation and overall well-being at work. It was enjoyable to work under their leadership, and I felt motivated to come to work"* (P8, 2026).

Overall, the Finnish participants perceived that a leadership style which provides autonomy and trust towards the employees supports their job satisfaction the best. In addition, leadership style in which the manager is empathetic while still able to make decisions and lead effectively was perceived to support job satisfaction. For example, Participant 2 (2026) and Participant 5 (2025) described their perception of the leadership style that best supports their job satisfaction the following way:

"That the manager does not overly monitor or watch everything all the time. They also give freedom and trust in how things are handled. They trust that tasks will be done even if they are not constantly keeping an eye on things" (P2, 2026).

"Style in which space and freedom to act are given, and there is trust that the employee will do their work properly and the best way they know how. The trust between the manager and the employee is important, because if that trust is breaking, job satisfaction suffers" (P5, 2026)

The participants did not consider these kinds of leadership styles to be specific only to the Finnish culture or to the culture of their organisation. Majority of them believe these leadership styles can be found from other cultures as well, while some of them were unable to evaluate that. Furthermore, they added that based on their experiences, the leadership style or perception of it can depend on the organisation, the manager themselves or even the relationship between the manager and the subordinate. For example, according to Participant 5 (2026), the leadership style of their manager was constant and mostly positive with P5, but they know that the manager had different leadership styles with other subordinates. With other subordinates, the Participant 5 perceived the leadership style of their manager as more old-fashioned, in which the *“problems are expected to be resolved by giving orders, and if that does not work, by shouting”* (P5, 2026).

4.1.3 Perceptions damaging job satisfaction

When describing situations in which their manager’s leadership style was perceived as negatively impacting their job satisfaction, most commonly the negative experiences related to the perception of passive or absent manager, lack of communication and the feeling of unfairness. These experiences were associated with the perceptions of not being appreciated, self-doubt and the lack of managerial interest. Furthermore, in one interview, the perception of unempathetic manager was associated with feelings of stress and anxiety.

Managerial absence and passiveness

For several Finnish participants, the perception of passive or absent manager was experienced to affect job satisfaction negatively. These perceptions were associated with the feeling that the manager does not care, a lack of appreciation and a sense of superficial interest of the manager. For example, Participant 8 (2026) shared that they perceive inactive manager, who is unable to take the lead and make decisions, as negatively impacting their job satisfaction. Participant 2 (2026) described that their negative manager was not always completely aware of their ongoing projects and provided superficial feedback:

“If we had, for example, a project, they knew that we were working on the project, but they did not really know what we were actually doing in the project or how we were doing it, and things like that. So, it was kind of like... they didn't really... I don't know whether they weren't interested or whether they just didn't really care” (P2, 2026).

“Sometimes they said something like ‘good job’ but it felt a bit like something they were supposed to say. Kind of like when you ask someone how their holiday was. It is not maybe because you really are interested in how it went, but because it is just a customary thing to ask” (P2, 2026).

One way in which managerial passivity or absence was experienced was through a lack of communication and unclear expectations. For instance, Participant 1 (2026) shared that while their manager gave them a high degree of autonomy, lack of communication led to situations in which the manager assumed that Participant 1 knew what they were doing, which was not always necessarily the case. The manager made assumptions, and these assumptions were not aligned with the views of Participant 1, which was negative to the job satisfaction of Participant 1. According to the perception of Participant 1, this was a constant leadership style of their manager. Consequently, this style did not only affect their job satisfaction, but motivation and well-being at work as well: *“It affected my motivation, and there is this feeling like I have done something wrong even though I do not really understand what I have done wrong” (P1, 2026).* Participant 5 (2026) described recurring situations in which the manager set expectations towards Participant 5. However, despite all those expectations being met, the performance was perceived insufficient by the manager. These experiences contributed to perceptions of unclear communication and unclear expectations.

Unfair and unequal treatment

The experience of being treated unequally was also frequently mentioned when the participants described negative leadership style perceptions. The participants described situations in which, in their perception, the manager had given unequal developing opportunities by favouring certain types of personalities and showed limited interest in further

developing employees in their current roles. These experiences were associated with perceptions of unfairness and thus were negatively affecting job satisfaction. For example, Participant 5 (2026) described being told of being capable of doing more than their current role, however, not being offered development opportunities in the organisation. Participant 1 (2026) explained their perceptions of unequal treatment and unfairness the following way:

“Unequal treatment as well, in the sense that you can see it in the everyday work, but then also maybe at a deeper level. For example, when it comes to career development opportunities, if you want to go that far, how different skills or types of expertise are valued.” (P1, 2026).

The participants described that they have not had similar negative perceptions with other managers and therefore did not consider them to be common leadership styles in the Finnish working culture. Participant 1 (2026) considered this to be a broader issue, as in their perception it might be common everywhere that employees with certain personalities, such as extraversion, could be potentially valued, and thus favoured, more.

“I think this is a broader phenomenon. I can imagine that different employees are treated differently, and that in working life certain traits, like extroversion and being very outward-oriented and expressive, are valued more” (P1, 2026).

Lack of empathy

Less prevalent overall, but a significant theme identified from one interview was the perception of lacking empathy, which was associated with feelings such as stress and anxiety and therefore negatively impacting job satisfaction. Participant 8 (2026) described working under a manager whose constant leadership style was hard and firm. They described feeling misunderstood and not being heard. Furthermore, Participant 8 (2026) reported feeling afraid to approach the negative manager or bring up concerns, due to perceived lack of empathy.

The Finnish participants perceive these leadership styles to be constant instead of one-time behaviour. Furthermore, the participants did not consider these leadership styles to be based on the Finnish culture or the organisational culture. Instead, the participants connected these leadership style perceptions to individual managers. Overall, the Finnish participants perceived that their job satisfaction is negatively affected by a leadership style in which autonomy is limited, the manager is perceived as absent or passive and employees are treated unfairly. Additionally, a leadership style that is tough and lacking empathy was perceived to negatively affect job satisfaction by one participant. The following citations present some of these perceptions:

“It is negative if they are not interested in all what I actually do. I mean, it’s not nice if someone is constantly monitoring you, but at the same time the manager should have at least some awareness of what their subordinates are doing at work” (P2, 2026).

“A tougher leadership style might work for some people, but it does not work for me. I am more sensitive and I value a people oriented and more empathetic leadership style” (P8, 2026).

“It feels negative when there is no trust and no room or freedom to act” (P5, 2026).

4.1.4 Leadership style expectations

When reflecting on general leadership style expectations in Finland, and when reflecting what kind of leadership is considered good in Finland, all Finnish participants emphasised a leadership style that supports employee autonomy and trust in employees. Some participants also emphasised that a leadership style in which employees are treated fairly and where the manager is easy to approach are expected in Finland. Furthermore, some participants highlighted that managers are expected to be motivated to work in a leadership position and to be capable of making decisions and providing direction. Additionally, several participants perceived that in Finland, a general expectation is that the leadership style is employee-oriented, meaning that the manager enables success of the

employees, considers individual needs of the employees and addresses issues early. The following citations illustrate these some of expectations:

“A manager should be motivated in their own work and leading others. They should have a motivated approach to work, rather than giving the impression that they are not interested and are just doing the job for the salary.” (P2, 2026).

“It is expected that the manager gives responsibility and trusts their subordinates and allows them to work independently” (P8, 2026).

“I think that, in general, a good way to lead is to give employees the opportunity to do their job as well as they possibly can. You give them freedom to do the work in their own way but still make sure they have opportunities to develop. And you understand that we are all individuals and that we all have different strengths” (P5, 2026).

According to all participants, a micro-managing leadership style, in which the manager does not trust the employees, is not expected in Finland. Furthermore, some participants highlighted that leadership which treats employees unfairly or is motivated by self-interest is not expected in Finland. In addition, some participants emphasised that lack of empathy and passiveness is not expected in Finland. Overall, based on the interviews, these kinds of leadership styles are not expected in Finland and thus would be considered bad leadership. The following citations illustrate some of these expectations:

“Micromanaging, where you are constantly being watched and have to keep reporting on your progress, which just adds to your workload because your manager simply does not trust you” (P1, 2026).

“Dictatorial leadership is not expected in Finland. Finland is a democratic country, so the same is expected in working life as well, that everyone is heard” (P5, 2026).

“If a manager is too careless, it would not be accepted in Finland. We tend to value a certain level of discipline and structure” (P8, 2026).

“It would be bad if people are lead unequally, and as a result employees are not in the same position” (P5, 2026).

When elaborating on why these expectations of good and bad leadership exist in Finland, the participants considered different reasons. Several participants considered that the expectations of good and bad leadership may vary depending on the generation as well as on the individual employee. Furthermore, some participants considered these expectations to be specific to the Finnish culture, which was perceived to be more independent and trust based. The following citations provide illustrations to these elaborations:

“In another context, cultural differences probably have a big impact, for example in terms of moral values” (P5, 2026).

“I do not really know if that comes down to personality differences or cultural differences or what. I do not see it as impossible that in some countries a manager does not necessarily have to be as empathetic” (P1, 2026).

“It could be different [in other contexts], there are certainly differences between cultures. It is hard to say, because I do not have experience outside Finland. But I could imagine that in Finland people are more independent and that trust and being given responsibility are valued” (P8, 2026).

4.2 Leadership style perceptions in Germany

4.2.1 General perceptions of leadership

Most of the German participants perceived the leadership style of their most relevant recent manager to offer autonomy, emphasise trust in employees and participate employees in the decision-making. Moreover, the leadership style of the most relevant recent manager was experienced as supportive of the employees and transparent in information sharing. The following citations illustrate these perceptions:

“I experienced it like supportive, but also giving a lot of freedom and autonomy in my personal work or in my day-to-day work. So if my manager gave me a task and I was kind of free on how to solve the issue, but whenever I needed support or anything, I could ask her for advice or ask her if I can get more time or more resources for that and she would help me how to manage upcoming issues.” (P4, 2026).

“They are keeping us in the loop and sharing information that other leaders I know don't share with their teams about some meetings that took place with higher leadership about some decisions that were made about some news from other teams. So, they really try to give us like a complete picture” (P7, 2026).

Furthermore, Participant 3 (2026) described that *“decisions are done in a cooperative way”* and that they always have had the *“opportunity to do my task on an autonomic way and in my own style”*. Participant 6 (2026) described that their manager places a great emphasis on autonomy and gives a lot of power in terms of decision-making to the employees, if the result is what is expected: *“to get to the result and to do the decision, it goes all up to me”* (P6, 2026).

However, Participant 7 reported that they perceived the leadership style of their most recent relevant manager to be inconsistent at times. According to Participant 7 (2026), the leadership style varied between more friendly and stricter style, which was associated with feelings of uncertainty about appropriate behaviour as a subordinate. The following citation illustrates this perception:

“Sometimes this buddy, buddy approach, it's hot, cold, hot, cold, because on one day you have the feeling you're the best employee in the world, because you're tackled like 20 things even though just pipe things were very realistic to have done in a certain time, but sometimes it's like you get a message that's like, why didn't you do X, Y, Z? Why is X, Y, Z the case? And you will ask yourself, where is that coming from?” (P7, 2026).

4.2.2 Perceptions supporting job satisfaction

When the German participants shared experiences in which they perceived the leadership style of their most relevant manager to support their job satisfaction, they consistently highlighted experiences in which they received managerial trust, supported autonomy and feedback.

Trust and supported autonomy

For most of the German participants, supported autonomy was perceived to positively impact job satisfaction. Furthermore, it was perceived as one of the most important factors in a leadership style supporting job satisfaction, as these perceptions were associated with the feeling of being trusted and supported as an employee. The participants highlighted the importance of autonomous work, while simultaneously being supported by the manager:

“I think the most important is being a supportive leader who's also giving freedom and trust in me as an employee, so to have trust in the process that the way I'm doing it, I'm going to reach a good goal, or the end result is going to be just fine. So, I have this autonomy for me to work on my own but always have the support and experience of my manager to rely on them for questions and everything” (P4, 2026).

Participant 3 (2026) shared that the leadership style of their positive manager emphasised their autonomy, but the manager was always supporting them. They perceived it supporting their job satisfaction, as *“it is important to let me work autonomous, and of course, support if I need the support”* (P3, 2026). Furthermore, Participant 6 (2026) described that their positive manager gave them autonomy, while still supporting them and regularly asking how they were doing. Participant 6 (2026) described that it is important that the managers are *“finding the right balance between being there and leaving you on your own”*.

Feedback

Most of the German participants shared that receiving feedback positively affects their job satisfaction. For example, Participant 7 (2026) described how their positive manager provided a lot of spontaneous feedback, which *“was also really helpful and respectful at all times”* (P7, 2026). This was perceived positively impacting their overall job satisfaction and well-being at work, while helping them to gain more confidence for their career. Participant 6 (2026) highlighted the importance of well-timed feedback, describing it as

positively impacting their job satisfaction and overall work motivation. Furthermore, they highlighted that it was especially important when starting in a new position:

“And after, I don't know, one or two months, he was like, hey, this really works good. What you do is very great. So it was for me, that was like, okay, yeah, I'm not getting at the wrong play.” (P6, 2026).

Feedback was also described positively affecting job satisfaction when it was given to remind employees about their existing skills. Participant 3 (2026) described receiving feedback from their positive manager, which supported their independent thinking and problem-solving skills by reminding them about their previous tasks, issues and capabilities. The following quotation illustrates this perception:

“But what was special about it was that even if I got some struggles, she just reminded me of my own experiences, my own tasks, my own skills. She just pushed my skills and just supported doing my own thing” (P3, 2026).

Support for professional development

Another prevalent theme identified from the interviews with the German participants was the experience of supported professional development. Most of the participants described that support for professional development is positively influencing their job satisfaction. Participant 3 (2026) shared that the positive manager consistently wanted to develop them, which supported their job satisfaction:

“She always wanted me to grow with my opportunities, exercises, and tasks, so that was a really, really good feeling for me” (P3, 2026).

Furthermore, Participant 4 (2026) described similar perceptions, sharing that their positive manager supported their professional development by gradually preparing them for more demanding positions and providing opportunities to develop their competencies within a safe environment:

“I feel empowered to just try out new things or to develop my skills or to go outside my comfort zone, because I know even if it might go wrong, I know I am not afraid of being fired or yelled at, but I know that I can try out new things and ask for support if needed” (P4, 2026).

In addition, Participant 6 (2026) described that their positive manager supported their professional development by providing opportunities to work on different tasks and create their own working style, which they considered as positively impact their job satisfaction.

Overall, the German participants did not consider these kinds of leadership styles and leadership perceptions to be specific to the German culture. For example, Participant 7 (2026) further described that receiving frequent unprompted feedback was not considered typical for the German working culture, which highlighted the significance of it in relation to their job satisfaction. Furthermore, Participant 6 (2026) thought that leadership style perceptions can depend on both the manager and the subordinate. Additionally, Participant 6 (2026) considered that leadership style perceptions can be influenced by employees’ personal preferences.

4.2.3 Perceptions damaging satisfaction

When the German participants shared experiences in which they perceived the leadership style of their most relevant manager to negatively impact their job satisfaction, the participants consistently highlighted experiences of passive or absent manager, excessive hierarchy and micromanaging as well as inconsistency and unpredictability. Moreover, the experience of lacking empathy was perceived negatively.

Managerial absence and passiveness

Participants described managerial absence and passiveness as negatively impacting their job satisfaction. Managerial absence and passiveness included a lack of interest towards the employees, exclusion from the decision-making process and a lack of recognition. These perceptions were associated with the feeling of being unappreciated. For example, Participant 6 (2026) shared that their negative manager did not ask the opinions of their

subordinates, but the opinions did not matter: *“Sometimes he asked what is your opinion, but you knew already, that it would not matter at all, what your opinion is”* (P6, 2026). Participant 4 (2026) described that managerial passivity, especially a lack of expressed interest towards the employee, was negatively affecting their job satisfaction. Participant 4 (2026) connected such leadership style to the feelings of not being appreciated on a personal and as well as on a professional level. Furthermore, Participant 3 (2026) described that they perceive it negatively if *“you receive more and more work, and no one is really thinking about it or even recognizing it. And if you deal it, they won't say, thank you, good job or anything like that”* (P3, 2026).

Excessive hierarchy and micromanagement

Many German participants described excessive hierarchy and micromanagement negatively impacting their job satisfaction. Participants described situations in which their manager had hierarchical and micromanaging style. Participant 4 (2026) reported receiving feedback from their negative manager suggesting that they should approve everything the participant was going to say in the meetings beforehand.

“My manager told me he didn't really like that I was just doing this on my own without consulting him first. It felt like he did it just because he held his power and it was not acknowledged kind of thing.” (P4, 2026).

Participant 4 (2026) perceived such leadership style to impact their job satisfaction negatively. In addition, Participant 4 (2026) described feeling insecure and limited in their work:

“I was always like, yeah, to who can I talk to anymore? Because what happens if my manager again found out that I talked to someone about something and it wasn't checked with him first” (P4, 2026).

Participant 7 (2026) shared that their negative manager wanted to read all the emails before the participant could send them. In addition to negatively influencing the job satisfaction, Participant 7 (2026) further described that their negative manager was *“looking at everything, especially pointing out the mistakes”*, which caused *“anxiety and horror going to the office each and every day”* for Participant 7. Participant 3 (2026) further

shared that they have perceived leadership style displaying hierarchy and micromanaging tendencies *“the most negative leadership”*.

Lack of empathy

Some German participants perceived lack of empathy as damaging of their job satisfaction. Participant 3 (2026) described that when their negative manager failed to show empathy towards them, the participant perceived it negatively and it damaged their overall job satisfaction. Furthermore, Participant 3 (2026) added:

“If there is no empathy, it's always hard. And I really do not need someone to cuddle me or something like that, that's not what I need. I do not need a strong relationship between my direct leadership and me, but just, for example, just having the easy question, how are you today?” (P3, 2026).

Participant 6 (2026) shared about a situation in which their negative manager kept criticising them despite the participant crying: *“I was crying, but the manager continued criticising me. And they were not noticing my reaction”*. In addition to damaging their job satisfaction, Participant 6 (2026) described that it damaged their overall work motivation: *“It was completely the point where I knew, like, I don't have any motivation left to work with that leader”*.

Inconsistency and unpredictability

One theme identified from two interviews was the experience of inconsistency and unpredictability. Participant 7 (2026) described inconsistent leadership style, which is characterised by manager with unclear expectations yet micromanaging tendencies, to be negatively impacting their job satisfaction:

“And still, even though the expectations are not clear, you constantly get like reprimanded for what you did or didn't do, this is an absolute horror for my job satisfaction. Some like unspoken, invisible expectations that are also changing daily” (P7, 2026).

“On Monday, it's okay to not keep someone in the loop. On Friday, I'm the worst employee ever because I didn't react on Monday” (P7, 2026).

Participant 6 (2026) shared that they perceive inconsistent and unpredictable leadership style damage their job satisfaction more than a leadership style which is constantly negative:

“If you have someone who is only one way, it makes it easier because then you can adjust how you need to work. But being sometimes a little bit unpredictable affects me negatively. Because you have the happy case and everything is fine and then something comes up where I don't understand why this is an issue for them or why they treat the situation differently and then this is kind of even, yeah, more worse for me because then I reflect and think like, why is this now an issue?” (P6, 2026).

4.2.4 Leadership style expectations

When concerning the leadership style expectations in Germany, the participants perceived that German employees generally expect the leadership style of their manager to combine autonomy and employee support. Participant 7 (2026) further added that in Germany the manager's responsibility in decision-making is highlighted, meaning that managers are expected to support their employees who implement the decisions made by the managers.

“It is not a responsibility of the employee alone and not all fingers get pointed at them. The manager needs to take responsibility since it was one of their employees, even if it's clearly the employee that made the mistake. [It is expected that] the manager doesn't like reprimand them in front of a lot of people” (P7, 2026).

Participants also emphasised a leadership style which is transparent and communicative. Participant 3 (2026) especially highlighted the importance of communication in the German working culture, which is considered to impact the expectations towards leaders as well.

According to the interviews, a leadership style characterised by control, micromanagement and a lack of trust in employees is not expected. Furthermore, passive leadership style is perceived as the incompetency of the manager and therefore is considered as bad leadership in Germany.

According to the interviews, these perceptions of good and bad leadership are considered to differ depending on the generation. For example, the participants perceived the younger generation to value more work-life balance when compared to the older generation. Furthermore, older generation was perceived to have accustomed to stricter leadership style than the younger generation, who emphasise freedom and autonomy. In addition, organisational issues such as the organisation's size, field and organisational newness were perceived to shape leadership style expectations.

"I would say we have this older generation and then we have this younger generation, which is doing the things really different because they want to have a work-life balance. This whole thing regarding the life balance, I want to work autonomously, I want to work like I can do in my own, you know, free space. I would say this is also affecting leadership" (P3, 2026).

Participant 4 (2026) also thought that the personality of an individual employee can shape these perceptions, in addition to other factors mentioned. Overall, the participants did not consider these expectations to be specific to the German cultural context. Instead, it was perceived that such leadership styles are not expected universally. However, it was noted that since Germans are reserved in nature, the reactions to such leadership styles could potentially be stronger in Germany when compared to other countries and that *"some micromanaging tendencies are quite regular and quite normal in Germany" (P7, 2026).*

4.3 Synthesis of findings

So far, this chapter has presented the interview findings from Finland and Germany separately. The next chapter, chapter five, analyses the results and ultimately provides the answer to the research question of the thesis. Therefore, before moving to the discussion part, this chapter aims to briefly synthesise the themes derived from the interviews to ensure the clarity of the findings.

The findings indicate similarities but also differences between the perceptions of Finnish and German employees. According to the interviews, leadership style that emphasises trust, employee autonomy and provides feedback and recognition supports job satisfaction in both contexts. In contrast, passive or unemphatic leadership style damages job satisfaction in both contexts. These themes emerged from both contexts.

The interviews also indicate context-specific themes. In the Finnish context, leadership style which treats employees unfairly or unequally is perceived as negatively impacting job satisfaction, while an empathetic leadership style is perceived as supportive of job satisfaction. These themes emerged from the interviews with Finnish participants.

In the German context, leadership style supporting the professional development of the employees is experienced as supportive of job satisfaction, but micromanaging or unpredictable leadership style is perceived as negatively impacting job satisfaction. These themes emerged from the interviews with the German participants.

Considering the leadership style expectations, the interviews reveal that in both contexts it is expected that managers provide autonomy and support and trust the employees. In contrast, micromanaging or passive leadership is not expected. These findings are similar in both contexts. The German participants highlighted the expectation of transparent and communicative leadership style, whereas in the Finnish context it was highlighted that managers are expected to be motivated and able to provide direction.

5 Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an answer to the research question. In this chapter, the leadership style perceptions in relation to existing leadership literature are discussed. In addition, the analysis on how the national contexts of Finland and Germany may explain these perceptions is presented. This is followed by managerial implications and the conclusion of the thesis. Lastly, limitations of the thesis and suggestions for future research are discussed.

5.1 Discussion about leadership style perceptions

5.1.1 Leadership styles supporting job satisfaction

The findings indicate that leadership styles supporting the employee autonomy, trust and displaying feedback and recognition are supporting employee job satisfaction in both Finland and Germany. In the German context, supported autonomy is particularly important for job satisfaction. Such leadership styles are particularly important for supporting job satisfaction in both contexts as they foster a sense of independence and being trusted while increasing professional confidence.

The perception of autonomy and trust can be connected to the transformational, servant and authentic leadership styles. The trust between the followers and the managers is the core element of transformational leadership style (Galloway, 2022, p. 46). Furthermore, the dimension of individual consideration in the transformational leadership style focuses on employee support and guidance (Northouse, 2021, p. 193), which can be associated with the perception of supported autonomy. Moreover, autonomy and trust can be associated with the empowerment in servant leadership style, which supports the autonomy and independent decision-making of the followers (Northouse, 2021, p. 263). In addition, Lux (2024, p. 90) highlights that mutual trust among followers and leaders is central in the relationship between the followers and the leaders in the authentic leadership style.

The importance of feedback and recognition as supportive of job satisfaction can be linked to the transformational and transactional leadership styles. For example, the dimension of inspirational motivation in transformational leadership focuses on encouraging and motivating employees (Galloway, 2022, p. 46; Northouse, 2021, p. 193). Thus, providing feedback and recognition can be one way to encourage and motivate employees. Moreover, feedback and recognition can also be associated with transactional leadership style, in which employees are rewarded, for example socially or psychologically (Bratton, 2023, p. 135; Govender et al., 2013, p. 392). This connection can be made particularly to the dimension of the contingent reward, as the central element of the dimension is rewarding the employees after completing their tasks successfully (Govender et al., 2013; Northouse, 2024, p. 189).

Additionally, the findings indicate some context-specific leadership style perceptions which support job satisfaction in Finland and Germany. In the Finnish context, empathetic leadership style positively impacts job satisfaction. Such leadership style creates a feeling of being seen and heard as an employee, which in turn supports overall motivation and well-being at work, in addition to job satisfaction. This perception can be associated with the servant leadership style, as according to Northouse (2021, p. 253), servant leaders demonstrate empathy towards their followers. To be more specific, this perception can be linked to the dimension of emotional healing in servant leadership, as it highlights the importance of being sensitive to the personal issues and overall well-being of the followers (Northouse, 2021, p. 253). Therefore, such leadership style can be perceived as empathetic leadership style and thus support job satisfaction in Finland.

In the German context, leadership style advocating for professional development of the employees is found to support job satisfaction. These perceptions can be associated with transformational and servant leadership styles, which both aim to grow and develop the followers. Northouse (2021, p. 256) argues that servant leaders place great emphasis on growing and developing their followers. In addition, in transformational leadership,

particularly on the dimension of intellectual stimulation, the leaders provide their followers new opportunities with the purpose of driving transformation and positive change (Galloway, 2022, p. 46; Minja & Barine, 2010, p. 32). Thus, it can be argued that transformational and servant leadership styles can be experienced as supportive of professional development and therefore as supportive of job satisfaction in Germany.

5.1.2 Leadership styles damaging job satisfaction

The findings indicate that leadership styles displaying excessive hierarchy and micromanagement are damaging job satisfaction in the German context. Furthermore, the results suggest that in Finland, such leadership style is not generally expected, which in turn suggests that hierarchical and micromanaging leadership can damage employee job satisfaction in the Finnish context. These perceptions can be associated with the absence of servant, transformational and authentic leadership characteristics. These are, for example individual consideration of transformational leadership style and empowerment of servant leadership style, which both highlight trust, autonomy and independent decision-making of the followers (Galloway, 2022, p. 46; Northouse, 2021, p. 190, 263). In addition, trust between followers and leaders is highlighted in the authentic leadership style (Lux, 2024, p. 90). Therefore, leadership style that lacks these characteristics can damage job satisfaction in Finland and Germany. Excessive hierarchy and micromanagement can be partially connected to transactional leadership, especially on the active management by exception. In active management by exception, the leaders closely watch the performance of the employees and quickly correct them if needed (Northouse, 2021, p. 195). In other words, closely monitoring employees and providing feedback quickly in case of errors can potentially be perceived as excessive hierarchy and micromanagement and thus negatively impact job satisfaction.

The results demonstrate that leadership styles characterised by managerial passivity and absence negatively impact the job satisfaction of Finnish employees. Managerial passivity is experienced through the feeling of limited interest towards the employee and lack of communication. Similarly, in the German context, such leadership styles are

considered as unfavourable and damaging to job satisfaction due to experienced lack of interest and appreciation from the manager. In addition to damaging job satisfaction, these leadership styles are negatively affecting job motivation and well-being at work. Managerial passivity and absence can be partially connected to transactional leadership, specifically if it emphasises passive management by exception. In passive management by exception, the leaders do not actively intervene in the performance of the employees but wait for errors to occur and deliver constructive feedback later on (Northouse 2021, p. 195; Schedlitzki, 2021, p. 76). Therefore, if the manager does not intervene early enough, it may be perceived managerial passivity and absence. In addition, these perceptions of a passive or absent manager can be associated with the laissez-faire leadership style. Schedlitzki (2021, p. 77) defines the laissez-faire leadership based on the definition by Bass (1998), stating that it is a leadership style in which “the leader avoids taking a stand, ignores problems, does not follow and refrains from interfering”. Although the laissez-faire leadership style was not included in the initial theoretical framework of this study, it emerged from the interview data as an important finding from both contexts concerning leadership style perceptions that damage job satisfaction. Therefore, it is discussed as an additional finding that extends the original framework.

The findings indicate that leadership styles lacking empathy are damaging job satisfaction in Finland and Germany. Out of the four leadership styles presented in the literature, these perceptions can be partially associated with transactional leadership, when the emphasis is too strongly on the dimension of active management by exception. Northouse (2021, p. 195) states that in this dimension, the leaders monitor the performance of employees and take corrective actions quickly in case of rule violations or errors. Therefore, when emphasised too much, such leadership styles can potentially be perceived as a lack of situational awareness and give impression of lacking empathy. In addition, it can also be suggested that lack of empathy can be associated with the absence of certain servant leadership characteristics. These are, for example, the expression of empathy and being mindful of the individual concerns and overall well-being of the employees (Northouse, 2021, p. 255).

Additionally, the findings indicate some context-specific leadership style perceptions which damage the job satisfaction of Finnish and German employees. The findings from Finland suggest that leadership styles characterised unequal or unfair treatment of the employees are damaging job satisfaction. These perceptions can be associated with a leadership style that lacks characteristics from authentic and servant leadership styles. Those leadership styles are emphasising fairness and recognition of managerial biases (Lux, 2024, p. 90) and openness, honesty and fairness with followers (Northouse, 2021, p. 262).

The results suggest that leadership styles lacking consistency and predictability damage job satisfaction in Germany, as such leadership styles cause feelings of uncertainty, anxiety and frustration and thus damage job satisfaction. These perceptions can be connected to the passive and active management by exception in the transactional leadership style, if the manager utilises them inconsistently. As discussed earlier, in passive management by exception, the leader delivers feedback after errors or mistakes have happened, in other words passively waits for them before delivering feedback (Schedlitzki 2021, p. 77), whereas in active management by exception, the leader actively observes the performance and delivers feedback quickly (Northouse, 2021, p. 195). Therefore, if active and passive management by exception are utilised inconsistently, it can be perceived as inconsistent and unpredictable leadership style and consequently damage job satisfaction.

5.1.3 Synthesis of findings in relation to existing leadership research

Based on the findings, it can be suggested that transformational and servant leadership can support the job satisfaction in the Finnish and German contexts. This is supported by previous quantitative research by Notarnicola et al. (2024), Gebreheat et al. (2023) and Gaganmale et al. (2023), Vreclj et al. (2022), Liu & Zhao (2022) and Aricioğlu & Timuroğlu (2026) and Westbrook et al. (2022), who suggest that transformational and servant leadership styles positively impact job satisfaction in several contexts.

Furthermore, it can be argued that characteristics of the authentic leadership style may play an important role in supporting the job satisfaction of Finnish and German employees. This finding is in line with the quantitative findings of Dai et al. (2025), Liu & Wong (2023) and Liu et al. (2024), who find that authentic leadership supports job satisfaction in different contexts.

Additionally, it can be suggested that transactional leadership can simultaneously support and damage the job satisfaction of Finnish and German employees. That is, the contingent rewards of the transactional leadership style can contribute to higher job satisfaction of Finnish and German employees. This is supported by researchers such as Salameh-Ayanian et al. (2025) and Sunarsi et al. (2021) who found that contingent rewards moderately support job satisfaction. However, the findings suggest that inconsistent usage or excessive focus on both active and passive management by exception of the transactional leadership style can negatively impact the job satisfaction of Finnish and German employees. This finding can be partially supported by researchers such as Jeong (2025) and Maheswari (2021), who found a negative connection between transactional leadership style and job satisfaction. As discussed in the literature, the previous research findings on transactional leadership and job satisfaction are not consistent, which can be interpreted to mean the positive relationship between transactional leadership and job satisfaction is contextual. The findings of this study demonstrate that in the Finnish and German contexts, the contingent rewards of transactional leadership appear to have a positive impact on job satisfaction, while active and passive management by exception appear to have damaging impact.

It can be suggested that laissez-faire leadership style, which highlights the managerial passivity, can also be connected to lower job satisfaction levels in Finland and Germany. This is in line with the findings of Garzón-Lasso et al. (2024) and Murillo et al. (2024), who suggest a negative relationship between the laissez-faire leadership style and job satisfaction. Finally, it can be argued that leadership styles lacking certain characteristics

of servant, transformational and authentic leadership style may also damage job satisfaction in the Finnish and German contexts.

As demonstrated above, the findings of this thesis are in line with previous quantitative research. However, this thesis adds to existing research by demonstrating that employees do not necessarily perceive leadership styles as separated categories or theories. Instead, employees perceive and describe leadership styles as concrete leader behaviours, such as trust, autonomy, feedback, recognition, micromanagement and passivity. These perceptions can then be interpreted and understood through existing leadership style theories.

5.2 Discussion about understanding the leadership perceptions within the contexts of Finland and Germany

The individualistic and low-context cultures of Finland and Germany (visualised in Appendices 1 and 2) might explain why leadership styles emphasising feedback and recognition are experienced to support job satisfaction. According to Mooij (2021, p. 123) and Sheposh (2025), in individualistic cultures, people want to differ from each other, and they value the success of the individual. Furthermore, the communication in individualistic and low-context cultures tends to be more direct and clearer. Therefore, these cultural characteristics of Finland and Germany may explain why leadership styles providing individual feedback and clear recognition, such as transformational and transactional leadership styles, are supporting job satisfaction in these contexts. Moreover, these cultural characteristics may help explain why a passive leadership style, such as the *laissez-faire* leadership style, is experienced to damage job satisfaction in the Finnish and German contexts. The findings indicate that managerial passivity or absence involved a lack of recognition and interest towards the employees as well as their exclusion from the decision-making process. The lack of individual feedback and direct communication can be perceived as the manager being passive or uninterested in the employees in the individualistic and low-context cultures of Finland and Germany. Moreover, as visualised in Appendix 1, both cultures can be characterised as low power distance cultures. In low

power distance cultures communication is participative and employees expect to be heard (The Culture Factor Group, n.d.), which may explain why excluding employees from the decision-making process is perceived as managerial passivity and thus negatively impacts job satisfaction in the Finnish and German contexts.

In relation to job satisfaction, the preference for leadership styles that support autonomy and trust and have fewer micromanaging tendencies, such as the transformational, servant and authentic leadership styles, can be understood through cultural characteristics such as individualism and low power distance of Finland and Germany. This is partially supported by Hannay (2009) who found that servant leadership is the most suitable for low power distance cultures. In individualistic and low power distance cultures, low hierarchy, individual independence and intellectual autonomy are emphasised (Hofstede, 2011; Mooij, 2021, p. 123; The Culture Factor Group, n.d.). The individualistic and low power distance characteristics of both contexts (as visualised in Appendices 1 and 2) might explain why excessive hierarchy and micromanagement are perceived as limiting independence and autonomy and therefore as damaging job satisfaction. Concerning the general expectations towards leadership in these countries, the interviews reveal that leadership styles supporting employee autonomy are expected, whereas micromanaging leadership styles are not expected. The preferences concerning individualism and low power distance can explain these expectations. Furthermore, this finding is supported by the GLOBE project (n.d.-a, n.d. -b), which suggests that leadership styles emphasising leader autonomy are not expected in Finland and Germany.

The cultural contexts of Finland and Germany may also explain why empathy is supporting job satisfaction in Finland, and why the lack of it is damaging job satisfaction in both countries. The Finnish culture focuses on the overall quality of life and well-being, while the German culture places greater emphasis on the achievement, success and performance (The Culture Factor Group, n.d.). Furthermore, findings of the GLOBE project (n.d.-a, n.d.-b) suggest that humane-oriented leadership styles, which are compassionate and supportive, are moderately expected in both countries. In Finland,

these cultural characteristics may explain why empathetic leadership style, such as the servant leadership style, is supporting job satisfaction and why leadership styles lacking empathy are damaging it. This is partially supported by Hannay (2009) who argues that servant leadership is the most applicable to cultures with lower masculinity. This dimension is visualised in Appendix 1 as motivation towards achievement and success. Nevertheless, these same characteristics may explain why leadership styles that are perceived to treat employees unfairly or unequally are damaging the job satisfaction in Finland. On the other hand, in the German context, the moderate emphasis on humane-oriented leadership style, but overall stronger emphasis on overall achievement and success, may explain why a lack of empathy in the leadership style is damaging job satisfaction, while an empathetic leadership style is not highlighted as positively affecting job satisfaction.

The German cultural context might explain why leadership styles supporting the employees' professional development, such as the transformational and servant leadership styles, are supporting job satisfaction, while leadership styles lacking consistency and predictability, for example inconsistent transactional leadership style, are damaging it. As visualised in Appendices 1 and 2, the German culture scores high on individualism, motivation towards success and achievement. Furthermore, German culture is performance oriented. According to The Culture Factor Group (n.d.), the German culture is driven by achievement and performance, and work is a central part of life. It is also individualistic culture, which, according to (Mooji, 2021, p. 123) emphasises the success of the individual. These cultural characteristics may help explain why German participants perceive leadership style supporting their professional development as supportive of their job satisfaction. Furthermore, as visualised in Appendices 1 and 2, the German culture scores high on uncertainty avoidance. Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance find uncertainty uncomfortable and they have a strong need for clarity and structure (Hofstede, 2011). This might explain why leadership styles lacking consistency and predictability, for example inconsistent transactional leadership style, are damaging job satisfaction in Germany, as they can contrast with the preference of clarity and structure.

The findings suggest that while the same broad leadership styles are perceived positively or negatively in both Finland and Germany, the reasons behind these perceptions may be shaped by the cultural expectations concerning autonomy, communication, hierarchy and work-life balance.

Finally, Table 4 below aims to summarize the findings and their interpretation discussed in this chapter. The table presents similar and context-specific themes derived from the interviews as well as their impact on job satisfaction in the Finnish and German contexts. In addition, the table presents the leadership styles to which the themes are connected in the analysis as well as their interpretation.

Table 4. Summary of the results and the analysis

Theme	Impact on job satisfaction	Connected leadership style(s)	Interpretation
Autonomy and trust	FI: Supports DE: Supports	Transformational, servant, authentic	Linked to the individualistic and low-power distance cultures, aligns with the expectation of employee independence and trust
Feedback and recognition	FI: Supports DE: Supports	Transformational, transactional	Linked to individualistic and low-context cultures
Experience of empathy	FI: Supports	Servant	Finnish culture has lower motivation for achievement and success, instead places greater emphasis on the quality of life and well-being, may support expectation of compassionate and supportive leadership
Managerial passivity or absence	FI: Damages DE: Damages	Laissez-faire, transactional (passive management by exception)	Linked to individualistic and low-context cultures, in Germany can conflict with the expectation of managerial support
Unfair or unequal treatment	FI: Damages	Absence of certain characteristics from servant and authentic	Finnish culture places greater emphasis on the quality of life and well-being

Lack of empathy	FI: Damages DE: Damages	Transactional (too strong focus on active management by exception), absence of certain characteristics from servant	Both cultures moderately expect compassionate and supportive leadership styles; perceived lack of empathy may conflict with that
Support for professional development	DE: Supports	Transformational, servant	Linked to the individualistic and performance-driven culture
Inconsistency and unpredictability	DE: Damages	Transactional (inconsistent)	Linked to the high uncertainty avoidant culture; inconsistency and unpredictability may conflict with the preference of clarity and structure
Hierarchy and micromanagement	DE: Damages FI: Not expected from leadership → suggests that it may damage	Transactional (active management by exception) and absence of certain characteristics of servant, transformational and authentic	Linked to the individualistic and low-power distance cultures, conflicts with autonomy expectations in both contexts, not expected in Finland, which suggests that it may be perceived negatively in relation to job satisfaction

5.3 Managerial implications

The results show that managers in Finland and Germany can support employee job satisfaction by being present and available, while simultaneously providing employees possibilities for independent work and decision-making. The results demonstrate that employees value trust and independence, but not abandonment or absence from the manager.

In order to support job satisfaction in Finland and Germany, the managers should provide clear feedback, recognition and communication to the employees. Furthermore, micromanagement and passive leadership should be avoided in the organisations, as the results indicate that excessive control and lack of leadership can damage job satisfaction.

Therefore, organisations should find a proper balance between micromanagement and passive leadership to support job satisfaction.

5.4 Conclusion

The aim of this research was to explore leadership style perceptions in relation to job satisfaction in the Finnish and German cultural contexts and to understand how these perceptions can be explained in each context. The research question of this thesis was as follows:

Which leadership styles do employees in Finland and in Germany perceive as the most supportive and the most damaging to job satisfaction, and how can these perceptions be understood within each national context?

In conclusion, the findings of this study suggest that transformational and servant leadership styles support job satisfaction in Finland and Germany. In addition, the findings indicate that authentic leadership style and certain elements of transactional leadership style, particularly contingent rewards, can positively influence on job satisfaction in both contexts. In contrast, transactional leadership style, particularly the active and passive management by exception, as well as passive leadership style, such as the laissez-faire leadership style, are damaging job satisfaction in these contexts. In addition, a leadership style that lacks transformational, servant and authentic leadership characteristics such as support for employee autonomy, independent decision-making and empathy, damages job satisfaction in both contexts.

Despite the same leadership styles being supportive or damaging in both contexts, the findings suggest that cultural context can shape different factors contributing either positively or negatively to job satisfaction. Participants for both countries emphasised autonomy and feedback as supportive of their job satisfaction. In contrast, managerial absence, excessive hierarchy, micromanagement and lack of empathy were perceived negatively in both contexts. These perceptions can be understood with the help of similar

cultural characteristics of Finland and Germany, as both cultures emphasise low hierarchy, the independence and success of the individual and direct communication. However, the findings demonstrate differences that can be explained by the cultural characteristics. The Finnish cultural context places bigger emphasis on the equality and overall well-being, while the German context emphasises performance, achievement, clarity and structure as factors contributing to job satisfaction. These different aspects, which shape job satisfaction in these contexts, can be explained by individual cultural characteristics of the countries.

5.5 Limitations of the study

This study has six potential limitations worth acknowledging. Firstly, this study focuses on the contexts of Finland and Germany; therefore, the findings can be applicable to only those contexts. Secondly, the sample size of eight participants, with four participants from each country, is another limitation of this study. The small sample size might affect the generalisability of the results. In other words, it means the findings cannot be generalised and used to make broad claims about the national cultures of Finland and Germany. However, the study was qualitative in nature, and the focus was to gain in-depth leadership perceptions rather than to make statistical conclusions. In addition, sample was gathered through personal networks and snowball sampling, which can potentially impact the credibility of the results.

Results from the interviews with the Finnish participants were translated to English, while interviews with the German participants were conducted in English. Therefore, possible translation error is a fourth limitation of the thesis, as translation errors or the fact that some participants could not share their perceptions in their first language, might alter the original message of the participants. This can affect to the trustworthiness of this research. Fifth limitation is that two of the eight interviews were not recorded, which may have affected the amount of detailed data obtained from those two interviews. However, notes were taken carefully during those interviews to ensure all relevant information was gathered and analysed.

Finally, the research was conducted within a limited time, which may have influenced the duration of data collection period and the depth of the analysis. Therefore, it can be stated that broader sample, longer data collection and analysis could have provided more in-depth leadership perceptions from Finland and Germany.

5.6 Suggestions for further research

This research could be repeated with a bigger sample size from both countries and a longer timeframe for data collection and analysis. This could provide more in-depth findings concerning this topic. Moreover, to make more generalisable results, this research could be repeated as quantitative research to test whether the same patterns appear in a larger sample size. Furthermore, future research could combine qualitative and quantitative methods to make more statistical conclusions while simultaneously gaining a deeper understanding on the prevailing reasons.

Future research could also explore the relationship between the laissez-faire leadership style and job satisfaction in cross-cultural contexts. This research could be quantitative in order to understand the relationship with a large sample. Later on, qualitative research could add to the quantitative research by researching employee perceptions in more detail and understanding the experiences, feelings and reasons behind the relationship between the laissez-faire leadership style and job satisfaction.

Finally, future research could compare more countries in order to obtain deeper understanding of how cultural context impacts the leadership style perceptions in relation to job satisfaction. This would provide meaningful insights from various countries and ultimately help to better understand how national context can impact leadership style perceptions in relation to job satisfaction.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Cultural dimensions of Finland and Germany by Hofstede

Dimension	Description	Country score (FI & DE)
Power distance	Different attitudes to power between leaders and followers	FI: 33 DE: 35 Difference: 2
Individualism vs. collectivism	The extent to which people are seen as independent or as part of a collective	FI: 75 DE: 79 Difference: 4
Uncertainty avoidance	The extent to which people are comfortable with an unknown future	FI: 59 DE: 65 Difference: 6
Motivation towards Achievement and success (Masculinity vs. femininity)	The extent to which the society is driven by competition, achievement and success	FI: 26 DE: 66 Difference: 40
Long-term vs. short-term orientation	The extent to which tradition is valued over innovation and change	FI: 63 DE: 57 Difference: 6
Indulgence vs. restraint	The extent to which leisure and enjoyment are enabled or constrained	FI: 57 DE: 40 Difference: 17

Source: adapted from Galloway (2022, pp. 125-127); The Culture Factor Group (n.d.)

Appendix 2. Cultural dimensions of Finland and Germany by the GLOBE project

Dimension	Description	Country score (FI & DE west)
Uncertainty avoidance	Extent to which people avoid uncertainty by adherence to norms and traditions	FI: 5.02 DE: 5.22 Difference: 0.20
Power distance	Extend to which people accept hierarchical power and power differences	FI: 4.89 DE: 5.25 Difference: 0.36
Institutional collectivism	Extent to which organisations and society enable collective efforts	FI: 4.63 DE: 3.79 Difference: 0.84
In-group collectivism	Extent to which people feel loyalty and belonging	FI: 4.07 DE: 4.02 Difference: 0.05
Gender egalitarianism	Extend to which collective aims to minimise gender inequality	FI: 3.35 DE: 3.1 Difference: 0.25
Assertiveness	Extend to which people are aggressive and confrontational	FI: 3.81 DE: 4.55 Difference: 0.74
Future orientation	Extend to which people future plan and defer returns	FI: 4.24 DE: 4.27 Difference: 0.03
Performance orientation	Extend to which people are rewarded for performance	FI: 3.81 DE: 4.25 Difference: 0.44
Humane orientation	Extend to which people are rewarded for fairness and altruism	FI: 3.96 DE: 3.18 Difference: 0.78

Source: adapted from Galloway (2022, pp. 125-127); The Globe Project (n.d.-a); The Globe Project (n.d.-b).

Appendix 3. Interview guide EN

Theme 1. Background information

1. What is your nationality?
2. How many years of work experience do you have?
3. What is your industry/field?

Theme 2. General perceptions on manager's leadership style

4. Consider your most relevant manager. How have you experienced their leadership style in general?

Follow-up prompts:

- How do they typically lead people daily?
- How do they make decisions / communicate with employees?
- How much autonomy do they give?

Theme 3. Leadership style and positive impact on job satisfaction

5. Consider your most relevant manager. Can you tell me about a specific situation in which you experienced that your manager's leadership style had a positive impact on your job satisfaction?
 - a. What happened?
 - b. What did the manager do?
 - c. How did you feel?
 - d. Why did you experience it positively?

Follow-up prompts:

- Was this a one-time behaviour or is it a broader pattern?
 - How did it affect your motivation, satisfaction or well-being?
 - Do you think that it is related to workplace culture, communication style or something else in Finland or Germany?
 - What does this tell you about their leadership style?
6. Thinking about the situation which you just described, what kind of leadership style would you say positively impacts your job satisfaction the most in your experience?
 - a. Why?

Theme 4. Leadership style and negative impact on job satisfaction

7. Consider your most relevant manager. Can you tell me about one specific situation in which you experienced that your manager's leadership style impacted negatively on your job satisfaction?
 - a. What happened?
 - b. What did the manager do?
 - c. How did you feel?
 - d. Why did you experience it negatively?

Follow up prompts:

- Was this a one-time behaviour or is it a broader pattern?
 - How did it affect your motivation, satisfaction or well-being?
 - Do you think that it is related to workplace culture, communication style re something else in Finland or Germany?
 - What does this tell you about their leadership style?
8. Thinking about the situation which you just described, what kind of leadership style would you say decreases your job satisfaction the most in your experience?
 - a. Why?

Theme 5. Leadership expectations in the national contexts

9. What kind of leadership is generally expected in your country?
 - a. What kind of leadership is considered good? Why?
 - b. What kind of leadership is considered bad? Why?

Follow up prompts

- Do you think that it is related to workplace culture, communication style or something else in Finland or Germany?
- Do you think these expectations would be different in the other context (Finland/Germany)? If yes, how?

Closing

10. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 4. Interview guide FI

Teema 1. Taustakysymykset:

1. Mikä on kansalaisuutesi?
2. Kuinka monta vuotta työkokemusta sinulla on?
3. Millä alalla työskentelet / mikä on toimialasi?

Teema 2. Yleiset kuvailut johtamistyylistä

4. Ajattele sinulle merkityksellisintä esihenkilöäsi. Millaisena olet kokenut hänen johtamistyyllinsä yleisellä tasolla?

Tarkentavat kysymykset:

- Miten hän tyypillisesti johtaa ihmisiä päivittäisessä työssä?
- Miten hän tekee päätöksiä / viestii työntekijöiden kanssa?
- Kuinka paljon hän antaa autonomiaa?

Teema 3. Johtamistyyli ja positiivinen vaikutus työtyytyväisyyteen

5. Ajattele sinulle merkityksellisintä esihenkilöäsi. Voitko kertoa konkreettisen tilanteen, jossa koit, että hänen johtamistyyllinsä vaikutti positiivisesti työtyytyväisyyteesi?
 - a. Mitä tapahtui?
 - b. Mitä esihenkilö teki?
 - c. Miltä sinusta tuntui?
 - d. Miksi koit tilanteen positiivisena?

Tarkentavat kysymykset:

- Oliko kyse yksittäisestä tilanteesta vai laajemmasta toimintatavasta?
- Miten se vaikutti motivaatioosi, tyytyväisyyteesi tai hyvinvointiisi?
- Uskotko, että tämä liittyy työpaikan kulttuuriin, viestintätapaan tai johonkin muuhun Suomessa tai Saksassa?
- Mitä tämä kertoo hänen johtamistyylistään?

6. Ajatellen kuvaamaasi tilannetta, millaiset johtamistavat vaikuttavat kokemuksesi mukaan eniten positiivisesti työtyytyväisyytesi?
a. Miksi?

Teema 4. Johtamistyyli ja negatiivinen vaikutus työtyytyväisyyteen

7. Ajattele sinulle merkityksellisintä esihenkilöäsi. Voitko kertoa yhden konkreettisen tilanteen, jossa koit, että hänen johtamistyyliinsä vaikutti negatiivisesti työtyytyväisyytesi?
a. Mitä tapahtui?
b. Mitä esihenkilö teki?
c. Miltä sinusta tuntui?
d. Miksi koit tilanteen negatiivisena?

Tarkentavat kysymykset:

- Oliko kyse yksittäisestä tilanteesta vai laajemmasta toimintatavasta?
- Miten se vaikutti motivaatioosi, tyytyväisyytesi tai hyvinvointiisi?
- Uskotko, että tämä liittyy työpaikan kulttuuriin, viestintätapaan tai johonkin muuhun Suomessa tai Saksassa?
- Mitä tämä kertoo hänen johtamistyylistään?

8. Ajatellen kuvaamaasi tilannetta, millainen johtamistavat vaikuttavat kokemuksesi mukaan eniten negatiivisesti työtyytyväisyytesi?
a. Miksi?

Teema 5. Johtamisodotukset kansallisessa kontekstissa

9. Millainen johtaminen on yleisesti odotettua maassasi?
a. Millainen johtaminen koetaan hyvänä? Miksi?
b. Millainen johtaminen koetaan huonona? Miksi?

Tarkentavat kysymykset:

- Uskotko, että tämä liittyy työpaikan kulttuuriin, viestintätapaan tai johonkin muuhun Suomessa tai Saksassa?
- Uskotko, että nämä odotukset olisivat erilaisia toisessa kontekstissa (Suomi/Saksa)? Jos kyllä, miten?

Lopetus

10. Haluaisitko vielä lisätä jotain?