

MASTER THESIS

EFFECTIVENESS OF HUMBLE LEADERSHIP FOR CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION IN CONTEXT OF ONLINE-BASED STARTUPS: A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION

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I ABSTRACT

Humble leadership (HLB) has gained increasing attention in research recently as the world becomes more complex and the difficulty rises for leaders to know everything on their own. There is almost no published research concerning the role of HLB for the creative and innovative (C&I) behavior of employees in startups with online-based business models. The purpose of this study is to find out *how* HLB can foster C&I related to business model development and *under which circumstances* it is effective.

19 semi-structured interviews have been conducted with founders of startups in Berlin. The companies were in an age between 6 months to 3.5 years and had staff between 5 to 150 employees. The interviews were analyzed with the help of the combination of elements grounded theory and of elements of template analysis.

This thesis found evidence for the importance of HLB for the startup development. It suggests that the effectivity of HLB differs over lifecycle stage and the kind of the affected C&I. External development associated with an earlier stage requires the leader to admit failures whereas for internal development associated with a later stage the spotlighting of followers strengths becomes more important.

This study adds insights to the HLB research, the business model related C&I research, and gives practical advices to founders and investors which behaviors are useful to accelerate a company's success.

Keywords: Humble leadership, creativity, innovation, startup, lifecycle stage, qualitative study

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| | |
|---------|---|
| C&I | Creativity and Innovation |
| CIT | Critical Incident Technique |
| HLB | Humble Leadership Behavior |
| MVP | Minimum Viable Product |
| Product | Product or Service (depending on the company, the term product also includes offered services) |

1 INTRODUCTION

Young and technology-based companies can contribute to an essential part to create employment and innovations (Bollinger, Hope & Utterback 1983; Dorfman, 1983). The positive economic effects associated with those kinds of companies only come into effect if they can establish in the market successfully. They must transform their technology into a product or service which will be appreciated by the market (Walter, 2010).

In digital businesses the market entrance became easier by having lower barriers due to the minimum amount of physical assets necessary to create and test a product (Ries, 2011). Market conditions and the technology environment change faster. Becoming and staying successful means to create new products and services and put continuously efforts to improve them by innovation. Under those conditions the importance of creativity and innovation is emphasized by scientist and practitioners (Ford & Gioia, 1995; King & Anderson, 2002). Hence, founders of startups across various industries aspire to create and transform their organizations in order to be capable to realize desired innovations (Fahlenbrach, 2007; Ling, Simsek, Lubatkin & Veiga, 2008). Startups in this study will be defined as “human institution designed to create new products and services under conditions of extreme uncertainty” (Ries, 2011, pos. 187). Recently, a management approach called *lean startup* gained higher attention when building a startup. Basically the approach champions the idea to build a prototype of a product or service called *minimum viable product* (MVP) as fast as possible in order to test it with a real customer rather than to develop an idea to edge in private under the high probability of disregarding a gap between offer and market need (Ries, 2011).

Research showed that leaders have a significant effect on the innovative outcome of their employee (Chen, Tang, Jin, Xie, & Li, 2014; Kang, Solomon & Choi, 2015; Mumford, Scott, Gaddis, Strange, 2002). Recently, humble leadership (HLB) becomes more relevant in research (de Haan, 2015; Morris, Brotheridge & Urbanski, 2005; Ou, Tsui, Kinicki, Waldman, Xiao & Song, 2014; Owens & Hekman, 2012; Owens, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2013). It evolved through the growing complexity and diversity of firms which implies that it becomes less feasible for leaders to know everything and to steer every decision. Owens and Hekman (2012) described humble leaders as those who inhabited one or all of the three traits: (a) admitting mistakes and limitations, (b) spotlighting follower strengths and contributions and (c) modeling

teachability. They discovered positive impacts on company outcomes. As positive effects of HLB they described an improved leader-follower relationship through identification and an increased follower engagement especially for intrinsic motivated employees (Owens & Hekman, 2012). But there is little research about the effectiveness of humble leadership on the creative and innovative outcome of employees. Additionally, there is a gap in research and a lack of consensus how leadership styles are effective for the outcomes in startups when they are in earlier stages (Kang, Solomon & Choi 2015; Marzler et al., 2008). Research indicated that the organizational environment of young and innovative companies differs from that of large organizations. As contingencies they defined the amount of resources available, degree of uncertainty and a closer relationship between the leaders and their employees (Ensley, Hmieleski & Pearce, 2006a). Hence, this study can add insights to the body of leadership research in regard of young companies.

This research is relevant for both, researchers and practitioners, to understand how founders can accelerate one of their most important assets, their innovative outcome concerning products and service development and their customer orientation. HLB sounds to be a promising concept as the volatile markets relevant for the raising attention of HLB are especially true for startups. Therefore the purpose of this study is to explore the role of humble leadership for followers' creativity and innovative behavior in startups with an online-based business model. In the present study I will focus on C&I related to business model development. This will add insights to research twofold: Firstly, through deeper knowledge about the practical application of humble leadership on innovative outcomes and it will define its contingencies. Secondly, how leadership in its specifications of humble leadership is effective in small and highly innovative companies.

Founders of startups are confronted with changing situations every day and have to balance different challenges. In this study they will find evidence, if the concept of humble leadership is successful in their business field. Due to the phenomenological perspective of the study specific situations are described comprehensively. This will enable founders to learn and to adapt insights to their own specific business contexts. The study will provide insights for current founders as well for those people who are about to launch a company. It may also provide indications for investors which leadership traits a founder or team should inhabit in order to raise up a company in highly volatile environments successfully. Especially interesting

for practitioners, this study will also take a look at how well humble leadership fits to the lean startup philosophy.

This master thesis aims at (a) finding out how humility applies to startups and if humility fosters innovation, (2) defining contingencies where humility is perceived to improve leader's decisions and in which humility is not and (3) understanding the management approach in a startup.

Those research aims narrow down to the research question:

- How do entrepreneurs assess the effectiveness of humble leadership behaviors for business model-related innovation and creativity in the context of online-based startups?

Followed by the sub-questions:

- Which contingencies impact the effectiveness of humble leadership behaviors for business model-related innovation and creativity in the context of online-based startups?
- How does humble leadership behaviors apply to the effectiveness of the lean startup approach?

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The following sections will describe the main concepts used in this study. The concepts of humble leadership (2.1), creativity and innovation (2.2), the influence of leadership on the creative outcome of employees (2.3) and the business model development including its accompanying concepts (2.4) will be discussed.

2.1 HUMBLE LEADERSHIP

The attention on humility and humble leadership rose in recent times. As the world becomes more complex (Senge, 1990) and diverse, markets continue to globalize and firms grow and change faster, humility becomes more relevant. In such environments the difficulty increases for a single leader to know everything by himself (Owens & Hekman, 2012). Deriving from the latin words "humus" for earth and "humi" on the ground, literally speaking humble leadership

means “leading from the ground” (Owens & Hekman, 2012, p. 787), implying that leaders consider their followers as valuable and equal cooperation partners. They provide them with the necessary drive, capabilities, resources and confidence to complete their leadership skills. In common sense humility is sometimes seen as a weakness but researchers argue it is more a trait which leads to a more powerful and effective leadership behavior (Morris et al., 2005; Nielsen, Marrone & Slay, 2010; Owens & Hekman, 2012; Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004). Owens et al. (2013) described humility as an “increase in the valuation of others and not a decrease in the valuation of self” (p. 1519). According to Burke (2006) the success of leaders will not be decided by “what they know or how bright they are” but by “how well they work with others, and how well they understand themselves” (p. 94).

Owens and Hekman (2012) conceptualized humble leadership as leaders who inhabited behaviors which are observable by peers and followers: (a) admitting mistakes and limitations, (b) spotlighting follower strengths and contributions and (c) modeling teachability. In changing environments it is continuously necessary to learn and improve. They noted that humble leaders at their most basic level “model how to grow to their followers” (p. 801). They stated that humble leaders do not just talk about the necessary aspects; they support their followers’ development and growth by exemplifying themselves as a role model.

Admitting mistakes and limitations refers to the “willingness to view oneself accurately” (Owens et al., 2013, p. 1518). Leaders with that trait are seeking for realistic feedback to build up an objective view of themselves. It helps to improve the interpersonal interactions between leaders and their followers: “self-disclosure often leads to increased trust, relational satisfaction, and reciprocal disclosure” (Owens et al., 2013, p. 1519). An accurate self-awareness also helps leaders to know in which areas they are capable to decide and in which areas it would be better to learn more about an issue.

Spotlighting follower strengths and contributions means in the first place to acknowledge others’ strengths. In the second place it means to show them that a leader values those strengths and efforts. By holding a “nonheuristic, complex view of others” (Owens et al., 2013, p. 1520) humble leaders can identify others’ valuable resources better and can deploy their employees more beneficially in organizational activities.

Leaders which are modeling teachability show “openness to learning, feedback, and new ideas from others” (Owens et al., 2013, p. 1520). Humble leaders are open minded, they seek for advice and they have “a desire to learn” (Owens et al., 2013, p. 1520). Under the conditions

of a knowledge intensive economy the absorptive capacity is one of the most critical ones for an effective leader.

Owens and Hekman (2012) describe humility as a fundamental catalyst to develop themselves and their followers. By acknowledging mistakes and limitations they are honest about the areas for improvement, they foster learning among their followers by spotlighting their strengths and they serve as a role model for learning by behaving curious and working on their own development.

2.2 CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

Innovative behavior is an important factor for the success of companies (Walter, 2010). Creativity typically refers to the production of new and useful ideas by an individual or a small group of individuals working together whereas innovation refers to the actual implementation and usage of those ideas in business' context (Anderson, Potočnik & Zhou, 2014; Baer, 2012). Research construes the relationship between creativity and innovation as a multistage process, creativity in this context is perceived as reaction to problem recognition (Janssen, 2000; Krause, 2004). Problem recognition will be followed by idea generation, creation of an environment of support for ideas, and finally idea implementation (Kang et al., 2015).

In the first place an organization needs a climate which favors novel and useful ideas (Amabile, 1996; Ford, 1996). Baer (2012) describes the implementation of ideas as a social-political process. Studies figured out that creativity does not necessarily lead to innovative outcomes hence it is interest to define factors that influence that process. The relationship between creativity and innovation is moderated by employees' motivation, their ability to network and existing relationships which determines to which extend ideas are realized (Baer, 2012). Ford (1996) suggested goals, rewards, capabilities and emotions as underlying issues for motivation. Furthermore, other mediators as discussed in research are cross-cultural differences, motivational orientations and leadership preferences (Rank et al., 2004).

Krause (2004) examined how leadership affects innovative behaviors. She figured out that granting freedom and autonomy are highly relevant for innovative behaviors. Referring to the social-exchange theory Janssen (2000) found evidence for the effect between the perceived effort-reward fairness and the innovative behavior of employee, which means that employees become more engaged in innovation when they can expect higher personal rewards.

2.3 LEADERSHIP INFLUENCE ON CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

Kruse defines leadership as “a process of social influence, which maximizes the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal” (Kruse, 2013). As Gardner (1990) elaborates “leadership is the accomplishment of group purpose, which is furthered not only by effective leaders but also by innovators, entrepreneurs, and thinkers; by the availability of resources; by questions of value and social cohesion” (p. 38).

Researchers have examined the role of leaders on C&I of their followers and found evidence for an impact (Anderson et al., 2014; Kang et al., 2015; Kato, 2015; Mumford, Scott, Gaddis & Strange, 2002). Ling et al. (2008) suggest that effective leadership at the top management level has a positive impact on organizations of all sizes when pursuing innovation. Nevertheless Kang et al. (2015) notes the lack of studies examining the impact of various leadership styles on innovative behavior in startups.

The effect of transformational and transactional leadership on innovation is still discussed in research and it seems to vary upon circumstances. More often transformational leadership is associated with a positive impact on followers’ innovative behavior (Chang & Lee, 2007; Pieterse, Van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2010) whereas no positive impact has been found for the relation between transactional leadership and innovative followers’ behavior (Boerner et al., 2007). In large and mature organizations a negative relationship between transactional leadership and innovative behavior has been identified (Pieterse et al., 2010).

Basu and Green (1997) did not find a relationship of a high level of transformational leadership necessarily leading to a stronger innovative behavior of their employees and in some cases they found even a negative relationship but they identified leader support und followers commitment as predictors for innovative behavior. Generally speaking leadership styles affect the outcomes of followers depending on the situation (Owens & Hekman, 2012). Times of extreme challenge or crisis could provide circumstances when transformational leadership can be particularly effective (Kang, Solomon & Choi, 2015). Thus Kang et al. (2015) proposes the effectivity of transformational leadership for a startup in their early growth stage when it struggles in the dilemma of scarce resources and the need to experiment to find a business model. On the other hand they suggest a different role of transactional leadership for startups in the survival stage. Following the argumentation of Ensley et al. (2006b), Kang et al. (2015) suggest a more directive leadership could be helpful for the performance in terms of setting

expectations and clarifying contingent rewards. The high uncertainty of startups in that stages and a lack of job security for employees might require leaders to radiate more direction due to a more transactional leadership behavior (Ensley et al., 2006b).

Tarabishy et al. (2005) and Waldman and Yammarino (1999) exhibit another point why startups differ from larger organizations. Executives tend to be more influential in companies of a smaller size because the relationship between leaders and their followers is more intimate which concludes that leaders have a more accurate view of their employees. Thus their transformational leadership style could be better adapted to the organization and though more influential in leader's will (Waldman & Yammarino, 1999). As humble leadership is more associated with transformational leadership than with transactional leadership (Judge & Piccolo, 2004), this study suggests that findings in transformational leadership are particularly adaptable.

Beside Gonçalves et al. (2015) no published research links humble leadership to the innovative outcome of followers. Gonçalves does not identify a direct link between humility and innovative outcome but humble behavior as facilitator to create conditions for individuals and teams to be creative. They figure out that not self-reported humility but humility as reported by team members created an atmosphere where teams feel psychologically safer, which raises their psychological capital and at the end leads to be more creative.

As described before, findings on leadership virtues cannot be generalized for all forms of organizations. For that reason this study can add unique insights how humble leadership is effective in various stages of online startups.

2.4 BUSINESS MODEL DEVELOPMENT

2.4.1 Startup

Startups gain increasing attention especially in Berlin's economy. As the label is used often it needs to be considered that not every new company is a startup. Whereas the Bundeswirtschaftsministerium (German Federal Ministry of Economics) counts 346,400 companies founded in 2012 (BMW, 2013) the German Startup Monitor 2013 only counts 5,000 startups with an average age of 2.4 years in Germany (GSM, 2013). As defined by Ries (2011), a startup is a "human institution designed to create new products and services under conditions of extreme uncertainty" (pos. 187). Blank and Dorf (2012) define as startup "a

temporary organization in search of a scalable, repeatable, profitable business model” (p. xvii.). Generally startups are labeled as young ventures with an over-proportioned growth and an innovative potential to differentiate from market and competitors limited by scarce resources in funding and employee (Hahn, 2014). The Bundesverband Deutscher Startups (BVDS, German federal associations of startups) numerates the following properties of startups: (a) younger than 10 years, (b) significant growth of employees or revenue and (c) a high focus and capability to be innovative. (GSM, 2014).

Learning plays a central role in a startup as characterized by Ries (2011): A startup “exists to learn how to build a sustainable business” (pos. 189-90). As described in chapter 2.4.2 in more detail, this learning comes from experiments based on certain assumptions. When experiments appear to succeed, an entrepreneur found a piece of a puzzle of a potentially successful business model. When assumptions are falsified the team becomes more experienced and is able to test the next set of assumptions (Blank & Dorf, 2012; Ries, 2011).

2.4.2 Lean Startup Approach

In an early lifecycle stage usually revenues are significantly lower than the costs of operations. This results in losses, therefore startups are dependent on financing sources outside of the operating business (Leach & Melicher, 2012). At the very beginning founders’ funds, money from friends and families helps to cover the first expenditures (Hahn, 2014). But hiring the first employees often calls for investors with strong financial power like business angels, venture capitalist and banks.

Unless founders are encouraged to experiment on one hand they are constantly in need to deliver success to sustain the investors’ trust on the other hand. In the beginning this success comes out not to be economical but at least investors want to perceive that actions are on the right track to realize future profits. This leads to a dilemma founders face: On one hand they need to give the freedom to experiment, and on the other hand they are in charge to spend resources economically and create success. Forbes formulated the twist as follows: “Focus, Focus, Focus -- But on What?” (Roth, 2012). As solutions he proposed that entrepreneurs should build their company “around a market need with customers in the front seat” because startups would fail more often because of a lack of customers than of a failure in product development (Roth, 2012). This might have a distinctive impact on the leadership behavior of founders.

At this point the lean startup approach developed by Ries (2011) is a suitable concept. He describes how an entrepreneur is able to test his idea by the help of a minimum viable product (MVP). Without large investments it would be possible to realize if a customer understands the product or service, if it reduces or eliminates the customer's problem, if the product delivers a certain value and if the customer has a suitable willingness to pay. By this approach an entrepreneur can conduct experimentation but still be focused because wrong ideas are eliminated fast and resources are still spend economically.

If it turns out that a product or a particular feature of a product can address its customers, it can be introduced to the target market and the first revenues can be generated. Further customer feedback helps to continuously improve the product or service.

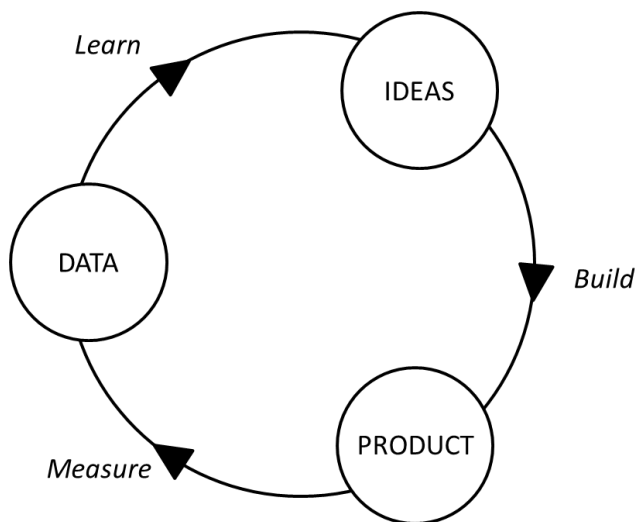


Figure 1: Depiction of the Build-Measure-Learn Loop

Figure 1 depicts the *Build-Measure-Learn Loop* (Ries, 2011). The concept is based on the aim to get in customer contact as fast as possible to receive a more precise view of the customer demands. The first step is the idea. The idea will be build or programmed as a MVP. Regarding Steve Blank a MVP seeks “to build the smallest possible feature set” (Blank & Dorf, 2012, p. 60). After measurements are defined to test whether a product is fine or not, the prototype will be offered to the customer. Although the revenues are not important in this stage, Ries (2012) states it is important to set a price for the product to get customer feedback as realistic as possible. From the data generated, the entrepreneurial team has a basis for further learning. The data indicates more precisely what the customer wants and which features he does not value. From those outcomes new ideas can be generated.

This approach refers to the customer development concept which emphasized customer orientation instead of product orientation as Maurya (2012) emphasizes: „Understand the customer’s worldview before formulating a solution“(p. 81). Blank follows with the provocative statement: “There are no facts inside your building, so get the heck outside“(Blank & Dorf, 2012, p. xxix). The lean-startup-approach highlights the essential role of learning and creativity but also states that entrepreneurial success comes from stringent management steering rather than luck or chance (Ries, 2011).

The lean startup approach has strong implications on the leadership behavior of entrepreneurs. They are called to train their employees in deductive and inductive thinking and they must create an atmosphere where employees are motivated to experiment and do not feel blamed when they make a mistake. Hence, the HLB trait *admitting mistakes and limitations* is supposed to play a role when founders manage their startup by applying the lean startup approach.

2.4.3 Business Model

As written previously the product is crucial for the company’s success but especially to actually reach customers. The business model describes the “rationale of how an organization creates, delivers, and captures value” (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010, p. 14). Schallmo defines the business model as a “company’s basic logic which value will be delivered to customers and partner and the value will be delivered” (2013, p. 16). The business model answers the question how the delivered value comes back to the company in form of revenues.

Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010) developed a framework for a business model which makes it intuitively understandable, relevant and simple. The framework enhances its function as a tool to communicate about strategic opportunities and discuss with employees and partners. They called their framework *business model canvas* which consists of four main areas separated in nine parts: customers (customer segments, customer relationship, and channels), offer (value propositions), infrastructure (key activities, key partners, and key resources) and financial viability (cost structure, revenue streams).

As the environment of a company changes also a business model needs to be adapted over time if not totally changed. Also newly gained insights can work as impetus for adjustments. Usually a business model becomes more complex in later lifecycle stages when the company

supplies more than one customer group. But for the beginning, focusing is more important than trying to cover all potential revenue streams (Ries, 2011; Roth, 2012)

2.4.4 Lifecycle Stages

Ventures undergo a maturation process in their first years. Leach and Melicher (2012) defined five stages of successful ventures in their early lifecycle: development stage, startup stage, survival stage, rapid-growth stage and early-maturity stage (p. 20 et seqq.).

In the **development stage** the entrepreneurial team generates ideas for a potential product, service or process and assesses the associated business opportunities by getting initial feedback from friends, family members and professionals. Positive feedback brings the potential founders closer to building a prototype for the prospected project.

The **startup stage** describes the time when the venture and funding is organized and the founders focus on a business model and plan. The acquisition of any initial resources is also a part before at the point “zero” the first product or service is sold.

In the **survival stage** the venture is generating more revenue but does not typically cover all costs from the operations. It is dependent on external financing sources and has therefore to convince external financing sources for future profits. Often the business will refocus or restructure based on the initial market experiences.

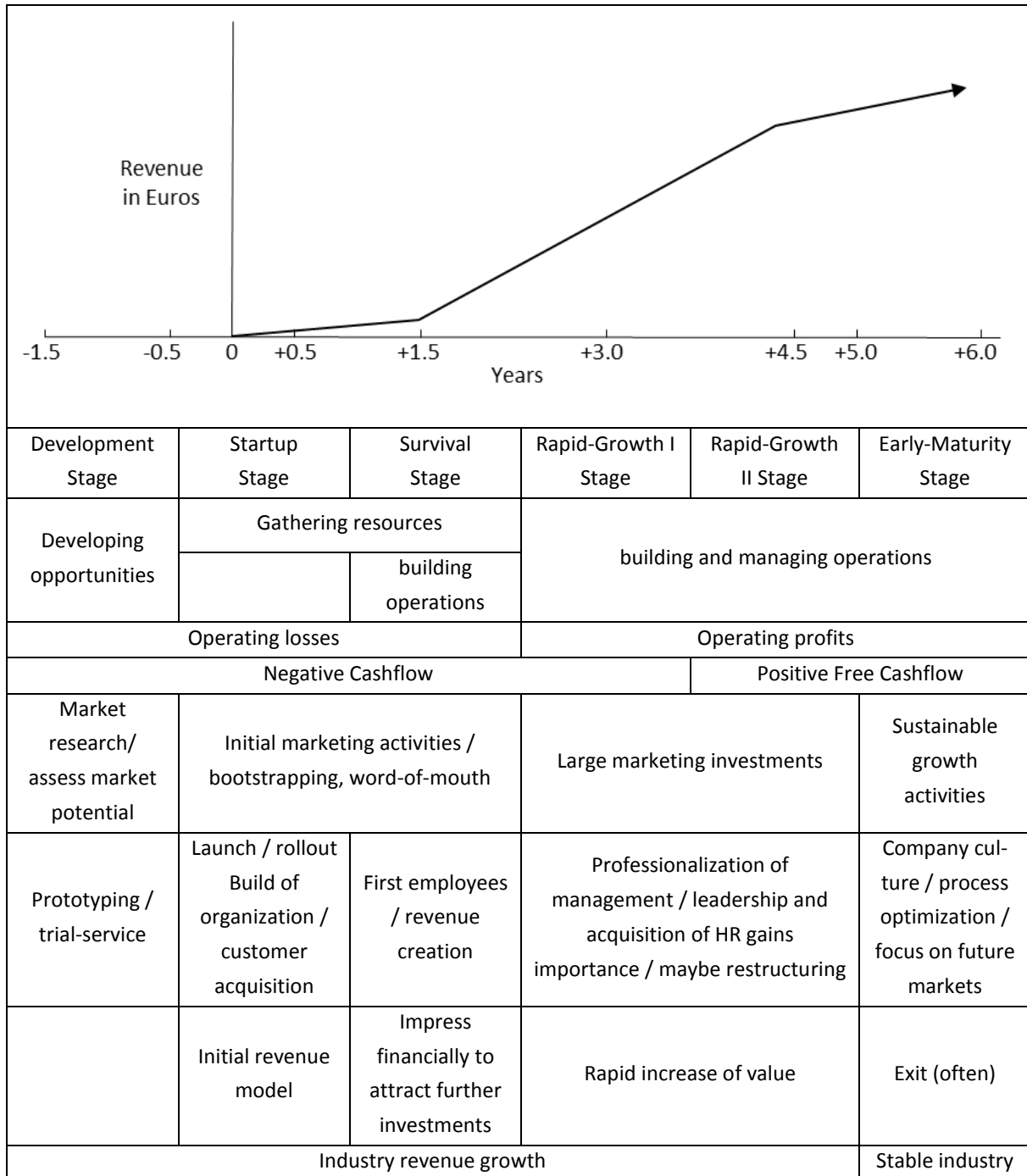
After the business model has become more established, the **rapid-growth stage** starts. The cash flows from operations are growing faster than the cash outflows. The venture benefits from economies of scale in production and distribution. The management focus shifts from exploration to exploitation. During the rapid-growth stage the venture break through the break-even point. That threshold demarcates the rapid-growth I from the rapid-growth II stage in this study. For a more precise attribution of findings this distinction was made in this study.

In the **early-maturity stage** the growth continues but at lower rates than in the stage before. Often in this stage the entrepreneurial team decides to undergo an exit through a sale or merger.

This thesis focuses on the humble leadership behavior in the context of the business model development in young entrepreneurial ventures. In the development stage startups do not have employees, as well as they are usually not employing more than five employees in the

startup stage. For that reason this study focuses on the survival stage, the rapid-growth stage and the early-maturity stage in which founders must apply leadership behavior.

Table 1: Classification of Lifecycle Stages



Own depiction; based on Leach & Melicher (2012); Schefczyk (2006); Ripsas (1997)

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

This master thesis aims to uncover more insights about the phenomenon of humble leadership and its influence on business model development. It strives for a theory building approach rather than a theory testing approach. In order to distinguish it from the study by Owens and Hekman (2012), this master thesis will focus on the startup sector, which is associated with relatively small (<150 employee) and young (<4 years) companies with a high demand for explorative activities. Therefore for answering the research questions a qualitative grounded theory research design is necessary.

Such an exploratory study suits properly in order to find out “what is happening; to seek new insights; to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light” (Saunders, 2007, p. 130). Qualitative research takes leadership as a dynamic process, its practices and viewpoints are varying in the field because of the diverse subjective perspectives to the researched topic. On one hand qualitative research can “demonstrate this variety of perspectives” (Flick, 2009, p. 16), on the other hand open methods allows facing the complexity of the study’s subjects (Flick, 2009, p. 15). According to Goulding (2002) a grounded theory strategy is “particularly helpful for research to predict and explain behavior” (Saunders, 2007, p. 142).

The objective is the development of a conceptual research model which is based on the conducted interviews. Nevertheless, for the development of the interview guideline deductive elements were used such as general theoretical constructs from former literature.

3.2 PARTICIPANTS

The study population represents executives in online-based startups in Germany, which founded or co-founded the company. Berlin was chosen because it is the most relevant startup spot in Germany and second it was accessible for the researcher through first and second level contacts. 19 interviews were conducted until the theoretical saturation was reached. To find the respondents a purposive non-probability sampling was applied striving for diversity in the study populations such as gender, professional experience and age, positions (e.g. marketing, finance, sales) and business field (e.g. health, housing supplies, digital services in b2c and b2b-companies).

For this purpose the researcher interviewed eight founders from his own personal network.

In order to refine the developed concepts, new participants were added based on initial theoretical insights (Kenealy, 2004). 11 respondents were found due to snowball sampling where respondents referred to further respondents which were perceived to fulfill the criteria of this study. The theoretical saturation was reached when categories have been developed when new data did not suggest any further refinements.

3.2.1 Company Overview

The recruited respondents came from 19 different companies which are based in Berlin. All companies have an online-based business model which means that the main marketing and sales activities of the companies were conducted online. In some cases, the companies also developed distribution channels in representative stores and cooperated with offline stores to sell their products. Nevertheless those channels were established to raise awareness, increase the average utilization of company resources and support the effectiveness of the online-based business model.

After the interviews were performed the companies' lifecycle stage was assessed. The assessment was based on the criteria defined in chapter 2.4.4. These criteria were matched to the aspects mentioned during the interviews regarding the issues which the founders highlighted at the moment of the interview. Most important for the assessment was the status of business model development and the status of scaling the business. Since one minimum criterion of five employees was defined, there were no companies in the development or startup stage because those stages are usually provided by founders without help of employees.

Table 2 shows an overview of the 19 examined companies. The company age ranged between 6 months and 3.5 years. The number of employees was clustered in 5 groups ranging from 5-10 up to 101-150 employees. The founders were not counted as employees because employees in these cases represented the number of persons which were led by the founders. Table 3 indicates that company age and number of employee are no reliable indicators for its lifecycle stage. There are companies assessed to be in the *survival stage* ranging from 6 months to three years whereas the youngest company in the following *rapid growth I stage* is 9 months old. Critical for the speed of life cycle development is the status of business model development: the execution of a sound business model needs significantly less time than the development of a new business model.

The business models of the companies range widely: On one hand, the systematical structures such as b2c to b2b businesses and platforms which connects companies with customers and on the other hand, the business fields vary such as baby clothing, jewelry and online marketing service companies. The companies represent a wide range of different needs in their daily business and the kind of customers they are dealing with.

Table 2: Overview of Companies Interviewed

| Lifecycle Stage | Company Age | Number of Employee | Branch/ Business Field | Business Model |
|-----------------------|-------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Survival Stage | 0-1 | 5-10 | eCommerce Service (video) | B2B |
| | 0-1 | 11-20 | eCommerce Service (PoS) | B2B / SaaS |
| | 1-2 | 11-20 | Learning Application | B2C |
| | 1-2 | 11-20 | Learning Software | B2B / SaaS |
| | 1-2 | 11-20 | Recruiting Service | B2B / SaaS |
| | 2-3 | 11-20 | eCommerce (jewelry) | B2C |
| | 2-3 | 5-10 | Media Content Provider | B2C / subscription |
| | 2-3 | 5-10 | eCommerce (baby clothing) | B2C |
| | 2-3 | 5-10 | Service-Agency (sports marketing) | B2B |
| Rapid Growth I Stage | 0-1 | 51-100 | Fintech | Platform |
| | 1-2 | 51-100 | eCommerce Service (local business) | B2B / SaaS |
| | 3-4 | 11-20 | Employee Health Service | Platform / SaaS |
| | 3-4 | 5-10 | Fintech | B2C |
| Rapid Growth II Stage | 1-2 | 21-50 | eCommerce Service | Platform |
| | 2-3 | 11-20 | Nutritional Supplement | Started B2C, now also B2B |
| | 3-4 | 101-150 | eCommerce (design furnishing) | Started B2C, now also B2B |
| Early-Maturity Stage | 2-3 | 11-20 | eCommerce (groceries) | Started B2C, now also B2B |
| | 2-3 | 21-50 | eCommerce (furniture) | Started B2C, now also B2B |
| | 3-4 | 21-50 | eCommerce Service (shopping) | B2B |

Table 3: Coherence between Company Age and Number of Employee*

| | | Number of Employee | | | | |
|-------------|-----|--------------------|-------|-------|--------|---------|
| | | 5-10 | 11-20 | 21-50 | 51-100 | 101-150 |
| Company Age | 0-1 | ● | ● | - | ● | - |
| | 1-2 | - | ● ● ● | ● | ● | - |
| | 2-3 | ● ● ● | ● ● ● | ● | - | - |
| | 3-4 | ● | ● | ● | - | ● |

*Bullets indicate number of cases

3.2.2 Respondents Overview

The lifecycle stage of the companies was assessed during the analysis of the interviews and was not directly asked to the respondents. The reasoning for the assessment of the lifecycle stage is written in part 2.4.4.

The age of the respondents ranged from 24 to 35 years. The researcher tried to include female respondents in the study and acquired one female founder from his own network and another one as reference from another respondent. Overall the set was dominated by male respondents (17 of 19), which reflects the fact that a relatively small share of the founders are female in the startup scene. The founders have been asked how much leadership experience they already had before they founded the company. It was qualitatively assessed by the description of the respondents. A “no” meant no leadership at all or only leadership experience in voluntary organizations. “Small” meant the respondents already lead employee occasionally or interns in a former organization. The experience was assessed as “medium” when the respondents reported they already led project teams with 5 to 30 employees and “equal” meant the respondents already founded a company before with at least 5 employees or had the responsibility for a department in a large organization. The number of founders ranged from 1 to 5 per company whereas two founders was the dominant constellation (12 cases). In three cases there were four founders, in two cases one founder and in each one company there were one respectively five founders represented in the study.

Across the lifecycle stages the property of the respondents in the dimensions described above were mixed. Thus a wide variety of different constellations was reached.

Table 4: Respondents Overview

| Lifecycle Stage | Leadership Experience before Founding | Founder's Age | Number of Founders |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Survival Stage | no | 24-27 | 4 |
| | no | 28-31 | 4 |
| | small | 24-27 | 2 |
| | small | 28-31 | 2 |
| | medium | 24-27 | 1 |
| | medium | 32-35 | 2 |
| | medium | 32-35 | 2 |
| | equal | 24-27 | 2 |
| | equal | 28-31 | 2 |
| Rapid Growth I Stage | no | 28-31 | 5 |
| | equal | 28-31 | 4 |
| | equal | 28-31 | 2 |
| | equal | 32-35 | 3 |
| Rapid Growth II Stage | small | 28-31 | 2 |
| | medium | 28-31 | 2 |
| | equal | 32-35 | 1 |
| Early-Maturity Stage | no | 24-27 | 2 |
| | no | 32-35 | 2 |
| | equal | 32-35 | 2 |

Table 5 shows the coherence between respondent's age and prior leadership experience. It shows that the prior leadership experience is independent from age.

Table 5: Coherence between Respondent's Age and Prior Leadership Experience *

| | | Respondent's Age | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------|-------|-------|
| | | 24-27 | 28-31 | 32-35 |
| Prior Leadership Experience | No (or only voluntary) | ● ● | ● ● | ● |
| | Small (e.g. interns) | ● | ● ● | - |
| | Medium (e.g. small teams) | ● | ● | ● ● |
| | Equal (e.g. company, departments) | ● | ● ● ● | ● ● ● |

*Bullets indicate number of cases

3.3 DATA COLLECTION

The primary data were gathered by semi-structured interviews. In the semi-structured interviews the researcher had a list of topics and questions to be covered, whilst a variation was allowed from interview to interview. According to Saunders the semi-structure allows to cover the humble leadership template given through former research but enhances the exploration of the research questions given in a specific organizational context (Saunders, 2007). Specifically the critical incident technique (CIT) was used, which was first developed by Flanagan (1954). It has been developed as an “investigative tool in organizational analysis from within an interpretative or phenomenological paradigm” (Chell, 2004, p. 45).

The interview guideline was developed in three steps. At first, the researcher defined topics and questions to be covered concerning the research questions and the appropriate literature. Secondly, the guideline was reviewed by the supervisors regarding shortcomings in methodology and content. Thirdly, after three conducted interviews in the field, the researcher checked if the intended issues were covered appropriately. Therefore, the guideline was adapted to enhance the fit to the organizational circumstances and the understandability.

The interview consisted of three sections. The first one covered the demographical, personal and professional background. The second section entailed questions concerning the business model, its development and specific areas of creativity and innovation which were dominant. The researcher intended to understand the circumstances that lead to certain decisions while the development process. The third and prevailing part asked about the leadership behavior and certain situations where the entrepreneurs behaved more or less humble. In this part the three traits of humble leadership behavior developed by Owens and Hekman (2012) were presented to the respondents and it was asked for particular examples. In those explanations, the critical incidents technique developed by Flanagan (1954) was applied. In a six step process following Chell (2004), the personal situation was analyzed. It started with the finding of personal incidents and in the following, questions concerning concrete behaviors were asked. This technique was used to reduce respondents' biases. Additionally it helps to “identify the context of emotionally laden critical events from which experiential learning takes place” (Chell, 2004, p. 45).

The interviews were conducted until the theoretical saturation was reached. During that

process the researcher noted that single aspects became saturated and he decided to shift the attention in following interviews to other aspects.

The interviews were conducted in an 8-week-period in November and December 2014. The interviews lasted on average 45 minutes (ranging from 35 to 55 minutes) and were electronically recorded and transcribed afterwards. 18 interview were conducted in German which represented the mother tongue of respondents and researcher, one interview was conducted in English. Regarding to Flick (2009) the researcher's impressions and reflections "become data in their own right, forming part of the interpretation" (Flick, 2009, p. 16). Therefore those notes were documented in the context protocols to enrich the reasonableness of the analysis.

3.4 CODING AND ANALYSIS

All 19 interviews were fully transcribed. The section of personal details were left out in the transcript for purpose of anonymization. Instead the researcher decided to cluster information like founders' age, company age and number of employees in order to prevent the possible identification of respondents for people who know Berlin's startup scene. Overall the interviews resulted in a transcript of about 200 pages.

The data analysis involved elements of template analysis (King, 2012) as well as elements of the grounded theory procedure described by Corbin and Stauss (Länsisalmi, Peiro & Kivimäki, 2004). The template analysis started with an initial template of existing categories and codes derived from the findings by Owens & Hekman (2012). During the coding procedure which was done by the researcher alone those codes were changed and adapted to the circumstances described in the interviews. The final template is represented as general research model in part 4.2.

The grounded theory approach started with an open coding. All units of meaning were coded, also in cases where no direct link to C&I or HLB was obvious. During that process more than 500 codes were created and used for around 2.300 times. 50 codes were used for 10 times or more. On the downside 102 codes were used twice and 230 codes were used only once. The codes covered different humble leadership behaviors, general leadership behaviors, they put a focus on different kinds of C&I and other statements concerning the attitude of the respondents and the description of certain situations.

In the second step of axial coding the codes and categories were related to each other via combination of inductive and deductive thinking. The comprehensive coding allowed the researcher to compare situations where the same or related codes were used in order to “discover the theory implicit in the data” (Kenealy, 2012, p. 408).

After the data analysis was completed and the core concepts emerged, during the selective coding the categories were further defined in order to build the holistic research model. The credibility of the finding is reached when they are “trustworthy and believable in that they reflect participants’, researchers’, and readers’ experiences with a phenomenon” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 302). This was assured twofold. Firstly, in June the researcher contacted the respondents again and asked for a voluntary member check. Three interviews were conducted to check the coding and main findings of the research. Secondly, the researcher has a profound professional work experience in the area of startups and departments specialized in innovation. He has worked for 3 years during bachelor studies for a German social network in part-time and afterwards in a three-month internship for an e-commerce startup in a business development position. Concerning C&I he has worked for a year in the market research of an automotive group and for a half year in the corporate foresight department of a German rail works company. Additionally the researcher has also a theoretical background from entrepreneurial education in his master program. Those experiences assured an understanding and appropriate interpretation of the situations in C&I and startups presented in the interviews. To enhance the credibility for readers a large set of “in vivo codes” (exact expressions of respondents) were used when emphasizing the findings.

The coding was done in English but only the quotes presented in the study were translated from German to English. The German version of the used quotes is presented in the appendix.

4 RESULTS

4.1 LABELING

4.1.1 Classification of Lifecycle Stages

Companies tackle different challenges in their lifecycles. While in the beginning a company needs to find their market and their customers, in later stages challenges emerge in relation to the direction of optimization and reaction to competition. Therefore, the lifecycle stage of

the interviewed companies was assessed. As table 2 indicates, the mere age of the company is not a reliable indicator. There were companies in the age of 0.5 to 3 years in the *survival stage* whereas the age in the following *rapid growth I stage* ranged from 0.8 to 3.5 years.

The classification of lifecycle stages was based on qualitative statements in three areas: the status of the business model development, the current challenges in creativity and innovation and the efforts which are spent in the sales activities. Table 2.4.4 summarizes the criteria for each stage. The survival stage is characterized with a high uncertainty about the product-market fit and thus the company is still experimenting with the product development and the business model behind the product to reach the customers. Once the product-market-fit has been found the sales activities raise in the rapid growth stages. The differentiation between *rapid growth I stage* and *rapid growths II stage* was made based on the assessment of profitability. In the *maturity stage*, the growth decreases and the managing focus is on business optimization and in some cases product differentiation.

The following table 6 shows examples which kind of issues indicated a certain stage.

Table 6: Issues which Indicated the Assessment of the Lifecycle Stage

| |
|--|
| Survival Stage: Basic questions for further development of the company |
| <p>"We have to find ways, new ways, too. What we are doing right now, at least from what I have seen, there is nothing that we could copy [from other competitors]." (#1, 63)</p> <p>"How do I promote our product, what should the customer hear?" (#2, 67)</p> <p>"We have seen the issues: it takes too much time, it is too expensive, it is too extravagantly to manage it. We cannot scale this right now." (#2, 179)</p> <p>"We are not profitable as a company and have the knowledge what to do. Meaning which operating numbers have to be right. More user growth because of virality, or more income of the users. But this doesn't happen just like that." (#5, 71)</p> <p>"Well, the innovative part [now, after we have changed our business strategy], is to try to develop a platform, which takes data from different places, which makes it easier for the educator [...] to optimize his promotion to his users. These are things, which function completely different in an enterprise environment when the customer is an enterprise as well." (#10, 149)</p> <p>"Many changes in that time, in the last half year, in the last three-fourths of the year, until we reached the focus that [in the future] there will be only projects in collaboration with supermarkets." (#13, 169)</p> <p>"We have a crowd, yes, this is an asset. [We have to consider,] how can we monetize this?" (#14, 67)</p> |
| Rapid Growth I Stage: Scalability is of high relevance |
| <p>"I am responsible for the sales department [...]. We are growing significantly; we are getting 20 new employees in, meaning we can calculate now with 60 employees." (#3, 27)</p> <p>"The basic business model is fixed. The details are changing constantly, of course. We adjust prices through recommendations, we change the products, we change the product characteristics, what is inside of the product?" (#3, 143)</p> <p>"It's important too that the processes aren't simply automated, but as well function resiliently, in the case we receive not only 100 registrations on a single day, but 1000." (#19, 111)</p> |
| Rapid Growth II Stage: Experiences from scaling impact the further improvement |

"Initially it wasn't a goal of mine to start a company with dietary supplements for the desire to have children and pregnancy, but these were just products, which were in the portfolio, which I worked with in other areas, but we had many other things too and then ceased some of them again." (#8, 136)

"Our distribution is totally complex somehow, we have to optimize particular processes. But we don't have to adjust this at the point where we send only 5 packages, but perhaps it is more important to do so when you send 50 or 5000 or 50000, to optimize this again." (#8, 157)

"Where and how do you optimize the product view, check-out and all these things you can optimize. New business fields are a huge topic." (#11, 75)

"There are processes that have to be constantly improved. Which can only be done by people doing them on a daily basis and see what the shortcomings are." (#18, 119)

Early-Maturity Stage: Further optimization and profit maximization are in focus

"Since the company was sold the system functions like that there is only the producer, who did a front integration and now covers both the logistics and the customer service. Therefore now only four people are necessary and not 15 anymore, because the entire system became much more efficient." (#6, 43)

"How could we make the logistics more efficient? Could it be possible one day external services won't be necessary anymore, but to even have internal teams?" (#7, 89)

"We have built quite a big set of tools in the last year and a half, which are supporting us and actually automate the entire purchase, this means optimizing, too." (#17, 116)

4.1.2 Categories of Creativity and Innovation

All interviews were fully searched for reported cases of C&I. The parts concerning the company description were revealing, since they included current business actions and the direct question for specified demand for C&I. But also the description of critical incidents and the business model change (if applicable) disclosed companies' innovative actions.

164 occurrences of creativity and innovation have been found in the data. When possible the respondents were asked to describe the demand and actual activities as precise as possible to get a real understanding of how the business works. The occurrences were specified into 18 subcategories and afterwards assigned to the 4 core categories *product*, *sales and marketing*, *external development* and *internal development*. Cases in the core category *product* were mentioned 48 times. They refer to C&I which affects development, improvement and user experience of the product or service which is delivered to the customer. Sales and marketing occurred 51 times and involved all activities which raise awareness and attractiveness of the products as well as the actual sales. *External development* was mentioned 28 times and mainly refers to questions of the business model development: Which customer (segments) should be targeted? How should the pricing look like? How to create revenue streams around the product or service? The fourth core category *internal development* was mentioned 37 times. C&I in this area affects internal processes and the way how the customer value is produced, its efficiency and effectiveness, hence they are invisible for the customer. Table 7 shows examples for each subcategory. All presented example quotes describe a different twist. They

are shortened when possible but include as much context as necessary to provide a deep understanding of how the online-business actually works.

Table 7: Specification of Creativity and Innovation

| Core Category | Sub Category | Appearance in Interviews | Example Quotes |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|---|--|
| Product (48x) | Product (32x) | #03 / #05 / #06 #07 / #08 (3x) / #09 (5x) / #10 (3x) / #11 (2x) / #12 (3x) / #13 #14 / #15 (2x) #16 (3x) / #17 / #18 (2x) / #19 (2x) | „For example, another way to present the content, or how we adjust our algorithms“ (#05, 81) “First of all, the online shop, second the delivery to business partners and third, retail of groceries. In the beginning, all of these three channels have been important to develop products, which attract customers.” (#06, 79) “Initially, the planning tool has been the core, this is a wholly... well, we weren't the first ones who did this, but we were the first ones who did it really well. At least in the sense of usability for costumers.” (#07, 81) “How does the ideal video look like, what is it, what increases the conversion maximally? Because we are able to merge experiences from different verticals and of different clients.” (#12, 73) |
| | Content (5x) | #02 / #05 (2x) #11 / #17 | “Which division makes sense? How could you label it? Creativity was important in this stage. And now the continuous development of the format. Which new linguistic elements can be used? (#02, 67) “What does the client expect when he searches for, for example, „green nike sneakers“? Does he of course expect that you show him other colors and that there are shoes for women, shoes for men, that there are shoes with 50% off and so on? Well that you ‘perceive, address and then concretely tackle’ this expectation.” (#17, 129) |
| | Platform acceptance (7x) | #09 (2x) / #10 / #16 (2x) / #17 / #19 | “We probably have around 20% of the clients, who regularly book. But we additionally have 50-60% who register, but we can't make them book regularly. [...] How do I build a user-journey, how do I include gamification-elements, how do I manage to fire some enthusiasm, to motivate, to provoke an interaction in order to book something.” (#09, 98) “Then it's about the user experience and how to implement particular features or to see which features can be implemented as such, in order to improve the user experience.” (#16, 135) |
| | Technical (4x) | #02 / #07 / #12 (x2) | “The speed for instance is decisive: so how quick does the player function, how long does it take to load the player, how long does it take to load videos and streams? Worldwide, on every device.” (#12, 73) |
| Sales and Marketing (51x) | Sales (14x) | #03 (3x) / #06 (2x) #07 (2x) / #09 (3x) #12 / #13 / #17 / #19 | “We thought of how to tackle a phone call. By calling, this is our service, bla bla bla... non-sense! If everyone calls, we don't really get through. By going directly there and we have developed a complete scan for the entire directory. For every company which we call.” (#03, 73) “We noticed that the issue of buying cookies is a persistent need, it's not manifested. You don't wake up in the morning with the urge to buy cookies. This has been a very important experience at our marketing department and this led to the fact that we realized that the client really wants to buy cookies, he is on the website, but he has no clue which ones, which type he is supposed to buy and actually he would like to try several types. [...] So we built a tool which would make this possible.” (#06, 79) “There is as well the topic of distribution and distribution processes: how do I address the client? Can I bluntly take the phone – which isn't something negative, it is an important step to call the people and distribute directly – or can I do this during events as well?” (#09, 94) |
| | Sales Channel (9x) | #07 / #08 (3x) #09 (2x) / #10 #11 / #13 | “Which are the right ways to do this? And if you do it the same way like everyone else, then for example in our case, which is as well very typical in our branch, many companies have established a pharmaceutical distribution, which takes a |

| | | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------|---|--|
| External Development (28x) | | | <p>lot of time and it is very cost-intense, therefore we have to find a way to do it.” (#08, 57)</p> <p>“Second, we have changed our focus from SMB, meaning Small-Medium-Sized Businesses. Consequently, this affected the acquisition channels. Prior it was Sales and individual address; nowadays it’s rather addressing which is attractive for the masses. In return, it affected as well the deal sizes, well, a deal doesn’t bring 200.000 Euro, but around 2000.” (#10, 131)</p> |
| | Marketing (26x) | <p>#01 (2x) / #02</p> <p>#03 (3x) / #04 (3x)</p> <p>#05 (4x) / #06</p> <p>#07 (3x) #08 (2x)</p> <p>#10 / #11</p> <p>#17 / #18</p> | <p>“The funnel, when the user comes, so that he buys it, this has to be improved. So that people don’t fall out of the funnel.” (#02, 67)</p> <p>„[Business clients] say: „Hey Pizza.de – although this is a completely different model – takes only 5% or 10% provision. You take 50%. I could afford this, and your product is cool, but your pricing I find it unfair. Therefore I won’t make this deal with you”. We had a really low quota of signed contracts until we figured out to say it creatively: We have 10% provision and 40% is the investment into your own marketing effort. Out of every Euro of your profit, 50 Cents are gone, but 40 Cents are put into your own marketing campaign and 10% are provision for us. It’s the same actually, only transported differently and it worked out perfectly for us.” (#03, 75)”</p> <p>“If the app becomes more viral, in first place. Well, the Facebook user cost money, when we buy them. The other user via PR cost money, too [...] all this takes time. If we were as viral as Whatsapp, it would be cheaper. We are cheaper regarding user acquisition, but it’s not like it was exploding.” (#05, 77)</p> <p>“In one case it was about testing a new vertical of potential publishers, which we haven’t really worked with in the past, tracking the quality really deeply to see if it makes sense for our advertisers. And if successful launching it across at least three advertiser’s campaigns.” (#18, 145)</p> |
| | Branding (2x) | #10 / #11 | <p>“How to reach a client and the way our branding strategy is, which is a very creative process and the way how we speak to people.” (#11, 79)</p> |
| | Customer segments (9x) | <p>#01 / #03 / #06 (2x)</p> <p>#10 (2x) / #11</p> <p>#13 (2x)</p> | <p>„We don’t only approach small companies, but as well big branches and agencies. We offer new products for agencies.” (#03, 143)</p> <p>“Because one of my colleagues is now engaged to the area of online marketing. And he always tags along with some insights. Something like: [...] That the target group is slightly older than we expected, for instance.” (#01, 195)</p> <p>„We have noticed that fruits function very well, especially for women, nuts rather for men. This is just simple data which we can generate from our customers and which we have varied in all three sales channels and we have targeted different target groups within our three sales channels respectively.” (#06, 79)</p> <p>“Once a supermarket joined as a sponsor, then they said they were buying everything, then we noticed: that’s an interesting model, let’s focus only on retail, thereby our business model has changed completely and currently we kind of do two things simultaneously.” (#13, 113)</p> |
| | Pricing (6x) | <p>#03 (3x) / #09</p> <p>#10 / #12</p> | <p>“Why do we sell the product for exactly 419 Euro or 520 Euro or whatever. What would happen if I doubled the price? We could earn more. Then you start tests and try. And it’s not that the colleagues are always right. If you’d listen to every employee, every single one would tell you: ‘No, don’t increase the price in any way. They would sell less.’ “ (#03, 151)</p> <p>“We have changed the pricing completely. Prior, this has only been a very small flat setup fee, which was basically nothing, which is fully based on success to make money, for the people which have searched. And yes, this would have never profited us and you couldn’t justify it considering the work we have done.” (#09, 169)</p> <p>“We have changed the monetizing model in the sense that we initially tackled the future plans with different assumptions, regarding what the client can afford. Therefore we assumed that the performance model would be more suitable. Funnily, that didn’t happen and such a fix-pay-model functions better with the clients, therefore we have changed some things in the areas of monetizing and pricing.” (#12, 138)</p> |

| | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|---|
| | Creating revenue streams (5x) | #05 (3x) / #10 / #14 | <i>"We have a crowd, yes, this is an asset. [We have to consider,] how can we monetize this? Let them use the questionnaire tool for students, when they want to use a particular segment of the crowd in order to gather data. We can run their capacity and earn money." (#14, 67)</i> |
| | Business model (5x) | #01 / #06 (2x) #13 / #14 | <i>"We have to find ways, new ways, too. What we are doing right now, at least from what I have seen, there is nothing that we could copy [from other competitors]." (#01, 63)</i> <i>"In the beginning of the value chain there were two actors, a producer and a distributor. So we were in the distribution. Afterwards there was a producer, the logistics service and the distribution. And now there is the producer, who does everything combined." (#06, 169)</i> |
| | Workaround laws (2x) | #16 / #19 | <i>"Many companies have emerged in the meantime, which offer particular solutions and now we realize an own solution for video identification and the electronic signature – we are working jointly with an existing solution, which the bank has embedded. Therefore we actually only connect the existing dots to one place." (#19, 103)</i> |
| | Competitor analysis (1x) | #16 | <i>"We analyze very accurately how the competition develops and use this as an input." (#16, 135)</i> |
| Internal Development (37x) | Processes (25x) | #02 / #04 (3x) #06 (4x) / #07 (3x) #09 / #11 (3x) / #12 #13 (3x) / #16 #17 (2x) / #18 (2x) #19 | <i>„Initially, we have of course recorded ourselves accurately: How does the flow have to be?“ From income to clothing till processing and the packaging of the sets and how many minutes can this take? [...] Later in the conversation with the colleagues we noticed: this isn't working at all and therefore the process developed and improved constantly." (#04, 86)</i> <i>"Of course there are many operations processes where new things are developed, where colleagues propose new ideas [...]: Where do we need a new field in order to work more efficiently, what would be better for the client in order to rate the product better? Probably hundreds of suggestions would emerge weekly." (#11, 243)</i> <i>"How we buy advertising: we have built quite a big set of tools in the last year and a half, which are supporting us and actually automate the entire purchase, this means optimizing, too... so we know exactly how much we can spend on a Google click in order to still earn money in the end, because we have to pre-finance the clicks to see at the end of the day: okay, did this bring us some money or did we spent more?" (#17, 116)</i> |
| | HR (6x) | #03 (4x) / #06 / #14 | <i>"We need very good people very quick. Where can we find them? By starting a call for applications? Probably not. By make active sourcing on Xing and contact people directly? Great, too. But now we needed six interns for next week. Do you get them that easily? No. We have been definitely creative, because we asked people on Facebook to share this: Hey, share this announcement. If somebody approaches us, you will receive a coupon over 50 Euro for Amazon. This had an unimaginable viral effect." (#03, 69)</i> <i>"How to improve the communal life in the team – well everything in the office, we need new chairs, I want toilet paper with elephants on it [laughing]," (#06, 205)</i> |
| | Logistics (4x) | #06 / #07 (3x) | <i>"How could we make the logistic more efficient? Could it be possible one day external services won't be necessary anymore, but to even have internal teams? I think, this is a relatively classic question which every company is asking itself if it is confronted with logistics." (#07, 89)</i> |
| | Company Culture (2x) | #14 (2x) | <i>""Take care of people, people, people. And then the rest. ' – And innovation for instance is in our case connected to the company culture: How you take decisions, how you delegate, how you live, which transparency you provide, which freedom everyone has and to be able to try things out on your own? This is innovation, too. How do you reinforce ideas among the colleagues – do you reward or punish them?" (#14, 67)</i> |

4.1.3 Categories of Humble Leadership Behaviors

During the interviews the categories of HLB developed by Owens and Hekman (2012) were presented to the respondents. They were asked if they can think of situations to share, in which they behaved in the previously described way. 18 out of the 19 respondents described at least two of the personal traits in their own behavior. Overall 196 situations of humble leadership behavior were identified in the interviews. *Admitting mistakes and limitations* was named 46 times, *spotlighting follower strengths and contributions* for 45 times and *modeling teachability* also for 46 times.

Over the interviews a forth category named *enabling employee to act and decide independently* emerged. The researcher subsumed the codes *enhancing independency*, *waive own opinion*, *enabling employee through knowledge*, *empowerment* and *decentralized decisions* for this category which occurred for 59 times in sum.

Table 8 shows a wide range of quotes describing each category. Because the specific context varies significantly, multiple quotes were selected to illustrate the practical implications of HLB specifically.

Table 8: Labels Describing the Core Categories of Humble Leadership Behavior

| Core Category | Appearance in Interviews | Example Quotes |
|--|--|---|
| Admitting mistakes and limitations (46x) | #01 (9) / #02 (6) #03 (2) / #04 / #05 #06 (2) / #07 (2) #08 (2) / #09 (2) #10 (2) / #13 (2) #14 (6) / #15 (4) #16 / #18 (2) #19 (2) | „In the beginning it happened more often [wrongly communicated context to the employee], I learned then that I communicated wrongly. (#2, 111) “We hired people exactly with this fact: we can’t do it, we need someone who can and who will take responsibility.” (#2, 91) “I find it fantastic to admit weaknesses and to show my employees too: hey, that’s normal that you don’t know everything.” (#7, 103) “I have my moments when I am somehow choleric and in a bad mood... I don’t scream at the people, but yes, I am somehow irritated.” (#15, 205) “Our business model is a very, very complex and very, very specialized one, and of course I can admit that I haven’t understood every single piece in detail and therefore need people who are more capable than me, for example in the analysis, database, database understanding.” (#17, 136) “I don’t have the expectation to know more than my IT-leader, that would be terrible.” (#19, 121) |
| Spotlighting follower strength and | #01 (5) / #02 / #03 #04 (3) / #05 (2) #06 (5) / #07 (6) #08 (3) / #09 #10 (3) / #11 (6) #12 (2) / #13 #14 (2) / #15 #17 / #19 (2) | “When I speak to investors, then it’s part of the whole thing, that I integrate my team.” (#01, 229) “Other than that, I simply trust them, because she is really good at it. And I am not the one who is packing sets every day. It’s just a fact that they are still the experts in this area.” (#4, 156) |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| <p>Contributions (45x)</p> | | <p><i>"We have a standup every week for the entire team. We pick one or two highlights and say: great job, android developers, thank you for getting back this client. Great. Of course we make this strategically because we want to establish role models." (#05, 141)</i></p> <p><i>"We noticed quite soon that this employee is very well organized, has strong communication skills and works very loyally and trustworthy, therefore we have encouraged her constantly over two years and demanded her daily." (#06, 119)</i></p> <p><i>"Very good. She was very happy about it [about a promotion for a new responsibility]. Because it was in accordance to her strengths. But it was appreciation for her that we see and acknowledge her skills. And at the same time, not only we do, but that we have formalized it in front of the colleagues so that they recognize that, too." (#07, 177)</i></p> <p><i>"Once a week, when everyone is pitching anyway what he did the last week, [...] it's as well about to share own success with the others." (#10, 288)</i></p> <p><i>„He's a genius. Of course I praised him highly and thanked him that he did everything by himself [...], we praised him publicly a lot as well. I tried to trigger a snow-ball-effect when the people were doing something big." (#11, 191)</i></p> <p><i>"Okay, crazy, and I told him as well: You, that's exactly what I want to hear! – Because I constantly forget to think leanly, and then the employees have to do it as well." (#15, 328)</i></p> <p><i>"I always try: positive feedback personally related, criticism group-related." (#15, 380)</i></p> |
| <p>Modeling teachability (46x)</p> | <p>#02 (2) / #03 (4) #04 (3) / #05 #06 (3) / #09 #10 (4) / #11 (3) #12 (3) / #13 (5) #14 (2) / #15 (4) #16 (3) / #18 (8)</p> | <p><i>"There's this nice sentence "willing to fail". I love to make mistakes actually, because then we know: that's not the way it works, we can rule this out." (#03, 163)</i></p> <p><i>"Well, I rather follow the principle of „get the most out of now“: Come over here, I am already laying here [after a big failure became obvious for an employee], so speak it out, everything you have in mind now! – And I soak so much out of this moment and learn incredibly much." (#10, 159)</i></p> <p><i>"I am going to conventions; I have developed a lot there. The first thing we did is to establish an industrial advisory board. I have some workshops now, too. And we had some topics where we only learned what currently is happening in the industry." (#14, 75)</i></p> <p><i>"I have spoken to my friends who are entrepreneurs as well, in order to see with their experience how... let's try this, I will try this. It's a lot of trying out, I think." (#15, 386)</i></p> <p><i>"Of course I have the expectation to learn constantly and to figure out what I can improve. I mean, that's why I work at a start-up. [...] Probably this is for many the main motivation." (#16, 302)</i></p> |
| <p>Enabling employee to act and decide independently (59x)</p> | <p>#01 (3) / #02 (6) #03 / #05 (7) #06 (5) / #07 (3) #08 (4) / #09 (5) #12 (3) / #13 (4) #14 (2) / #15 (3) #16 (2) / #17 #18 (4) / #19 (6)</p> | <p><i>„For me it's important to tackle it goal-centered. Not to ask what each and every person does, because one might be better than the others and [...] then they should see how to achieve it by themselves." (#01, 129)</i></p> <p><i>"Then I always say: yes, this is my opinion, but in the end you shouldn't listen to me. If you have an own opinion you are the designer or the conceper, then you have a better feeling for the case than me." (#02, 133)</i></p> <p><i>"We bear in mind that we motivate people to do things by themselves. For instance, we make in introduction to the database to somebody who only seldom has to use it. We say: here you have two, three SQL step-ins, you probably know this, so you can make a request. And some say: hey, I really like that." (#05, 133)</i></p> <p><i>"I know often what I want. But then I consider that if I express it exactly that way and the person works on it this way, than it's a loss, because it's becoming an automatism, he's becoming stupid. And I don't want this in any way. Because I know that he will have to think on another point. And this is much more important to me [...] than delegating him optimally." (#05, 181)</i></p> <p><i>"Every employee [...] in this time [first 3-6 months] should have been at least three times out for lunch or dinner with every founder, in order to reflect on the things they have learned in this period. [...] Our goal on one hand was to provide 100% transparency. So that everyone understands what is happening in the company. Everything was transparent from the very beginning, accounting, profit, salaries." (#06, 123)</i></p> <p><i>"If it wasn't about an existentially threatening error for the company, we accepted decisions from employees, although we knew that it was unlikely that this plan would succeed. [...] Only to let the employees gain some experience as well." (#06, 197)</i></p> |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| | | <p>"Well, I have to be the dumbest in the room. [...] I tell them that they know more and that they are better and therefore get the authority to decide. Unless I veto against something, because I have strategic concerns or whatever." (#14, 71)</p> <p>"You want to make people being responsible and effectively think about it constantly." (#15, 327)</p> |
|--|--|---|

4.2 GENERAL RESEARCH MODEL

This chapter will be a short summary of the general research model depicted in figure 2 whereas the following chapters will describe the results comprehensively for each layer of the model.

As the model shows, this study discovered the distinctive and important role of the startup's lifecycle stage. The founders described current tasks and challenges which can be clearly matched to a certain stage. The model depicted the lifecycle stages *survival stage*, *rapid growth I stage*, *rapid growth II stage* and the *early maturity stage* at the bottom of the model. In fact the goal and reward of founders' efforts is the development of their company: From figuring out which business model fits to the market in the *survival stage* up to optimizing and perfecting the business and its profits in the *early-maturity stage*.

The second layer in the research model is called *implementation of ideas*. This layer is separated into *external development*, *internal development*, *sales & marketing* and *product development*. As the interviews revealed, every stage needs a differing innovative input. Founders from companies in the *survival stage* described *external development* as key issue whereas in the *early-maturity stage* the internal development often associated with optimization was dominant for the respondents.

Creativity, the third layer, is separated in the two parts *high risk creativity* and *low risk creativity*. Generally, *external development* is rather associated with *high risk creativity* because it concerns ideas with a large strategic impact such as the definition of revenue streams and market segmentation. Implemented ideas in that area are decisive for the success or failure of the company. There are also C&I with strategic impact in the other three identified fields of innovations like a hiring policy or large marketing investments. But mostly reported C&I in *internal development*, *sales & marketing* and *product development* was more associated with lower risks and more easy to refuse in a case of failure. Thus, more risky innovations require ideas which are vaguer in their outcome.

Employees' creativity is dependent from two preconditions: motivation and capability. Firstly,

the motivation to engage in creativity is a trade-off between expected benefits (financial rewards, positive recognitions, chance of success) and possible detriments (loss of reputations, punishment) of engagement. Employees will engage in creativity if they expect a positive expectancy value of their action. Secondly, the capability to create those ideas is important which are suitable for the company. It involves the knowledge about the company's needs, its strategy, market demand, best practices in industry as well as the cognitive ability to process and combine that knowledge appropriately.

Founders perceive that their leadership behavior influences followers' motivation and capability for innovative action. In the fourth layer the four traits of humble leadership behavior *admitting mistakes and limitations*, *spotlighting follower strength and contributions*, *modeling teachability* and *enabling employees to act and decide independently* are presented. Those traits have a differing impact on the two kinds of creativity. For example, for *high risk creativity* it is more important that a leader admits own mistakes. This is because the possible impact of high risk creativity is higher and employees need their executive as a role model to see that failures are part of the business and don't necessary lead to negative consequences for the employees so they can feel safer even if an idea does not work out as expected.

The model also shows the mediating role of *role model for learning*: Seeing oneself accurately by admitting limitations one can identify the areas for improvement. By actually taking action to improve, a founder can serve as role model for his followers that they also feel motivated to close gaps in their personal knowledge base. Through that improvement employees are more enabled to act and decide independently.

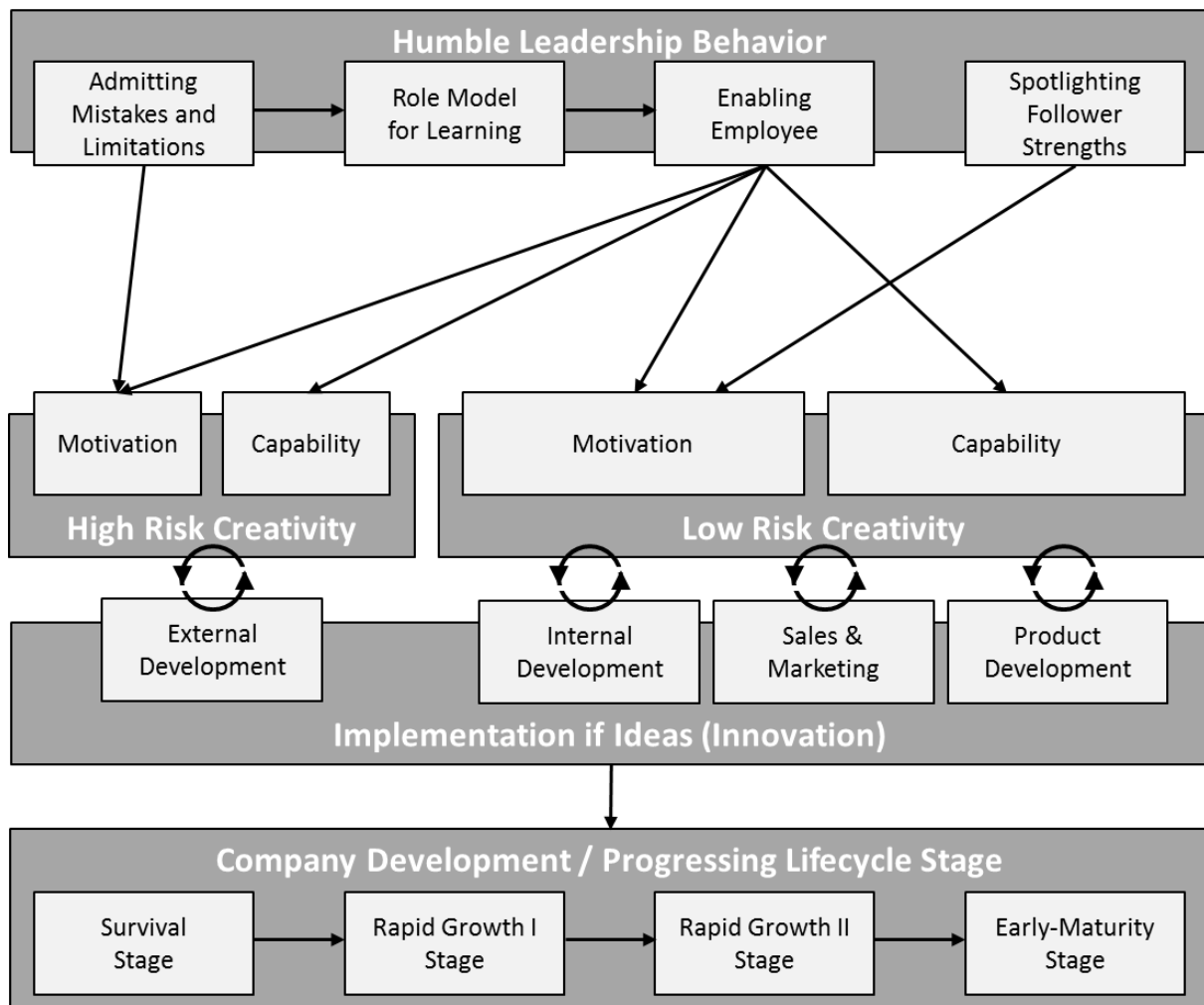


Figure 2: General Research Model

4.3 INNOVATIVE DEMAND AND ITS STAGE DEPENDENCY

There are four different areas of C&I identified in this study: *product development*, *sales and marketing*, *external development* and *internal development*. Since startups are acting in an environment of a highly innovative industry, the offered products and services are new, as well as the underlying business models. C&I is an underlying principle for further development of a company.

At first, it was analyzed in which stage of the startups which kinds of C&I were relevant. Over all interviews 161 cases of C&I were reported, ranging from 2 to 15 cases per interview. Subtracted by multiple cases per area of a certain C&I per interview, 95 cases were reported. That means if in one interview 3 cases of C&I in sales channels were reported, is counted only once. Per interview there were 1 to 8 different kinds of C&I reported.

Table 6 presents a qualitative interpretation of C&I over different stages. Table 9 shows the average number of naming of specific creativity and innovations per company and stages. For example a 1.0 means in all interviews a certain kind was mentioned. 0.3 means that in 1 out of 3 interviews a specific kind of creativity and innovation was mentioned. Blanket cells indicate there was no naming of C&I by one of the companies in a certain stage. The darker the color the higher is the relative value of C&I involved.

Table 9: Naming of Certain Creativity and Innovation per Interview

| | Product Development | | | | Sales & Marketing | | | | External Development | | | | | Internal Development | | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|---------|---------------------|-----------|-------------------|---------------|-----------|----------|----------------------|---------|------------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------|----|-----------|-----------------|
| | Product | Content | Platform acceptance | Technical | Sales | Sales Channel | Marketing | Branding | Customer segments | Pricing | Creating revenue | Business model | Workaround laws | Competitor analysis | Processes | HR | Logistics | Company Culture |
| Survival Stage | .7 | .2 | .1 | .2 | .2 | .2 | .6 | .1 | .3 | .2 | .3 | .3 | | | .4 | .1 | | .1 |
| Rapid Growth I Stage | 1.0 | | .8 | | .8 | .3 | .3 | | .3 | .5 | | | .5 | .3 | .8 | .3 | | |
| Rapid Growth II Stage | 1.0 | .3 | | | | .7 | 1.0 | .3 | .3 | | | | | | .7 | | | |
| Early-Maturity Stage | 1.0 | .3 | .3 | .3 | 1.0 | .3 | 1.0 | | .3 | | | .3 | | | 1.0 | .3 | .7 | |

Throughout all stages *product* (16 interviews), *marketing* (12 interviews) and *processes* (12 interviews) were the mostly emphasized kind of C&I, followed by *sales* (8 interviews) and *customer segments* (6 interviews). Nevertheless the main categories show tendencies through the lifecycle stages in table 10: The relevancy of *product development*, *sales and marketing* and *internal development* grows whereas the importance of *external development* decreases.

Table 10: Average Naming of Creativity and Innovation Pooled in Core Categories

| | Product Development | Sales & Marketing | External Development | Internal Development |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Survival Stage | 1.2 | 1.1 | 1.2 | 0.7 |
| Rapid Growth I Stage | 1.8 | 1.3 | 1.5 | 1.0 |
| Rapid Growth II Stage | 1.3 | 2.0 | .3 | .7 |
| Early-Maturity Stage | 2.0 | 2.3 | .7 | 2.0 |

The researcher is aware of the fact that the computation of C&I incidents has only a low significance. This is due to methodological constraints as well as the low number of observations per stage. However, the analysis provides indications for tendencies which will be discussed in chapter 5.

The observation of varying innovative demands is plausible because every lifecycle stage has a different focus and main challenge:

The challenge of the *survival stage* is to find a sound business model, the “rationale of how an organization creates, delivers, and captures value” (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010, p. 14). It is subsumed under the core category *external development*:

Business Model Creation: „We have to find ways, new ways, too. What we are doing right now, at least from what I have seen, there is nothing that we could copy [from other competitors].“ (#01)

In *rapid growth I stage*, the company needs to find a way to scale the business. Under the precondition to have operational processes defined that reduces the variable costs under the sales price, a scalable business model will turn into profits as the number of sales cover the fixed costs. Once a scalable business model has been found, *sales and marketing* gain more importance:

Sales: “We thought of how to tackle a phone call. By calling, this is our service, bla bla bla... non-sense! If everyone calls, we don’t really get through. By going directly there and we have developed a complete scan for the entire directory. For every company which we call.” (#03)

In *rapid growth II stage*, and the early maturity stage the growth needs to be optimized and the focus begins to shift from growth to profitability. The business has to be defended against competitors and cross-selling and product differentiation becomes important:

Processes: „Where do we need a new data item to improve our efficiency? What would be better for the customer that he evaluates our product better? There are probable one hundred ideas a week.“ (#11)

4.4 THE PROCESS FROM IDEA CREATION TO IDEA IMPLEMENTATION

Basically, an idea needs to be created before it can be implemented. In the research model, this was illustrated in a two-step model based on previous research (Amabile et al., 1996; Rank et al., 2004). The results of this thesis reveal that this simplified model fails to capture additional important intricacies of innovation processes. Actually the step from creativity to innovation is an iterative process which involves constant reciprocal interaction between founder and employee: creation, review and discussion and operationalization. Creation and

innovation is not strictly separated but as the research model in figure 2 suggests, creation and implementation go hand in hand and alternate permanently.

Employees' ideas often evolve through daily work:

"I don't expect from my crew to generate any business ideas, but I rather expect them to acknowledge the optimization potential in their own daily business or daily tasks." (#17, 236)

Resources in very young startups are limited and need to be invested really carefully. Therefore, ideas have to be evaluated and chosen wisely. For the assessment, different options were outlined by the interviewees: First, they decided alone whether to do a step or not. Second, they discussed it with the creator or in small teams. Or third, they had a systematic evaluation tool for ideas which typically inhabited the dimensions of expected outcome and expected efforts.

"You're a group of five or six people being responsible and you check the features. If they're small, you don't discuss them. Everyone decides by himself if it makes sense to include them or not." (#09, 204)

"That the people say [...]: 'We should do that differently [...], I have an idea, let's do it this way.' Then I say: 'Sure, try it, track it the whole day and, look at the performance in comparison to something else'." (#12, 130)

When an idea is accepted it needs to be developed in a way that it can be tested. One respondent expressed that testing is vital wherever the idea comes from:

"I think it's total nonsense to follow things only because they are yours. [...] Because [the right idea] doesn't exist. The idea is always an idea in the beginning and has to be analyzed if it's wrong or right." (#3, 113)

After an initial test, it is common practice to adapt an idea and to restart the review and operationalization process. During to the whole process an employee needs to undertake creative action to achieve an innovation.

4.5 IMPACT OF HLB ON EMPLOYEE'S CREATIVITY

4.5.1 Admitting Mistakes and Limitations

For founders in the Berlin startup scene it seems to be more important that the reason for a decision is justifiable than the bare success of an idea. 6 out of 19 respondents explicitly said they have a focus on logic argumentation:

"I often say that I want the people to have good reasons. Meaning that the people should think about it when they write a piece or built the feature in a particular way. If somebody convinces me and can explain 'I am doing this because ...' then I am satisfied." (#02, 145)

Activities and projects in startups are a process driven by hypotheses: New hypothesis are developed from new data, experiences and customer insights or colleagues feedback. Failure

is perceived as part of a natural learning process. One founder answered to an employee who offered an idea for a current problem:

"Then I try, we cannot judge. First, we aren't participating in the production, second, we don't have the expertise in the video production, not like you, try it and look at the result and then we'll do it that way." (#12, 154)

"You have a hypothesis. But you test it and if it doesn't function, then you have to adjust it." (#01, 179)

13 out of 19 respondents promoted testing and experimenting and perceived failing as part of success. One respondent described why he perceives failing as a progress in business development and not as a step backwards:

"I love to make mistakes actually, because then we know: that's not the way it works, we can rule this out." (#03, 163)

Therefore making mistakes is important. One precondition of making a failure is taking a risk by moving out of the comfort zone. One respondent said that when he admits failures it reduces the barrier for employees to also admit failures and to lose fear of punishment. Therefore, employees are more likely to take risks in their idea creation.

"I find it fantastic to admit weaknesses and to show my employees too: hey, that's normal that you don't know everything." (#7, 103)

Admitting mistakes is relevant for *high-risk creativity* as well as for *low-risk creativity*. But the higher the risk of an experiment is, the more relevant is the openness for a possible fail. Therefore, in the research model the link from admitting failures was reduced to the motivation of *high-risk creativity*. Several founders restrict creativity and experimenting of their employee when they see potential damage of core business or key customers:

"The highest priority is to protect the inventory, meaning what we have at the core of the business, this has to continue. This shouldn't be threatened by some experiments. This is the highest premise behind it." (#17, 334)

4.5.2 Spotlighting Follower Strengths and Contributions

Leaders play an important role in recognizing their employees' efforts. Praise and appreciation are perceived as important for employees' motivation and to sustain their commitment. Especially when the company prospers spotlighting follower strengths becomes more important. This is maybe due to the reduced overview everybody has about all colleagues. Appreciation therefore brings transparency in the success, efforts and challenges of every employee.

“Once a week, when everyone is pitching anyway what he did the last week, [...] it’s as well about to share own success with the others.” (#10, 288)

Additionally, praise can be used as an allocative function. Founders can decide to spotlight especially the outcome they want to see e.g. if they wish C&I in a certain area. By doing so, they might stimulate other employees to become engaged in the same way.

„We praised him publicly a lot as well. I tried to trigger a snow-ball-effect when the people were doing something big.” (#11, 191)

The respondents announced appreciation is twofold. It is directed to the whole company but also to the employee himself that great work is done.

„In general you have to recognize it that they have worked well. But it’s as well an outward sign to the others somehow. [...]. Probably it goes to both direction.” (#16, 284)

Six respondents explicitly expressed the fear to kill the employees’ motivation because of a lack of appreciation. They adduced two reasons: Firstly, due to time constraints and strong operative pressure, founders’ attentiveness would be reduced and secondly, because certain ideas would defocus the company’s strategy.

“My biggest fear is that when employees propose an idea, and in this particular moment I’m in a bad mood because I’m very stressed, I block them up and they consequently think: The idea sucked, or [...] he doesn’t like ideas of mine.” (#05, 87)

“Then you have to open the door again and encourage [...], at the same time you can’t kill the entire positive energy.” (#10, 113)

Two respondents expressed talked about the desire to have a personal assistant who keeps ideas and engages to further develop the good ones.

4.5.3 Modeling Teachability

As described earlier, failure is perceived as a normal event in a startup. Some respondents expressed it in a more neutral way as “conducting tests”. They assumed that not every conducted test will be successful but they undergo as much tests as possible in order to find the setup which turns the business into success. In fact they consciously plan to have a certain rate of unsuccessful experiments. 12 respondents emphasized the importance of learning for their organization. If somebody admits a failure it will be subsequently followed by the wish to prevent making the same failure again.

“Then we took a seat [...]. But the intention wasn’t to search for mistakes, but to avoid mistakes in the future.” (#13, 137)

Hence teachability can be understood as a logical consequence of admitting weaknesses and failures. If an executive admits those but doesn’t take actions against it, he wouldn’t be

credible as a role model for his followers. In the interviews was only a weak direct link reported between modeling teachability and creativity. The willingness to find a solution once a failure happened can operate as a stimulus for creativity.

Moreover, teachability is closely related to admitting failures and enabling employees: Before somebody gets involved into learning (teachability), he must be aware and open to accept the existence of own deficits (admitting failures). Building knowledge about effective tools and experiences concerning company's needs is the final outcome of that process (enabling). It is plausible that founders who are more teachable by themselves also put more attention on the topic of training:

"Of course I have the expectation to learn constantly and to figure out what I can improve. I mean, that's why I work at a start-up. [...] Probably this is for many the main motivation." (#16, 302)

"I planned very early to our budget for each and every an annual budget for training over 1.500 Euro. Well, when you're such a young company, that's quite some money, when there is hardly any money at all." (#14, 71)

For somebody who perceives learning as a process normally associated with work, also expects more from the employees.

4.5.4 Enabling Employee to Act and Decide Independently

In this study, enabling employees turned out to be an issue with a high impact on the creative and innovative outcome. When respondents were asked to talk about their humble leadership behavior, they simultaneously talked about enabling behaviors. That is why *enabling employee to act and decide independently* was developed as fourth category of HLB. For 13 respondents enabling employees was an important topic and they confirmed to empower their employee by knowledge and they enhances independent idea development and decentralized decisions.

Enabling is a twofold action. First, it is about defining areas in which employees are allowed to decide independently and to reminding them continuously about their independence:

"Then I always say: yes, this is my opinion, but in the end you shouldn't listen to me. If you have an own opinion you are the designer [...] then you have a better feeling for the case than me." (#02, 133)

Secondly, employees must be empowered to use that freedom for ideas which move the company in the right direction. Those are things like thinking logically and systematically over problems, to create powerful ideas and decide for the ones that are aligned with the company's strategy. In order to do so, it requires knowledge about best practices in the

industry, concrete perspectives the company has and understanding and insights about the working matter of colleagues. In fact, enabling is about transparency and training:

"Every employee [...] in this time [first 3-6 months] should have been at least three times out for lunch or dinner with every founder [...]. Our goal on one hand was to provide 100% transparency. So that everyone understands what is happening in the company." (#06, 123)

Enabled employees have an impact on C&I through increased motivation and enhanced capabilities:

"I would like to have someone next to me [...], who records exactly such things [...] from the employees. That gives them as well a nice feeling. Employees are getting a good feeling, when they can be engaged." (#03, 167)

Involvement increases the ownership feeling and the motivation to really take care about the own project:

"Well, if I feel like this is his own idea and have the impression that the employee is totally motivated, then I don't have to take so much care if it, [...] then they will find a way." (#01, 221)

"I think he became more independent. And, above all, he started to think about [...] other ways. And it's not only: Well, how am I doing this now, I better ask.' But rather: I try out more now." (#04, 122)

One respondent acquired an employee through the offer of a personal-centered employee development plan by co-creation of founder and employee:

"He could have gone [to a highly respected startup], too. But he didn't, because he felt as if it hadn't been about him, while it is here. It's really important to me towards which direction we develop somebody." (#14, 71)

To shift responsibility to the employees comes together with an introduction how success can be measured and it extends the view how to solve a problem: The action of an employee isn't being taken in order to satisfy the executive, but to really solve a problem. One respondent described that responsibility works as a push to become creative:

"If I'm responsible for a process or a task and I have to solve them independently and there hasn't been a solution before, then I have to be creative myself and have to find a solution." (#13, 161)

Propelled by responsibility employees are more sensible for the areas they are not capable enough:

"[If employees have freedom], then you quickly reach the point, when people say: ,Well, actually, I would do it in this or that way, but I'm not very familiar with it.' Then they propose themselves how to gain this knowledge." (#19, 161)

The same respondent uttered his expectation of a co-investment between employer and employee concerning training opportunities. If he sends an employee to a four-day seminar he would expect the employee to take two day from the weekend as well for such training.

He estimates when an employee does a co-investment he would only choose really beneficial trainings:

"I think everything has a value, if somebody is willing to give something for it and therefore a particular person decides completely different [...] once he knows: 'Ok, I have to sacrifice a little free time for it'." (#19, 161)

Four respondents noticed benefits of decentralized decisions because of the bare raise of people and ideas involved:

"And you wouldn't be creative and innovative, because when somebody takes decisions, the creative potential is very limited. Then you don't try out new things." (#02, 139)

4.6 SITUATIONAL CONTINGENCIES OF HUMBLE LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR

The respondents generally perceived HLB as important for company success and the innovative outcome of their employees. Nobody refused the traits of HLB to be "good" whereas several respondents explicitly called them to be pattern for good leadership. Nevertheless, the founders admitted that they cannot behave humbly in every situation. In this research, 4 contingencies were identified which influenced founders how humbly they behave: *trust*, *time pressure*, *strategic alignment* and *founder's experience*. Beside those situational contingencies the lifecycle stages and the kind of C&I were identified as contingencies for HLB.

When founders decide to hand over responsibility they need *trust* as a basis. Some respondents said to give a leap of faith but mostly trust needs to be earned by employees due to the daily work in the company.

"He [the employee] has internalized the mindset [...] and the needs of the company, so you can simply say: 'Do it. And when you're done, send it to the developer, I trust you.' But in the beginning, it's difficult." (#02, 123)

"Well, I think that trust doesn't emerge when having a two-hour-conversation during lunch. [...] The intern [...] has actually always worked very well during the last three months." (#06, 135)

On the other hand, in situations of a critical incident, three respondents described the fact, that when they admitted failures they created *trust* in the employee's eye. That made it easier to communicate and openly discuss a problem, admit further failures on founders' and on employees' side to find a solution:

"Because I went there and said that I had made a mistake. [...] That made it easier, that he accepts what I said." (#1, 75)

Founders behave more authoritative when they are under *time pressure*. In those situations, they weight near-term company success against long-term learning of employees. In practice this translates into fewer discussions with employees, less involvement and more direct work instructions:

"If something has to be done, [repetition] I rather support him a little or shorten it. ,Fine until this point and now let us finish it in this or that way.'" (#02, 161)

"Sometimes there is no clear solution, I think, meaning that nobody is perfectly informed. [...] and too much humility of course is problem, when it's like that on both sides, you don't find a solution and don't take a decision."(#16, 402)

Only in two interviews the founders talked about exceptional employees who created ideas with strategic impact and who propelled its implementation. But often respondents argued that they restrict employees' creativity in strategic questions. All actions have to be aligned, which leads to more authoritative leadership traits when C&I affect *strategic alignment*:

"If you let somebody just go over weeks, than he gets caught up in many approaches [...]. What's always important to me: think of a general approach. The strategy always has to be delivered by the management." (#03, 107)

"Employees get the authority to decide. Unless I veto against something, because I have strategic concerns." (#14, 71)

"[...] when we receive customer feedback, then integrate all employees for sure. But, in some cases, your own values and visions are required. Because it all flows together to one company culture. You know. It depends on the situation; it totally depends on the situation."(#14, 139)

The fourth contingency, *founder's experience*, is ambiguous. On one hand, respondents described HLB as idealistic, which leads to the logical consequence that experienced leaders behave closer to that ideal than non-experienced ones:

"I notice, and this being very general, that the next founding is much easier to me, especially regarding these ideals, which you mentioned and listed." (#07, 99)

But on the other hand the respondents spoke less about events of HLB especially concerning admitting mistakes and limitations as they were more experienced. This leads to a threefold interpretation which cannot be clarified in this study: more experience leads to less failures; more experience makes it harder for founders to admit failures; or for experienced leaders it is yet so normal to admit failures, that they did not assess those situations as important to name them in the interviews.

4.7 APPEARANCE OF LEAN STARTUP APPROACH

As described in the theoretical background section, the lean startup approach encourages managers to build a minimum viable product and to test it with real customers. The approach

understands a startup as an organization which basically exist to learn how to build a product or service.

The interview respondents have already adopted the lean startup philosophy as a common business practice. For that reason, the third research question fades into the background of this study. The answer for the third research question will be a brief recap of the results presented before.

The interviewees are well aware of lean startup principles. The respondents talked about lean startup without being directly asking about that topic:

"Because I constantly notice that I make the mistake and don't think leanly anymore. [...] And then I thought in a far too complex way and my product manager tells me, Well, we'll just take a mobile phone and somebody will test it'." (#15, 327)

"[We developed the business model] As well through interviews and questions and real design thinking [...]. Lean start-up-style. This, by the way, was a complete revelation for me." (#15, 311)

The basic idea of lean startup is to test an idea with minimum amount of resources as opposed to developing a full-blown idea to its "perfection" and potentially risking the obsolescence certain features. The idea of testing and experimenting was widely accepted by the respondents:

"The useful application of creativity is to me [...] to reduce a creative idea to a minimum of resourced and check its core to find out quickly, if it will function or not." (#03, 113)

"What we always do is to test a lot. We build something, show it to the people, we upload it and see what happens. But this is a process, which you have to feed constantly." (#05, 73)

When it was developed in 2008, lean management originated from business practice and therefore reflected the nature daily operations in young businesses. This also proved true for the Berlin tech startup scene:

"We haven't read the book Lean Startup, but when you have read it, I have skimmed it, it is what you actually do." (#05, 151)

"This is my philosophy, yes, it is the lean startup: Although you don't have anything, start selling. Only this way you learn quicker, otherwise we wouldn't be here." (#14, 97)

5 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to figure out which humble leadership behaviors accomplished by founders are reported to be effective in order to foster creativity and innovation in the context of online based startups. More specifically, the study aimed to spot in which contingencies entrepreneurs perceive humble leadership as effective and which humble leadership behaviors are perceived to foster the effectiveness of the lean startup approach.

This study provided findings to answer the research questions. The respondents confirmed that the three humble leadership traits presented by Owens and Hekman (2012) play an important role for the innovative behavior. No direct link has been found between HLB and creativity but an indirect relationship seems to be mediated by motivation and capabilities of employee. The motivational component can be explained by the expectancy theory. It explains the decision of individuals to engage in a certain way because of the expected outcome the selected behavior will have (Oliver, 1974). The reward of creative engagement could be an increased ownership feeling of employees' work or that their efforts will be recognized and spotlighted by their executives.

During the analysis it has been discovered that the lifecycle stage is a central element to understand the effectivity of HLB on C&I. The literature indicated that there is a link between the effectivity of certain leadership behaviors and the maturity of the organization (Ensley et al., 2006b; Kang, Solomon & Choi, 2015; Pieterse et al, 2010). But there was no research which examined single HLB traits in dependence to maturity. For the researcher those results were surprising. By matching the respondents' quotes to their company's lifecycle stage it turned out that HLB applies differently depending on lifecycle stage.

Admitting mistakes and limitations is more relevant for *high risk creativity* which is associated with *external development* in the *survival stage* of a startup. The interpretation of a decreasing importance of admitting mistakes during the maturing process could be threefold: Firstly, as the uncertainty decreases there are less mistakes and limitations to be admitted. Secondly, for founders in later stages it became self-evident that limitations are part of the normal business and for that reason they were not conscious about that behavior when they were asked about that. And thirdly, by showing their own imperfection, especially in the beginning of the company, founders want to reduce power distance to their followers consciously or unconsciously. Clarification in that question could serve a study which accompanies founders

for a longer time.

Spotlighting follower strengths becomes more important as the company matures. A possible explanation could be that in the beginning all or most of the relevant knowledge is inhabited in the founder or team of founders. In later stages tasks are becoming more specialized as the business will be optimized. Optimization is more associated with *low risk creativity* because the possible deviation of an expected outcome of a decision is rather “better” or “worse”, while complete fail of an optimization is unlikely. Another possible explanation could be that an enlarged organization requires a leader to establish a feedback culture to balance the perceived effort and the rewards received (Janssen, 2000).

The trait that founders are serving as *role model for learning* has an indirect relationship to the capabilities of employees to get engaged in creativity. This study suggests that this trait could be a consequence of *admitting mistakes and limitations* and therefore serves as a moderator for *enabling employee*.

Enabling employee to act and decide independently has emerged as a fourth important facet of humble leadership – if not the most important one. Firstly, because enabling employees affects motivation *and* the capabilities of employees to become engaged in creativity and secondly, because respondents from all lifecycle stages reported enabling as an important issue for follower engagement. Evidence in the literature for the relationship between enabling and motivation can be found. Accordingly, Krause (2004) identified *granting freedom, autonomy, expert knowledge and information* as most relevant factors for innovative behavior. De Jong and Den Hartog (2007) called *delegation* as an important facilitator of followers’ engagement and Ford (1996) described *capabilities, knowledge and skills* as relevant factors that employees engage in creativity.

Following previous argumentation, this study identified lifecycle stages and kind of C&I necessary as most relevant contingencies. As elaborated before there are also situational contingencies which influence leader’s behavior: *trust, time pressure, strategic alignment* and *founder’s experience*.

Trust within the leader-follower relationship is perceived as a precondition for an open and transparent communication. Humble leadership is associated with a higher amount of time effort spent in the short run. When founders consciously balance the benefits of behaving humbly and the disadvantages of a delayed action than *time pressure* could prevent HLB in some cases. The same is true when founders want to keep the company on track by *strategic*

alignment. They sometimes decide to be more dispositive and put themselves in the middle of a decision when they expect this could enhance the focus in the company.

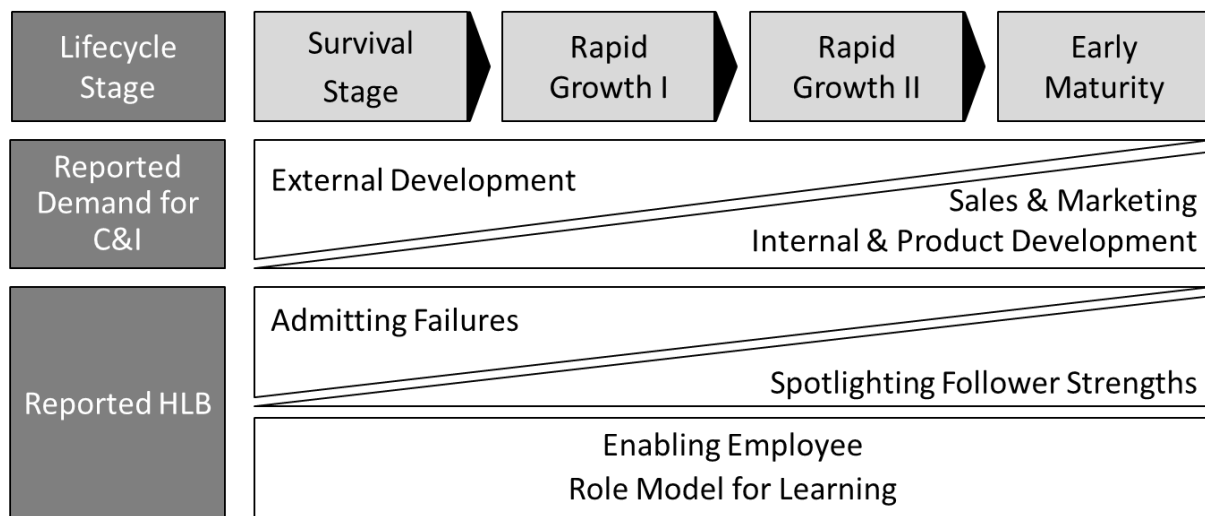


Figure 3: Tendencies of Reported Demand for Innovation and the Reported HLB

Figure 3 depicts the detected tendencies of the reported demand for creativity and innovation as well as the reported humble leadership behaviors in accordance to the company's lifecycle stage. The figure is based on a small number of observations and the researcher suggests taking it as a basis for a quantitative examination. The three-sides figures in figure 3 indicate an increasing respectively a decreasing importance over company development.

This study suggests that the importance of *external development* decreases as the company matures, whereas the importance of *sales and marketing*, *internal development* and *product development* increases. *Enabling employees* and *serving as role model for learning* are traits with same importance in all stages, whereas *admitting failures* decreases and *spotlighting follower strengths* increases. It might be possible that the differences in the observed humble leadership behavior are mediated by the differing demand in C&I. This would suggest that a high demand for *external development* in a later stage occurs, also an adapted HLB would be necessary. Compared to this, it is also possible that the relationship between lifecycle stage and HLB is mediated by decrease of uncertainty about the future development of the company or by the amount of experience founders have after a certain time of leading their company. The latter one is unlikely because also founders, which are already leading their second or third company spoke often about admitting mistakes and limitations when their current company was in the survival stage.

In regard to the social exchange theory the cause-effect-relationship remains in question: Do

founders spotlight their followers more as a company further develops, or does a company develop further because the founders spotlight their followers? The first possibility would not be covered by the social exchange theory. As wages are low in startups especially in the beginning, the spotlighting of employee should decrease as the wages level up when the company develops.

The second sub-question of this study aimed to figure out the fit of HLB to the lean startup approach. First of all, the concept of lean startup was known and widely applied by the respondents. Some founders explicitly noted that they were guided by that management approach. Other – maybe unconsciously – just applied the principles in their daily business.

Figure 4 depicts the interdependencies between HLB and the lean startup philosophy. All four HLB which were identified in this study are associated to have a positive effect on the success of the *build-measure-learn loop*. Starting at the beginning, there is an idea which needs to be developed. As presented before, spotlighting follower's ideas and efforts enhances their motivation. Enabling has two distinct effects: Firstly, employees know in which areas innovations are helpful for a company's target, so they can channel their ideas in the right directions. Secondly, they are empowered to adapt ideas to specific environments and align actions with other employees without involving the leader in every step.

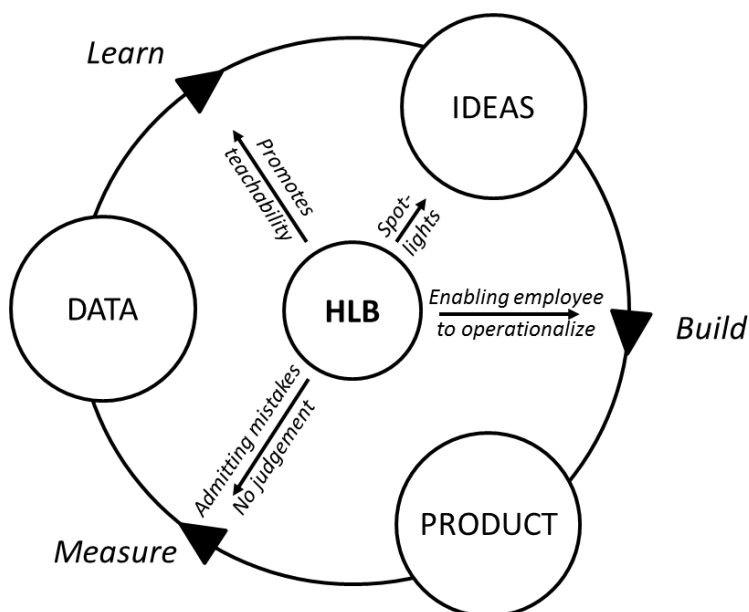


Figure 4: Effect of HLB on Build-Measure-Learn Loop

Once a prototype of a product is developed and ready to be tested, the data generation starts. Usually, a number of ideas are tested simultaneously and not only the valid ideas are highlighted as good but also the ones which failed and generated valuable learning. In this manner, mistakes are ubiquitous and admitting those is a precondition. The generated data are the outcome of measurement and will be used for learning and are therefore the basis for the next loop: Which new ideas can be created with the new obtained knowledge? Hence, failed experiments are not judged as “bad” as long they are used to propel learning.

Humble leadership pays off in every step of the underlying *build-measure-learn loop* as presented in figure 4. In general, the interviews showed that the lean startup approach is widely applied in Berlin’s startups and it also represents state-of-the-art in startup management worldwide (Blank & Dorf, 2012; Müller & Thoring, 2012).

This calls for pointing out the importance of humble leadership to accelerate the innovative behavior in the startup scene. Although some respondents did not agreed to behave humbly, all of them reported traits which are inhabited in the concept of humble leadership. It seems to be the case the word “humility” is still associated with weakness. Maybe with another label humble leadership can increase its popularity in the startup scene.

As a secondary finding, the study revealed further that creativity and innovation cannot be separated easily. In the interviews the researcher presented the definitions to the respondents to distinct between creativity and innovation. They agreed to understand the distinction that creativity refers to the creation of ideas and innovation refers to the implementation of ideas. But in fact that distinction does not play a role in practical business. Indeed, some respondents made the distinction between creativity and innovation. They argued that ideas would come from the management and employees are subjected to implement. But at the end the respondents described that every employee takes action in creativity *and* innovation and that both concepts cannot be treated distinctively. That is because also the implementation of ideas - no matter where they come from – involves creativity to adapt them to practical business needs and circumstances. This research showed that innovation is less a two-step-model from creation to implementation but rather an iterative process in which creation, discussion and implementation alternate multiple times. The research model inhabits that insight by a circled connection between creativity and innovation.

5.1 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This work revealed practical implications for the startup scene twofold: Application of the lean startup approach and the life cycle dependency. When quantitative examination supports the results this study discovered, the implications could be rolled out to the startup scene.

Firstly, the research revealed that humble leadership plays an important role in the application of the lean startup approach. Founders are encouraged to implement humble leadership behaviors in their daily business to support the innovative outcome of their employees. In some cases like time pressure they must balance the advantages and disadvantages but overall HLB revealed to be supportive for success of their company.

Secondly, during the lifecycle the requirements on leaders changes. It seems that founders must adapt their humble leadership behavior on the innovative needs of the company. For business model development in early stages, admitting mistakes appears to be helpful, whereas in later stages the spotlighting of followers becomes more important. Those insights could be also relevant for investors which support the companies they invested in. If management staff is recruited in later stages, they might look for other traits that the leaders show in their behavior than they look in earlier stages.

5.2 STRENGTHS, LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The qualitative setup of this study and the use of aspects of template analysis and grounded theory made it possible to better understand a new phenomenon and enabled to find reasoning for the observed behaviors. The aim was to systematically collect and examine the subjective perceptions of relevant representatives of Berlin's startup scene. The interviews entailed comprehensive details about the practical circumstances in startups which make it possible to take them as individual cases to learn from and adapt the findings to other cases where the circumstances are similar. Due to the strict focus of the study population on online startups in Berlin, comparisons between the findings in different interviews were not suitable due to a similar cultural and economic context.

The methodical strengths turn out to be the weaknesses as well on the other hand. The qualitative approach is not aimed to deliver representative and positivistic results. Hence, generalizability and quantification of the findings is not possible. Humble leadership behavior might play a different role in other industries or other cultural contexts. In the United States where error tolerance is well-marked and failures are widely accepted, admitting mistakes

could have a more important or less important role than this trait has in Germany. The assessment of HLB were self-reported and retrospective. Although the interviews were anonymized and the critical incidents technique was applied it cannot be ruled out that some answers are adjusted to meet socially desired standard. Therefore the study could be enhanced by including the followers' perspective and the usage of standardized validated Likert scales to assess leadership behavior and the kind of C&I which was not possible with the given resources.

In later lifecycle stages a differing leadership approach was observed. Unless there are clues indicating that the leadership actually changes in response to different requirements and a progress in company development a selection bias is possible. It might be the case that a certain leadership style is in favor of company development whereas another leadership style makes it unlikely to reach the early-maturity stage.

Further research is needed to overcome those limitations. A longitudinal study could certainly track if HLB changes and if yes, to figure out the reason behind those changes. To cover the aspect of cultural differences a subsequent study should include other entrepreneurial hot spots in the world like the Silicon Valley, Tel Aviv and Korea. Ultimately, the perspective of the followers should be obtained in terms of how they perceive the HLB of their leader and how they perceive motivational aspect to get engaged in C&I. As the study by Gonçalves et al. (2015) illustrates the outcomes for innovative behavior differ when external and internal perception are not congruent.

Humble leadership was identified to be relevant in the process of business model related creativity and innovation. As this field of research is still underdeveloped further research could add important insights for academic and practitioners.

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VII APPENDIX

A. INTERVIEW GUIDELINE

1. Informed Consent

Lieber Teilnehmer, Liebe Teilnehmerin,

vielen Dank für das Interesse und ihre Mithilfe in dieser Studie. Im Rahmen meiner Masterthesis interessiere ich mich für das Thema "Führungsstile" und dessen Einfluss auf die Entwicklung von Geschäftsmodellen in Online Startups. Dabei spezialisiere ich mich auf einen neuen und bisher relativ unerforschten Führungsstil "Humble Leadership" – übersetzt "bescheidener Führungsstil". Bitte lesen Sie folgende Einverständniserklärung sorgfältig durch und bestätigen Sie mit ihrer Unterschrift die Teilnahme und ihr Einverständnis an dieser Studie.

Einverständniserklärung

Ich erkläre mich dazu bereit, im Rahmen des genannten Forschungsprojektes an einem Interview teilzunehmen. Das Interview wird ca 30-60 min dauern und wird von Herrn Martin Funck durchgeführt. Ich kann das Interview jederzeit abbrechen oder Antworten auf einzelne Fragen verweigern ohne Gründe für meine Entscheidung zu nennen. Das Interview wird elektronisch aufgezeichnet, sodass es im Anschluss verschriftlicht und analysiert werden kann. Meine Antworten werden vertraulich behandelt und in Forschungsberichten anonymisiert; es kann daher nicht auf meine Person rückgeschlossen werden.

Bitte geben Sie unten ihre E-Mail-Adresse an, falls sie in ein paar Monaten eine Kurzdarstellung der Ergebnisse erhalten möchten. Bei Fragen können Sie mich kontaktieren unter: martin.funck@campus.tu-berlin.de oder 0151 / 14 16 33 49

Datum, Ort / Unterschrift

Optional: E-Mail-Adresse

2. Introduction and Questions

Ich untersuche einen neuen Führungsstil, „Humble Leadership“ – übersetzt „bescheidene Führung“. Ich möchte untersuchen, wie sich dieser Führungsstil auf den Prozess der Geschäftsmodellentwicklung auswirkt und welche Rolle er für das innovative Verhalten von Mitarbeitern und deren Kreativität spielt. Ich mache die Unterscheidung zwischen Kreativität und Innovation weil man, kurz gesagt, bei Kreativität von der Ideenentwicklung (für z.B. neue Produkte, Technologien, Arbeitsprozesse oder Serviceangebote) und bei Innovation von der tatsächlichen Umsetzung und Anwendung dieser Ideen spricht. Ich werde zu einem späteren Zeitpunkt erklären, was es bedeutet „bescheiden zu führen“.

1. Zunächst habe ich einige kurze Fragen zu Beginn zu demografischen Faktoren: Geschlecht?; Wie alt?; Welche Position?; Wie lange in der Position?; Welche Hauptaufgaben?; Wie lange schon Führungsverantwortung?; Für wie viele Mitarbeiter im Team/Abteilung sind Sie verantwortlich? Ich habe noch ein paar kurze Fragen zur Firma, das eigentlich Interview folgt danach: Wie viele Mitarbeiter in der Firma?; Seit wann besteht die Firma?; Aus welchen Mitteln wurde oder wird die Firma vor allem finanziert? Wie funktioniert das Geschäftsmodell Ihrer Firma? Welche Form/Art von Kreativität und/oder Innovation ist bei ihnen im Team/ in der Abteilung gefragt?

Humble Leader/ bescheidene Führungskräfte zeigen drei Verhaltensweisen: 1) sie geben ihre eigenen Schwächen und Fehler zu 2) nehmen die Stärken ihrer Mitarbeiter wahr und erkennen diese auch an und 3) zeigen ihren Mitarbeitern, dass Lernen und die ständige eigene Entwicklung wichtig und möglich ist.

2. Können sie mir eine Situation nennen und erläutern, in der Sie sich “humble” bzw “bescheiden” verhalten haben gegenüber ihren Mitarbeitern? (Nehmen Sie sich etwas Zeit, um ein gutes Beispiel zu finden. Wenn es mehrere gibt wählen sie das, das am wenigsten weit zurückliegt) Um welche Situation oder welches Projekt handelte es sich? War Kreativität oder Innovation in diesem Projekt gefragt? Haben die Mitarbeiter tatsächlich kreatives oder innovatives Verhalten gezeigt? Welches Verhalten haben Sie genau gezeigt? Was haben Sie genau gemacht – bitte

beschreiben Sie mit mehr Detail? *(auf die 3 Verhaltensweisen von humble Leadership eingehen)* Was waren die Bedingungen oder welche Faktoren haben Sie besonders motiviert sich humble/bescheiden zu verhalten?

Unter einem Geschäftsmodell wird die Art und Weise verstanden, wie ein Unternehmen einen Wert schafft, vermittelt und erfasst. D.h. es werden Fragen beantwortet wie: Welchen Mehrwert bietet das Unternehmen seinen Kunden? Welche Kunden hat das Unternehmen und wie werden sie erreicht? Welche Ressourcen und Partner braucht das Unternehmen um die Kernaktivitäten auszuführen? Wie sieht das Verdienstmmodell aus?

3. Das Geschäftsmodell welches Sie zu Anfang kurz skizziert haben, war das die Idee, mit der sie auch gestartet sind? Erinnern Sie sich an eine entscheidende Änderung, die das Geschäftsmodell betroffen haben? *(Nehmen Sie sich Zeit, um ein gutes Beispiel zu finden.)* Auf welchen Erkenntnissen hat diese Änderung beruht? Welche Rolle haben Ihre Mitarbeiter dabei gespielt? In welchem Umfeld befand sich das Unternehmen in dieser Zeit? Können Sie sich daran erinnern, dass ein Mitarbeiter einen konkreten Anstoß gegeben hat?

Falls noch nicht unter 2 und 3 beantwortet:

4. Wie verhalten Sie sich grundsätzlich? Wie sieht ihr Führungsverhalten abgesehen von diesen Beispielen aus? Äußern Sie häufig humble/bescheidenes Führungsverhalten und warum? Oder ist es eine Ausnahme? Wenn Sie sich humble/bescheiden ihren Mitarbeitern gegenüber verhalten welche anderen Führungsverhaltensweisen haben Sie zusätzlich gezeigt?

Backup - potentielle Fragen sofern sie noch nicht beantwortet wurden:

Wie würden Sie sich verhalten, wenn ein Mitarbeiter grundsätzliche Annahmen Ihres Geschäftsmodells infrage stellt? (z.B. Kundengruppe, Verdienstmmodell, Produkthauptnutzen)

Wie arbeiten Sie grundsätzlich mit Ihren Angestellten zusammen?

Gibt es Unterschiede, wie Sie mit Ihren Mitarbeitern und wie Sie mit Ihren Mitgründern/ -geschäftsführern sprechen?

Wie fördern Sie neue Ideen in Ihrem Unternehmen?

Wie fördern Sie, dass neue Ideen umgesetzt werden?

Wenn jemand in Ihrer Firma eine gute Idee hat, wie kommunizieren sie das gegenüber anderen Personen in der Firma?

Wie gehen Sie damit um, wenn Sie merken, dass sie selbst an Ihre eigenen Grenzen stoßen?

Wie drücken Sie es aus, wenn Sie von einer anderen Idee überhaupt nicht überzeugt sind?

Wie werden Aufgaben in Ihrer Firma priorisiert?

Gibt es Umstände in denen Sie sich vorstellen können, dass Sie zu viel Bescheidenheit zeigen?

Gibt es andere Verhaltensweisen, die Bescheidenheit aufwiegen?

Könnte Bescheidenheit zu Ineffektivität führen? Wann?

B. ORIGINAL QUOTES BEFORE TRANSLATION

1. Definition of Stages

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| Survival Stage: Basic questions for further development of the company |
| <p>„Wir müssen Wege finden, auch neue Wege. Was wir jetzt gerade machen, zumindest von dem was ich mitbekommen habe, gibt es nichts was wir einfach [von einem anderen Wettbewerber] kopieren könnten.“ (#1, 63)</p> <p>„Wie vermarkte ich unser Produkt, was muss der Kunde hören?“ (#2, 67)</p> <p>„Wir haben die Probleme eigentlich gesehen: es dauert zu lang, es ist zu teuer, es ist zu aufwendig, das zu managen. Wir können das so nicht skalieren.“ (#2, 179)</p> <p>„Wir sind nicht profitabel als Firma und haben Wissen, was wir machen müssen. Also welche Kennzahlen stimmen müssen. Mehr Nutzerwachstum aus Viralität heraus, oder mehr Einnahmen aus den Nutzern. Das fällt aber nicht vom Baum.“ (#5, 71)</p> <p>„Also der innovative Teil bei uns ist [jetzt nachdem wir unsere Geschäftsstrategie geändert haben], dass wir versuchen, eine Plattform zu entwickeln, die von verschiedensten Stellen Daten zieht, mit Hilfe derer es dem Educator erleichtert wird [...] seine Vermarktung an seinen Nutzer zu optimieren. Das sind so Sachen, die funktionieren halt einfach total anders in einem Enterprise-Umfeld, wo der Kunde dann wiederum auch ein Enterprise ist.“ (#10, 149)</p> <p>„Sehr viel Veränderung in der Zeit, in dem letzten halben Jahr, letzten dreiviertel Jahr bis hin zum auf Fokus, dass es [künftig] nur noch Projekte mit Supermärkten gibt.“ (#13, 169)</p> <p>„Wir haben eine Crowd, ja, da ist ein Asset. [Wir müssen uns überlegen,] wie kann man das monetisieren?“ (#14, 67)</p> |
| Rapid Growth I Stage: Scalability is of high relevance |
| <p>„Ich verantworte den Bereich Sales [...]. Wir werden auch nochmal deutlich mehr, wir holen jetzt nochmal 20 rein. D.h. man kann dann schon von 60 Mitarbeitern ausgehen.“ (#3, 27)</p> <p>„Das grobe Geschäftsmodell steht. In den Feinheiten ändert sich hier natürlich permanent was. Wir passen Preise an durch Erfahrungswerte, wir ändern die Produkte, wir ändern die Produkteigenschaften, was ist in den Produkten drin?“ (#3, 143)</p> <p>„Dann geht es halt auch darum, dass die Prozesse nicht nur automatisiert sind, sondern auch belastbar funktionieren, wenn dann halt nicht nur 100 Anmeldungen am Tag kommen, sondern auch 1000.“ (#19, 111)</p> |
| Rapid Growth II Stage: Experiences from scaling impact the further improvement |
| <p>„War jetzt nicht von vornherein ein Ziel von mir, eine Firma zu machen mit Nahrungsergänzungsmittel für Kinderwunsch und Schwangerschaft, sondern es waren einfach Produkte, die im Portfolio waren, von denen ich mir auch schon im ähnlichen Gebiet gearbeitet habe, aber die hatten auch ne Menge anderer Sachen und haben dann davon auch andere wieder eingestellt.“ (#8, 136)</p> <p>„Unser Versand ist total komplex irgendwie, wir müssen bestimmte Prozesse optimieren. Aber das muss man vielleicht nicht an dem Punkt wo man 5 Pakete verschickt, sondern, vielleicht ist das wichtiger wo man 50 oder 5000 oder 50000 verschickt, dass man dann nochmal in Optimierung geht.“ (#8, 157)</p> <p>„Wo und wie optimiert man von Produktansicht, Check-Out und was man alles durchoptimieren kann. Neue Geschäftsfelder ist ein Riesenthema.“ (#11, 75)</p> <p>“There are processes that have to be constantly improved. Which can only be done by people doing them on a daily basis and see what the shortcomings are.” (#18, 119)</p> |
| Early-Maturity Stage: Further optimization and profit maximization are in focus |
| <p>„Seit Verkauf sieht das System so aus, dass es jetzt eigentlich nur noch den Produzenten gibt der jetzt vorwärts integriert hat und sowohl die Logistik als auch den Customer Service abdeckt. Deswegen sind jetzt auch nur noch vier Leute und nicht mehr 15 notwendig, weil das ganze System eben deutlich effizienter geworden ist.“ (#6, 43)</p> <p>„Wie kann man die Logistik effizienter aufsetzen? Kann es irgendwann Sinn machen, dass man keinen externen Dienstleister nimmt, sondern irgendwann sogar interne Teams hat?“ (#7, 89)</p> <p>„Da haben wir 'ne ganze Ecke an Tools gebaut in den letzten anderthalb Jahren, die uns da unterstützen und den kompletten Einkauf eigentlich automatisieren, das heißt auch die Optimierung.“ (#17, 116)</p> |

2. Categories of Creativity and Innovation

| Core Category | Sub Category | Appearance in Interviews | Example Quotes |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|---|--|
| Product (48x) | Product (32x) | #03 / #05 / #06 / #07 / #08 (3x) / #09 (5x) / #10 (3x) / #11 (2x) / #12 (3x) / #13 / #14 / #15 (2x) / #16 (3x) / #17 / #18 (2x) / #19 (2x) | <p>„Zum Beispiel, eine andere Darstellungsform von Inhalten, oder wie wir unsere Algorithmen anpassen.“ (#05, 81)</p> <p>„Zunächst Online Shop, zweitens Belieferung von Geschäftskunden und zum dritten Lebensmitteleinzelhandel. Dort war zu Beginn jeder dieser drei Kanäle eben wichtig Produkte zu entwickeln, die den Kunden an dieser Stelle eben ansprechen.“ (#06, 79)</p> <p>„Der Hauptpunkt sind anfänglich die Planungstools, das ist eine ganz ... also wir waren nicht die ersten, die das gemacht haben, aber wir waren quasi die ersten, die es richtig gut gemacht haben. Also gut im Sinne von benutzerfreundlich.“ (#07, 81)</p> <p>„Wie sieht das ideale Video aus, was ist, was erhöht die conversion maximal, weil wir da eben auch Erfahrung aus verschiedensten Verticals von verschiedenen unseren Kunden zusammen bringen können.“ (#12, 73)</p> |
| | Content (5x) | #02 / #05 (2x) / #11 / #17 | <p>„Welche Aufteilung macht da Sinn? Wie kann man das auch nennen? Da war Kreativität gefragt. Und jetzt kontinuierlich in der Weiterentwicklung des Formats. Welche neuen sprachlichen Elemente kann man nutzen?“ (#02, 67)</p> <p>„Was erwartet der Kunde, wenn er jetzt, zum Beispiel ‚grüne joggingschuhe nike‘ eingibt? Erwartet der natürlich, dass so... dass man ihm noch andere Farben zeigt, dass man ihm irgendwie auch zeigt, okay, es gibt Damenschuhe, Herrenschuhe, es gibt Schuhe, die 50% Rabatt haben etc. pp? Also dass man diese Erwartungen erst 'mal wahrnimmt, adressiert, und dann auch konkret bedient.“ (#17, 129)</p> |
| | Platform acceptance (7x) | #09 (2x) / #10 / #16 (2x) / #17 / #19 | <p>„Wir haben jetzt bestimmt 20 % der Belegschaft, die bucht tatsächlich regelmäßig. Aber wir haben noch weitere 50-60 % die registrieren sich, aber wir bekommen die nicht dazu regelmäßig zu buchen. [...] Wie baue ich so eine User-Journey auf, wie bau ich Gamification-Elemente ein, wie schaffe ich es, den zu begeistern, zu motivieren, da eine Interaktion herzustellen, und dann etwas zu buchen.“ (#09, 98)</p> <p>„Da geht's dann um User Experience und wie man bestimmte Features, oder welche Features man überhaupt implementieren sollte, um die Nutzererfahrung noch besser zu machen.“ (#16, 135)</p> |
| | Technical (4x) | #02 / #07 / #12 (x2) | <p>„Entscheidend ist z.B. die Geschwindigkeit: Also wie schnell ist der Player, wie schnell wird der Player geladen, wie schnell werden die Videos geladen und gestreamt? Weltweit, auf jedem Endgerät.“ (#12, 73)</p> |
| Sales and Marketing (51x) | Sales (14x) | #03 (3x) / #06 (2x) / #07 (2x) / #09 (3x) / #12 / #13/ #17 / #19 | <p>„Wir haben überlegt, wie setzen wir ein Telefonat an? Indem man anruft, das ist unsere Dienstleitung bla bla bla... Blödsinn. Ruft ja jeder an, kommen wir nicht gut durch. Indem wir hingehen und wir haben einen kompletten Scan entwickelt über die Verzeichnislandschaft. Für jedes Unternehmen, dass wir anrufen.“ (#03, 73)</p> <p>„Uns ist aufgefallen, das Thema Kekse kaufen ist ein latentes Bedürfnis, ist kein manifestes. Du stehst nicht morgens auf und sagst heut muss ich unbedingt noch Kekse kaufe. D.h. das war eine sehr wichtige Erfahrung bei uns im Marketing und das hat dazu geführt, dass wir feststellen der Kunde will unbedingt Cookies kaufen, ist auf der Seite, hat aber keine Ahnung welche, welche Sorte er kaufen soll und eigentlich würde er gerne verschiedene Sorten ausprobieren. [...] Also haben wir ein Tool gebaut, um genau das zu ermöglichen.“ (#06, 79)</p> <p>„Es gibt auch das Thema Vertrieb und Vertriebsprozesse: Also wie spreche ich Kunden an? Kann ich jetzt eben stumpf das Telefon in die Hand zu nehmen - was jetzt nicht negativ ist, das ist ein wichtiger Weg die Leute anzurufen und Direktvertrieb zu machen - oder ich kann auch Events machen.“ (#09, 94)</p> |
| | Sales Channel (9x) | #07 / #08 (3x) / #09 (2x) / #10 / #11 / #13 | <p>„Was sind die richtigen Wege, um das zu tun? Und wenn man es jetzt genauso tut wie jeder andere, dann würde man beispielsweise in unserem Fall, in unserer Branche ist es gängig, dass viele Betriebe einen Pharmavertrieb aufgebaut haben,</p> |

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| | | | <p>was sehr langwierig ist und sehr kostenintensiv und da müssen wir halt einen Weg finden, dass zu tun.“ (#08, 57)</p> <p>„Wir haben zweitens, eben von Enterprise auf SMB, also sprich Small-Medium-Sized Businesses unseren Fokus verändert. Das hat sich logischerweise auf die Akquisition-Channels ausgewirkt, eben früher Sales und individuelle Ansprache, heute mehr massentaugliche Ansprache. Aber umgekehrt halt auch auf die Deal-Sizes, ja, also ein Deal bringt jetzt halt nicht mehr 200.000 Euro, sondern vielleicht irgendwie 2000.“ (#10, 131)</p> |
| | Marketing (26x) | #01 (2x) / #02 / #03 (3x) / #04 (3x) / #05 (4x) / #06 / #07 (3x) / #08 (2x) / #10 / #11 / #17 / #18 | <p>„Den Funnel, wenn der Nutzer kommt, dass er kauft, das zu verbessern. Dass hier nicht Leute aus dem Funnel rausfallen.“ (#02, 67)</p> <p>„Die [Business-Clients] sagen: ‚Hey Pizza.de - obwohl das ein ganz anderes Modell ist - nimmt nur 5% oder 10% Provison. Ihr nehmt 50%. Ich kann mir das zwar leisten, ihr habt ein geiles Produkt, ich find's aber unfair. Deshalb mache ich den Deal nicht mit euch.‘ Wir haben eine echt geringe Abschlussquote gehabt, bis wir auf die Idee kamen durch Kreativität zu sagen: Wir haben 10% Provision und 40% ist das Invest in euren eigenen Marketingeinsatz. von einem Euro der an Umsatz reinkommt, sind zwar 50 Cent weg. davon 40 Cent die wir in eure Marketingkampagne stecken und 10 % Provision für uns. Ist das Gleiche in Grün, nur anders ausgedrückt und hat perfekt funktioniert.“ (#03, 75)</p> <p>„Wenn die App viraler wird, vor allen Dingen. Also die Facebooknutzer kosten uns halt Geld wenn wir die einkaufen. Die anderen Nutzer über PR kosten uns auch Geld [...] das kostet halt Zeit. Wenn wir jetzt viral wären wie Whatsapp, dann wäre das günstiger. Also wir sind relativ günstiger in der Nutzerakquise, aber es ist noch nicht so, dass wir damit explodieren.“ (#05, 77)</p> <p>“In one case it was about testing a new vertical of potential publishers, that we haven't really worked with in the past, tracking the quality really deeply to see if it makes sense for our advertisers. And if successful launching it across at least three advertiser's campaigns.” (#18, 145)</p> |
| | Branding (2x) | #10 / #11 | <p>„Wie man an Kunden rankommen kann und wie unsere Branding-Strategie ist, was ein sehr kreativer Prozess ist und die Art und Weise, wie wir mit den Leuten reden.“ (#11, 79)</p> |
| External Development (28x) | Customer segments (9x) | #01 / #03 / #06 (2x) / #10 (2x) / #11 / #13 (2x) | <p>„Wir gehen nicht nur auf kleine Unternehmen, sondern mittlerweile auch auf große Filialisten und auf Agenturen. Wir bieten neue Produkte für Agenturen an.“ (#03, 143)</p> <p>„Weil mein einer Mitarbeiter jetzt im Onlinemarketingbereich aktiv ist. Und der immer wieder mit kleinen Insights daher kommt. So was wie: [...] Dass die Zielgruppe doch ein Tacken älter ist als wir gedacht haben beispielsweise.“ (#01, 195)</p> <p>„Wir haben festgestellt, dass eben Früchte total gut funktionieren vor allem bei Frauen, Nüsse besser bei Männern. Das sind einfach Daten, die wir aus unserem Kundenstamm generieren konnten und die in allen drei Saleschannels variiert haben und dementsprechend haben wir auch in allen drei Saleschannels eben unterschiedlich unsere Zielgruppen angesprochen.“ (#06, 79)</p> <p>„Da kam mal Supermarkt als Sponsor dazu, und irgendwann hat er gesagt, ich kaufe es komplett und dann haben wir gemerkt: Oh ja spannendes Modell, komm wir gehen nur noch über den Handel, damit hat sich das Geschäftsmodell quasi 180 Grad gedreht und aktuell fahren wir ein bisschen zweigleisig.“ (#13, 113)</p> |
| | Pricing (6x) | #03 (3x) / #09 / #10 / #12 | <p>„Warum verkaufen wir das Produkt eigentlich für genau 419 Euro oder 520 Euro oder was auch immer. Was passiert eigentlich, wenn ich es doppelt so teuer mache? Könnten wir ja mehr verdienen. Dann startet man halt Tests und Versuche. Und das was die Mitarbeiter schreien, das muss nicht immer das sein was es ist. Wenn du auf jeden Mitarbeiter hören würdest, dann würde dir jeder Mitarbeiter sagen: Nein, auf keinen Fall Preis erhöhen. Kann er ja weniger verkaufen.“ (#03, 151)</p> <p>„Wir haben das Pricing komplett geändert. Also das war vorher bis auf eine ganz ganz kleine, schmale Setup Fee, die nichts war eigentlich, die komplett auf Erfolg basiert, also dass man Geld bekommt, für Leute, die gesucht haben. Und ja, das hätte sich nie getragen und hat auch, ist auch nicht gerechtfertigt gewesen, für die Leistung, die wir erbracht haben.“ (#09, 169)</p> <p>„Das Monetarisierungsmodell haben wir das auch insofern gedreht, weil wir ursprünglich mit anderen Annahmen ran gegangen sind, was Margen und so weiter angeht, was sich sozusagen der Kunde leisten kann. Und auch da eigentlich davon</p> |

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| | | | <i>ausgegangen sind, dass Performancemodell besser hinkommt. Kam es jetzt witzigerweise nicht und so ein Fix-Vergütetes-Modell funktioniert besser bei den Kunden und von daher haben wir gerade eben in Bereich Monetarisierung, Pricing einiges geändert.“ (#12, 138)</i> |
| | Creating revenue streams (5x) | #05 (3x) / #10 / #14 | <i>„Wir haben eine Crowd, ja, da ist ein Asset. [Wir müssen uns überlegen,] wie kann man das monetisieren? Lass die doch nebenbei für Studenten als Umfragetool nutzen, wenn die ein bestimmtes Segment aus der Crowd nutzen wollen, um Daten zu erheben. So können wir die noch auslasten und Geld verdienen.“ (#14, 67)</i> |
| | Business model (5x) | #01 / #06 (2x) / #13 / #14 | <i>„Wir müssen Wege finden, auch neue Wege. Was wir jetzt gerade machen, zumindest von dem was ich mitbekommen habe, gibt es nichts was wir einfach [von einem anderen Wettbewerber] kopieren könnten.“ (#01, 63)</i> <i>„Zu Beginn hatte die Wertschöpfungskette zwei Akteure, einen Produzenten und einen Vertrieb. Also wir waren Vertrieb. Anschließend gab es einen Produzenten, einen Logistikdienstleister und den Vertrieb. Und jetzt gibt es noch den Produzenten, der alles unter einem Dach macht.“ (#06, 169)</i> |
| | Workaround laws (2x) | #16 / #19 | <i>„Da gibt es sehr viele Firmen mittlerweile, die entsprechende Lösungen anbieten und wir realisieren jetzt eine eigene Lösung für die Video-Identifikation und die elektronische Signatur - da arbeiten wir mit einer fertigen Lösung zusammen, die die Bank eingebunden hat. Also wir bringen quasi nur die vorhandenen Dots an einer Stelle zusammen.“ (#19, 103)</i> |
| | Competitor analysis (1x) | #16 | <i>„Wir analysieren sehr genau, was der Wettbewerb macht und nehmen das als einen Input.“ (#16, 135)</i> |
| Internal Development (37x) | Processes (25x) | #02 / #04 (3x) / #06 (4x) / #07 (3x) / #09 / #11 (3x) / #12 / #13 (3x) / #16 / #17 (2x) / #18 (2x) / #19 | <i>„Wir haben uns das anfangs natürlich genau aufgezeichnet: Wie muss eigentlich der Flow sein? Vom Income der Kleidung, bis hin zur Verarbeitung und zum Packen der Sets und wie viele Minuten darf das eigentlich kosten? [...] Und später im Gespräch mit den Mitarbeitern festgestellt haben: Das ist ja eigentlich gar nicht gut und deshalb hat sich der Prozess im Laufe der Zeit immer wieder weiter entwickelt und weiter verbessert.“ (#04, 86)</i> <i>„Es gibt natürlich sehr viele Operation-Prozesse wo neue Dinge entwickelt werden, wo Mitarbeiter Vorschläge bringen [...]: Wo brauchen wir ein neues Feld, um effizienter zu arbeiten, was wäre besser für den Kunden, um das Produkt besser zu beurteilen? Da kommen wahrscheinlich hundert [suggestions] in der Woche zusammen.“ (#11, 243)</i> <i>„Wie wir die Werbung einkaufen: Da haben wir 'ne ganze Ecke an Tools gebaut in den letzten anderthalb Jahren, die uns da unterstützen und den kompletten Einkauf eigentlich automatisieren, das heißt auch die Optimierung... also wir wissen halt genau, wieviel wir für 'nen Klick bei Google ausgeben dürfen, um am Ende noch Geld zu verdienen, weil wir müssen diesen Klick ja vorfinanzieren und am Ende des Tages zu sehen: Okay, hat der uns Geld gebracht oder haben wir da draufbezahlt?“ (#17, 116)</i> |
| | HR (6x) | #03 (4x) / #06 / #14 | <i>„Wir brauchen sehr schnell sehr gute Leute. Wo kriegen wir die her? Indem wir Stellenausschreibungen machen? Wahrscheinlich nicht. Indem wir bei Xing active sourcing machen, Leute anschreiben? Auch super. Aber wir haben jetzt für nächste Woche sechs Praktikanten gebraucht. Kriegt man die so einfach? Nein. Kreativ waren wir definitiv, weil wir hier über Facebook die Leute aufgefordert haben zu teilen: Hey, teil diese Anzeige. Wenn jemand kommt, bekommst du einen 50 Euro Amazon-Gutschein. Das hat einen viralen Effekt gegeben, der war unvorstellbar.“ (#03, 69)</i> <i>„Wie man das Zusammenleben im Team verbessern kann, also alles so Büro, wir brauchen neue Stühle, ich will Klopapier mit Elefanten drauf [laughing].“ (#06, 205)</i> |
| | Logistics (4x) | #06 / #07 (3x) | <i>„Wie kann man die Logistik effizienter aufsetzen? Kann es irgendwann Sinn machen, dass man keinen externen Dienstleister nimmt, sondern irgendwann sogar interne Teams hat? Ich glaub, das ist eine relativ klassische Frage, die sich jedes Unternehmen stellt, das mit Logistik zu tun hat.“ (#07, 89)</i> |
| | Company Culture (2x) | #14 (2x) | <i>“Take care of people, people, people. And than the Rest.” - Und Innovation bei uns ist zum Beispiel auch Firmenkultur zu haben: Wie triffst du Entscheidungen, wie delegierst du, wie lebst du, welche Transparenz führst du unten an, welche Freiheiten hat jeder und darf auch selbst etwas ausprobieren. Auch da ist</i> |

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| | | | Innovation. Wie bestärkst du unter deinen Mitarbeitern Ideen, belohnst du Risiko, oder machst du Abstrafen.“ (#14, 67) |
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3. Categories of Humble Leadership Behavior

| Core Category | Appearance in Interviews | Example Quotes |
|---|---|---|
| Admitting mistakes and limitations (46x) | #01 (9) / #02 (6) / #03 (2) / #04 / #05 / #06 (2) / #07 (2) / #08 (2) / #09 (2) / #10 (2) / #13 (2) / #14 (6) / #15 (4) / #16 / #18 (2) / #19 (2) | <p>„Das [wrongly communicated context to the employee] ist am Anfang öfter passiert. Ich hab dann gelernt, dass man falsch kommuniziert.“ (#2, 111)</p> <p>„Die Leute haben wir mit der genauen Ansage eingestellt: Wir können's nicht, wir brauchen jemanden der das kann und der auch den Hut auf hat.“ (#2, 91)</p> <p>„Finde ich fantastisch Schwächen zuzugeben und damit halt auch den Mitarbeitern zeigt: Hey, das ist ganz normal, dass man nicht alles weiß.“ (#7, 103)</p> <p>„Ich hab' auch meine Momente, in denen ich irgendwie cholerisch und schlechte Laune hab' und irgendwie... ich schrei dann die Leute nicht an, aber ich bin einfach garstig, ja.“ (#15, 205)</p> <p>„Unser Geschäftsmodell ist sehr sehr komplexes ist und ein sehr sehr spezialisiertes, und ich kann da ohne Weiteres zugeben, dass ich da nicht in jedes einzelne Teil bis zum Letzten durchsteige, und deswegen halt auch Leute brauche, die da wesentlich fitter sind, zb Analyse, Datenbank, Datenbankverständnis“ (#17, 136)</p> <p>„Ich hab jetzt nicht den Anspruch mehr zu wissen als mein IT-Leiter, also es wäre ja schlimm quasi.“ (#19, 121)</p> |
| Spotlighting follower strength and Contributions (45x) | #01 (5) / #02 / #03 / #04 (3) / #05 (2) / #06 (5) / #07 (6) / #08 (3) / #09 / #10 (3) / #11 (6) / #12 (2) / #13 / #14 (2) / #15 / #17 / #19 (2) | <p>„Wenn ich mit Investoren spreche, dann ist ja Teil des Ganzen, dass ich da auch mein Team anbiete.“ (#01, 229)</p> <p>„Aber ansonsten vertraue ich dem einfach, weil die das einfach echt gut kann. Und ich bin halt nicht diejenigen, die jeden Tag Sets packt. Ist halt einfach so, und die sind immer noch die Expertinnen da drinnen.“ (#4, 156)</p> <p>„Wir haben auch jede Woche ein Standup für das ganze Team. Wo wir auch meistens ein oder zwei Highlights rauspicken und sagen: Super Job hier, android-Entwickler, danke, diesen Kunden hast du wieder zurückgeholt. Toll. Das machen wir natürlich auch strategisch, weil wir Vorbilder etablieren wollen.“ (#05, 141)</p> <p>„Wir haben sehr schnell gemerkt dass die Mitarbeiterin sehr gut organisiert ist, kommunikativ sehr stark und extrem loyal und vertrauensvoll arbeitet und insofern haben wir sie in zwei Jahren konsequent gefördert und täglich gefordert.“ (#06, 119)</p> <p>„Sehr gut. Hat sich sehr gefreut [about a promotion for a new responsibility]. Weil es auch genau ihren Stärken auch entsprach. Also es war Wertschätzung für sie, dass wir das sehen und anerkennen, was sie kann, ihre Fähigkeiten. Und gleichzeitig natürlich, nicht nur wir, sondern dass es auch vor den Kollegen formalisiert wurde eben auch, dass sie das auch anerkennen.“ (#07, 177)</p> <p>„Einmal die Woche, da pitcht eigentlich ohnehin jeder das, was er in der letzten Woche gemacht hat, [...] auch darum, eigene Erfolge irgendwie ein Stück weit zu share.“ (#10, 288)</p> <p>„Er ist ein Genie. Also ich habe ihn natürlich gelobt in höchstem Maße und mich bedankt, dass er das alles allein gemacht hat [...], auch öffentlich gelobt haben wir ihn viel. Habe versucht, einen snow-ball-effect zu machen, wenn die Leute irgendwas groß machen.“ (#11)</p> <p>„Okay, krass, und hab' ihm auch gesagt: Du, das ist genau, was ich hören will! - Weil ich immer wieder verraffe, lean zu denken, und dann müssen es die Mitarbeiter halt auch alle mitmachen.“ (#15, 328)</p> <p>„Ich versuche immer: Positives Feedback personenbezogen, Kritik gruppenbezogen.“ (#15, 380)</p> |

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| <p>Modeling teachability (46x)</p> | <p>#02 (2) / #03 (4) / #04 (3) / #05 / #06 (3) / #09 / #10 (4) / #11 (3) / #12 (3) / #13 (5) / #14 (2) / #15 (4) / #16 (3) / #18 (8)</p> | <p>„Da gibt's den schönen Satz Willing-to-fail. Ich liebe es Fehler zu machen eigentlich, weil dann wissen wir: So geht's nicht, dann können wir das schon mal wegstreichen.“ (#03, 163)</p> <p>„Also folge ich da eher dem Prinzip ‚Get the most out of now‘: Komm, hier, ich liege jetzt [after a big failure became obvious for an employee] schon so zu sagen angeschossen irgendwie da, ja, komm, jetzt, hau zu, gib alles, was du irgendwie noch auf dem Zettel hast irgendwie auch noch! - Und ich zieh da auch unglaublich viel in dem Moment raus und lerne halt einfach krass viel.“ (#10, 159)</p> <p>„Ich gehe auf Fachkongresse, habe mich da weiterentwickelt. Das erste, was wir gemacht haben ist so einen Beirat zu gründen aus der Industrie. Hab jetzt auch so Workshops. Wo wir Themen hatten, wo die uns nur darüber belehren, was in der Industrie gerade passiert.“ (#14, 75)</p> <p>„Ich hab' einfach mit Freunden, die auch Unternehmer sind, darüber gesprochen, um mir deren Erfahrungsschatz irgendwie... probieren wir, probier' ich das aus. Es ist ganz viel ausprobieren, denke ich.“ (#15, 386)</p> <p>„Natürlich hab' ich trotzdem den Anspruch, kontinuierlich weiter zu lernen und rauszufinden, was ich noch besser machen kann. Ich mein', deswegen arbeite ich bei 'nem Start-up. [...] Das ist für viele wahrscheinlich die Hauptmotivation.“ (#16, 302)</p> |
| <p>Enabling employee to act and decide independently (59x)</p> | <p>#01 (3) / #02 (6) / #03 / #05 (7) / #06 (5) / #07 (3) / #08 (4) / #09 (5) / #12 (3) / #13 (4) / #14 (2) / #15 (3) / #16 (2) / #17 / #18 (4) / #19 (6)</p> | <p>„Für mich ist es wichtig zielbasiert das rein zu gehen. Also nicht zu fragen, wie macht jetzt eine Person irgendetwas, weil meinetwegen, wenn die einfach besser ist als alle anderen und (...) dann sollte die gucken wie die das selber erreicht.“ (#01, 129)</p> <p>„Das sag ich eigentlich immer wieder: Ja das ist meine Meinung, aber am Ende solltest du nicht auf mich hören. Also wenn du eine eigene Meinung hast, du bist der Designer oder du bist der Concepter, du hast da einfach ein besseres Gefühl für.“ (#02, 133)</p> <p>„Wir achten darauf, dass wir Leute dazu enabeln, selber Sachen zu machen. Also das wir zum Beispiel eine Einweisung in die Datenbank machen, auch für jemanden der nur gegebenenfalls mal auf die Datenbank zugreifen muss. Wir sagen hier hast du zwei drei SQL Step-ins, das kennst du wohl, und dann kann er eine Abfrage machen. Und manche sagen: Hey, das finde ich geil.“ (#05, 133)</p> <p>„Oft weiß ich genau, was ich möchte. Aber ich denke dann, wenn ich das jetzt genau so sage und der das genauso abarbeitet, dann ist das für den... dann schleift sich das ein, dann wird er blöde. Und das will ich auf gar keinen Fall. Weil ich weiß, dass er an einer anderen Stelle mitdenken muss. Und das ist mir viel wichtiger [...] als dass ich ihn immer optimal aussteuere.“ (#05, 181)</p> <p>„Jeder Mitarbeiter [...] sollte in der Zeit [first 3-6 month] mindestens drei Mal mit jedem Gründer eben alleine Mittag oder Abendessen gehen um einfach das zu reflektieren was sie in der Zeit gelernt haben. [...] Was unser Ziel damit war, dass zum einen 100% Transparenz zu gewährleisten. Dass alle verstehen was im Unternehmen passiert. Bei uns war von Anfang an Buchhaltung, Umsätze, Gehälter alles transparent.“ (#06, 123)</p> <p>„Wenn es kein existenzbedrohlicher Fehler für die Firma war, dann haben wir oft auch Entscheidungen zugelassen von Mitarbeitern wo wir von vorherein wussten, dass die Wahrscheinlichkeit, dass der Plan so aufgeht extrem gering ist. [...] Einfach um den Mitarbeiter selbst Erfahrungen sammeln zu lassen.“ (#06, 197)</p> <p>„Also ich muss auch der dümmste im Raum sein. [...] Sag auch, dass die mehr wissen, dass sie besser sind, deswegen auch die Entscheidungshoheit kriegen. Außer es gibt da von mir Veto, weil es strategisch irgendwie Bedenken gibt, was auch immer.“ (#14, 71)</p> <p>„Du willst die Leute dazu bringen, dass sie selbstverantwortlich sind und quasi immer wieder drüber nachdenken.“ (#15, 327)</p> |