THE ROLE OF LEADERS IN ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING INTERORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

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Purpose: This paper aims to delineate the leader's role in both establishing and maintaining interorganizational relationships. It is leaders on whom the success of teams under their guidance hinges significantly, impacting the achievement of organizational goals, an entity's overall effectiveness, the efficiency of its operation, market positioning, and relationship-building with external entities.

Design/methodology/approach: As business and technological trends evolve, leaders need to demonstrate not only managerial skills but also interpersonal skills, empathy, and flexibility. The objectives were achieved through a pilot study using a PAPI, CAWI survey method with a self-constructed questionnaire. The target group was middle- and top-level managers, currently students of the Master of Business Administration. The study focuses on the dynamics of inter-organizational relationships, their form, motivation, and leadership roles.

Findings: The pilot study findings underscore the significance of a leader possessing both knowledge and appropriate character traits within an organization seeking inter-organizational collaboration. The leader's primary objective should be to inspire individuals to forge relationships, complemented by effective organizing or planning tailored to the sector's requirements.

Originality/value: The article introduces insights into the role of leadership in establishing and maintaining inter-organizational relationships, highlighting qualities such as respect, open communication, and teamwork. It provides a valuable basis for understanding leadership dynamics in the public and private sectors. To date, there has been no research in the literature on the location and dynamics of leadership in education. This pilot study is the first phase of a larger project and shows that the research direction is valid based on the analysis of the literature and the experiences of managers.

Keywords: leader, inter-organizational relations, private and public sector.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

In a turbulent and competitive environment, companies continuously seek opportunities to improve their market position (Kozioł-Nadolna, 2020). Interorganizational relationships and ensuing interorganizational collaborations serve as avenues for organizations to enhance their competitive edge. Through collaboration among entities, organizations generate a synergy effect, bolstering access to cutting-edge and high-technology resources (Bańkowski, Rzepka, 2024).

In our increasingly complex global landscape, which sees organizations collaborating at various levels, the role of a leader in establishing and maintaining interorganizational relationships becomes paramount (Cortellazzo et al., 2019). As business and technological trends evolve, leaders must not only exhibit managerial skills but also demonstrate interpersonal abilities, empathy, and flexibility. It is leaders on whom the success of teams under their guidance hinges significantly, impacting the achievement of organizational goals, an entity's overall effectiveness, efficiency of its operation, its market positioning, and relationship-building with external entities. Consequently, it can be assumed that leaders wield substantial influence (Rzepka, 2023) over the quality of relationships—both internal and external.

To foster positive, enduring, and long-term relationships, leaders must consider several critical aspects, such as collaborating with various stakeholders (this applies to both internal and external stakeholders) that should be built on effective communication, conflict resolution and negotiation (in order to uphold harmony and cooperation among partners), as well as building trust at multiple levels—within the organization and beyond. Leaders must also show understanding of the needs and values of their business partners, and embrace an innovative approach to partnerships (which is manifested in openness to new ideas and strategies that might enhance the value of cooperation among all involved parties. Another important aspect involves continuous monitoring and improving interorganizational relations; leaders must therefore regularly assess the quality of relationships their organization have with other entities, respond to changing market conditions, and adapt their collaboration strategies on that basis.

This paper explores research entities from both the public and private sectors, each operating under distinct principles, goals, and strategies. Public enterprises receive subsidies from the state budget (Mitek, Micuła, 2012). Their primary advantage lies in their ability to focus on fulfilling their mission rather than solely pursuing financial gains. For public organizations, having a stable source of funding is crucial (Kozarzewski, Bałtowski, 2016). State subsidies enable them to pursue additional objectives, such as scientific research. On the other hand, private enterprises aim to generate income. By earning profits, they can fulfill tax obligations, compensate employees, and invest in further development.

2. Literature view

In light of the above, the main objective of this article is to define the role of leaders in establishing and maintaining relationships between organizations across various sectors (public and private) and their business partners. Additionally, three specific goals have been formulated: (1) to investigate leader traits that positively impact organizational management effectiveness and efficiency in both the public and private sectors; (2) to detail activities undertaken by leaders in organizations in public and private sectors in order to nurture relationships with business partners, and (3) to articulate the role of leaders in public and private sectors when it comes to establishing successful business relationships.

The structure of this paper has been intentionally designed to align with its goals. It comprises three distinct sections: the theory part (which delves into issues related to the role of a leader within modern organizations and explores its dynamics in the public and private sectors), the methodology part (which presents the research methodology employed in this article), and the empirical part (which analyzes and interprets the results of own research).

2.1. Leaders in contemporary organizations

A leader, as defined by Iwińska (2023) is an individual who exerts a positive influence on other employees without resorting to coercive tactics. Their attitude depends on a set of soft skills (e.g. communication, creativity, dynamism, adaptability) that directly shape their management style (Szczęsna, 2021) and how they are perceived by others. The primary objective of a leader is to optimize the potential and competencies of other employees (Kopertyńska, 2015).

Nowadays, when organizations largely operate based on the VUCA concept (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity), leaders must exhibit agility and flexibility and need specific competencies across various domains such as social competence (e.g. empathy), organizational acumen (e.g. organizing work), strategic thinking (e.g. planning), and technological literacy (e.g. analyzing data) (Grześ, 2022). A comprehensive overview of the desired competencies of a contemporary leader is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
Leader competence overview

Type of competence	Characteristic
Interpersonal competencies	problem-solving ability, delegating authority, establishing relationships, demonstrating empathy and openness, influencing others
Specialized competencies	qualifications, knowledge, experience, management skills
Innovative competencies	creative thinking, aptitude for continuous learning, ability to absorb new solutions

Source: Own elaboration based on Kopacka (2015).

Today, leaders encounter many challenges (as outlined in Table 2), and their organizational roles are exceptionally intricate (Grześ, 2022). Both external and internal conditions can directly affect an organization's functioning. As a result, leaders must grapple with new challenges (Deloitte Insights, 2019):

- entry of new generations into the labor market,
- changing organizational environment,
- technology development,
- evolving customer expectations.

The role of a leader involves a series of activities aimed at addressing the challenges posed by the modern market (Mazur-Wierzbicka, 2020). Among these, interorganizational relationships play a crucial role as the determinants in facilitating effective responses to the above-mentioned challenges. In their relationships with employees, leaders should exhibit three key traits: affirmation, repetition, and charisma (Garita, Martinez, 2016). Furthermore, inclusiveness and flexibility allow leaders to understand employees and their needs (Travaglione et al., 2017). Inclusive leaders constantly seek input from their employees during decision-making processes (Cortellazzo et al., 2019). Therefore, it is important for the leader to effectively build and foster strong relationships with their business partners.

2.2. Public and private sectors

The public sector is a part of the economy that encompasses organizations that are under state and local government authority (Fryczyńska, Fierla, 2015). These institutions provide public services, spanning many aspects of the society such as education, transportation, or healthcare. Notably, public organizations rely on funding from public resources (Brol, 2021). In highly-developed economies, the public sector's influence continues to grow (Kóska-Wolny, 2023).

The private sector comprises enterprises operating in the market in pursuit of generating profits. These businesses, regardless of their legal form, include all entrepreneurs (Ostrowiecki, 2015), and are focused on high efficiency and competitiveness. They engage with the market-seeking customers, thus looking for ways to improve their economic operations. Due to its clear ownership structure, it is easy to distinguish this sector from the public one. It is regarded as "the most productive, innovative, and effective" (Olbińska, 2013) sphere of the economy.

Both public and private organizations grapple with the impact of environmental conditions (Kóska-Wolny, 2023). However, the private sector is particularly sensitive to crises that occur in the environment (Ostrowiecki, 2015). A critical element of organizational functioning of organizations across sectors is competitiveness, i.e. participation in market competition. For public organizations, competitiveness is the ability to achieve their intended goals in the market efficiently, effectively, profitably, and economically using selected tools. A public organization is considered competitive when at least two conditions are met: there exist at least

two entities with the same or similar goals, and these entities operate in the same competitive arena (Stankiewicz, 2005).

When considering the aforementioned definition, it is important to differentiate between the objectives of public and private organizations. Public entities focus their goals on implementing activities with a public and social orientation, whereas private sector organizations pursue commercial goals. Kędzierska (2005, p. 98) highlights that competitiveness in the private sector pertains to a business's capacity to thrive in a specific industry under free-market conditions. Enhanced competitiveness solidifies a company's position within the industry, reducing its susceptibility to external pressures and economic downturns. This has become particularly significant in open economies, which are more vulnerable to crises. There are several factors that influence the development of an enterprise's competitiveness, including the number, size, and diversity of enterprises, product assortment, the degree of market saturation, technological advancements, among others.

Understanding the disparities between sectors is important for tailoring management approaches within specific organizations. Three fundamental factors that directly influence management discrepancies in the public and private and public sectors include ownership, financing, and control. Public sector institutions are community-owned, financed through taxes, and subject to political oversight, whereas organizations in the private sector are owned by shareholders of owners of the company, financed by customers, and controlled by market forces (Boyne, 2002).

Boyne (2002) delineates four spheres where an institution's public or private sector status affects its management: organizational environment, goals, structures, and the values the leaders uphold. The most important distinction between activities of public and private institutions lies in their divergent objectives. While private sector organizations are profit-oriented, public entities are committed to providing public services (Brol, 2021). Financing mechanisms also differ significantly between public and private entities. Public organizations rely on public funds, whereas private counterparts draw from private sources. Moreover, operational modalities vary as private sector operations often push boundaries within legal frameworks, engaging in activities not explicitly prohibited by law, while public organizations must adhere to regulatory frameworks and guidelines (Rostkowski, 2012).

3. Research Methodology

The research results presented in this article stem from a segment of a broader research initiative conducted collaboratively by the Lublin University of Technology and the University of Warsaw. Titled "Interorganizational Relations in the Socio-Economic Economy", the project

spans from October 1, 2023, to September 30, 2024. The research aims to delve into various facets of interorganizational relations, including:

1. Definition and forms of interorganizational relationships.
2. Factors motivating and impeding interorganizational relationships.
3. Controlling mechanisms within interorganizational relationships.
4. The role of leaders in shaping interorganizational relationships.
5. Organizational structure and competencies.

The initial phase of the research project, Stage I, comprised a pilot study conducted from December 2023 to January 2024. The study aimed, among other things, to expand knowledge in the realm of interorganizational relationships, with particular focus on taking insights from leaders in the respective sectors into account. For this reason, the research sample was purposefully selected. The survey questionnaire was distributed to students enrolled in the Master of Business Administration postgraduate program at the Lublin University of Technology. The study was conducted on the assumption that these students wanted to develop their insights into organizational dynamics because of their managerial positions.

The research technique used for that purpose, PAPI (Paper and Pen Interview), allowed for a 100% response rate, yielding 47 completed questionnaires. In this paper, the authors discuss the responses from 46 participants. One respondent identified their organizational affiliation as belonging to the public-private sector, making it impossible to categorize the affiliation within the control variable, which delineates organizational sector as either private or public.

As part of the research process, a self-constructed survey questionnaire comprising 15 closed questions was utilized to collect data. The questionnaire included single-choice and multiple-choice questions, along with a five-point Likert scale, facilitating the measurement of respondents' views. Analysis of the responses indicated a predominance of male participants (60.9%) with managerial experience averaging 11-15 years (26.9%) in organizations that had been operating for a minimum of 11 years (84.8%). A comprehensive breakdown of data on the 46 respondents is provided in Table 3.

Table 2.
Breakdown of respondent characteristics – sex, position held, type, and duration of organization existence

Sex	
female	39.1% of respondents
male	60.9% of respondents
Managerial position held	
under 5 years	19.4% of respondents
6-10 years	15.1% of respondents
11-15 years old	26.7% of respondents
16 years or older	10.7% of respondents
Not applicable	28.1% of respondents
Type of organization	
private	52.2% of respondents
public	47.8% of respondents

Cont. table 2.

Duration of the company's existence	
0-1 year	0.0% of respondents
2-5 years	7.3% of respondents
6-10 years	7.3% of respondents
11 years or more	85.4% of respondents

Source: Own study based on research.

It is important to note certain limitations of the pilot studies discussed in this article. Notably, the research sample was confined to postgraduate students from a single university in Lublin (specifically, the Master of Business Administration program at the Lublin University of Technology). Consequently, the research lacks insights from leaders in other regions of Poland. Additionally, there's ambiguity regarding the positions held by respondents within their respective organizations, with over 28% of them not occupying managerial roles.

4. Findings

A contemporary leader, whether in the public or private sectors, must possess a variety of qualities that set them apart within both internal and external environments. These characteristics include but are not limited to, strong communication skills, the ability to inspire motivation, empathy, creativity, innovation, decisiveness, and effective time management. Chart 1 illustrates those leader traits that contribute positively to organizational management effectiveness.
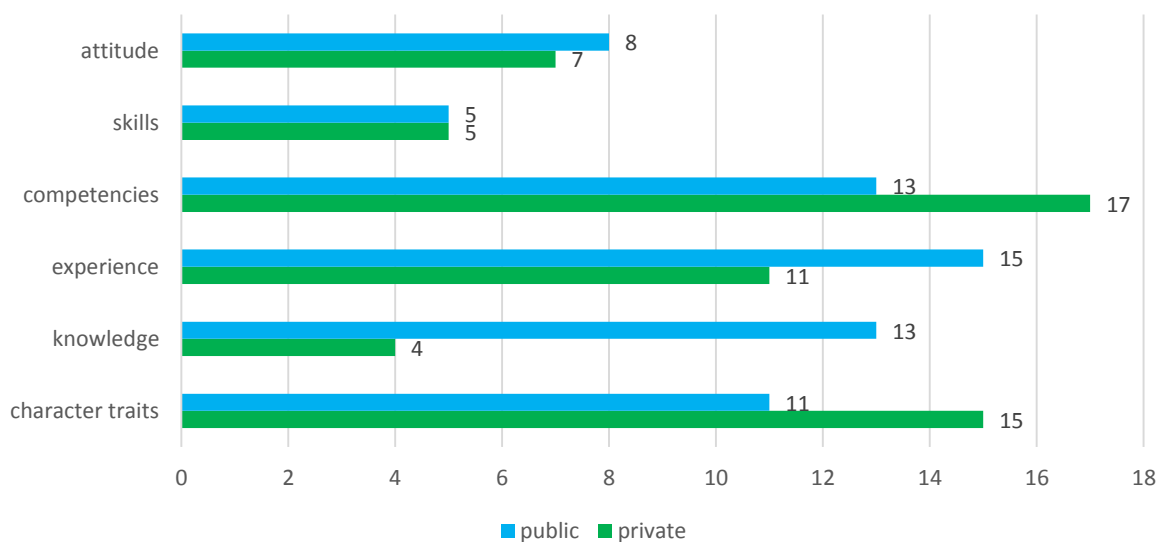

Figure 1. Leader traits contributing to effective enterprise management (n)[1].

Source: Own study based on research.

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[1] The suggested question was a multiple-choice one (a maximum of 3 answers).

The data in figure 1 indicates that in public organizations, leaders who exert the greatest positive impact on management effectiveness are: competencies in the broadest sense of the word (17 responses) and character traits (15 responses). The key attributes of a public sector leader include experience (15 responses) and knowledge (13 responses). Conversely, the least emphasized traits are skills (5 responses in each sector), and in the public sector specifically, knowledge was perceived as less impactful for effective organization management. Among respondents from the private sector, knowledge garnered three times more responses (13 responses).

The data presented in figure 1 underscores the unanimous recognition among all respondents of the three most critical attributes of a leader in enterprise management: competencies (totaling 30 responses), alongside experience and character traits (each receiving 26 responses). These findings echo the predominant views of respondents from the private sector. Respondents from the public sector also emphasized the significance of a leader's knowledge (13 responses). Conversely, the importance attributed to skills received the lowest number of responses.

Leaders within organizations undertake a myriad of functions aimed at ensuring efficient business operations and nurturing relationships with business partners. These functions often entail a blend of tasks performed across various stages of cooperation or concurrently. Figure 2 provides insights into the functions performed by leaders in the process of establishing interorganizational relationships.
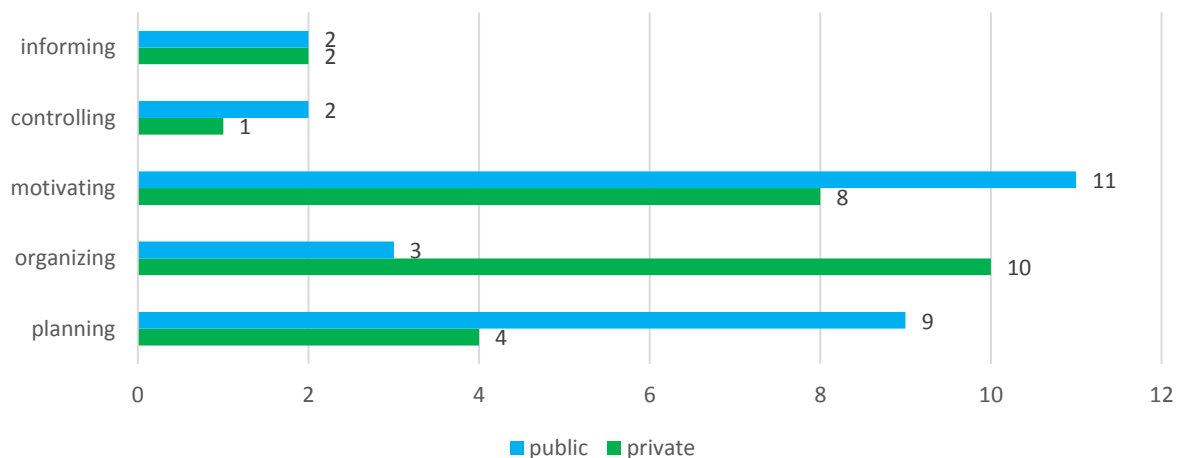

Figure 2. Leaders' tasks in establishing interorganizational relationships (n).

Source: Own study based on research.

The data presented in figure 2 indicates that, for public sector organizations, the primary function attributed to the leader in establishing interorganizational relationships is motivation (11 responses), followed closely by planning (9 responses). According to respondents, the functions of controlling and informing are deemed the least useful in establishing relationships with partners. Conversely, for private sector representatives, the most crucial

function of a leader in establishing interorganizational relationships is organizing (10 responses), followed by motivating (8 responses).

Maintaining relationships with business partners is paramount due to the continuous evolution of the market and ever-growing customer demands. Best practices in building and sustaining enduring business relationships encompass conducting open dialogue, fostering cooperation, providing understanding during challenging times, exhibiting flexibility in adapting to changing market conditions, demonstrating self-confidence and charisma, and emphasizing the partner's individualism, among others. Effective maintenance of organizations' relationships with partners hinges on the proactive role of the leader and the actions undertaken in this process (refer to figure 3).
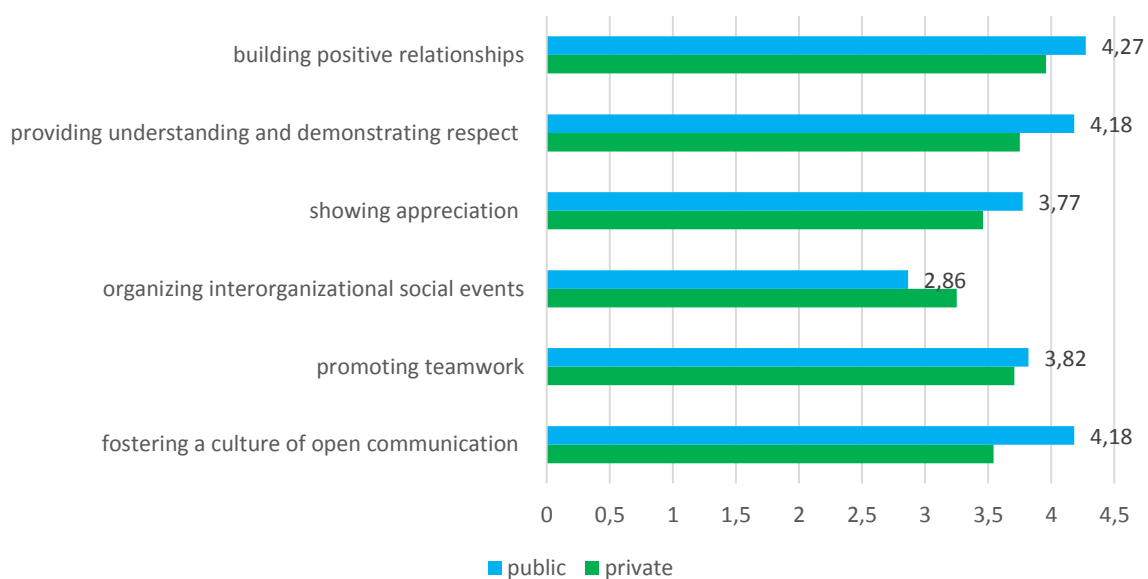

Figure 3. Respondents' activities for maintaining interorganizational relationships (average)[2].

Source: Own study based on research.

The data presented in Chart 3 highlights the primary activities conducted in public organizations to uphold relationships, emphasizing building positive relationships (average response rate of 4.27) and fostering a culture of open communication (4.18) as key endeavors in maintaining established partnerships. Similarly, in private enterprises, building positive relationships (4.27) and demonstrating understanding and respect are also predominant (average response rate of 3.75). Conversely, organizing interorganizational social gatherings is deemed least important by respondents in both sectors, with response rates of 2.86 in the public sector and 3.25 in the private sector.

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[2] The question used a Likert scale of 1 to 5.

5. Discussion

Establishing interorganizational relations hinges on leaders possessing specific attributes tailored to their respective economic sectors, facilitating the achievement of organizational goals. For leaders in the public sector, essential traits include the ability to build cooperative networks, embracing change and being able to adapt to it, adherence to ethical values, and contextual intelligence, among other things. In the private sector, today's business demands individuals who are alert, agile, creative, and committed to continuous learning. A leader in this context requires analytical skills and a proactive approach to motivate and stimulate their team. In the post-Covid era, leaders characterized by lack of authenticity, agility, and teamwork are dispensable (ICAN Management Review, 2022).

The study findings reveal both similarities and notable differences in the leader's role in fostering and sustaining interorganizational relationships across the public and private sectors. In the private sector, respondents attributed the greatest importance to competences and character traits in positively influencing organizational management. Conversely, in the public sector, respondents emphasized the significance of experience and knowledge. However, when assessing the role of leaders in establishing relationships, the majority of respondents from both sectors identified motivating as one of the key leadership functions, and informing and controlling were considered secondary.

It is noteworthy that creating a culture of open communication as an action undertaken in organizations to sustain relationships with business partners, received a much higher average rating in the public sector compared to the private sector. This observation confirms the assumptions of the New Public Management doctrine, this doctrine advocates for a departure from the role of unilateral authority in determining the shape of the public sector, in favor of establishing a multi-entity system of dialogue and collaboration. In such a system, public authority structures engage with other entities in order to develop optimal solutions (Denhardt, Denhardt, 2000).

In today's era of heightened competitiveness, particularly within the private sector, it becomes imperative to adopt a unified economic and social mission. Engaging in competition for supremacy or striving for dominance often results in merely gaining a superficial advantage. The challenge for 21st-century manager-leaders lies in exercising wise, discerning, and primarily participative leadership, grounded in extensive internal and external collaboration. This participatory approach entails a balanced and somewhat controlled involvement of the organization's employees and partners in the decision-making process. Interorganizational collaboration should extend to collaboration with entities across various sectors of the economy, fostering mutual symbiosis (Mazurkiewicz, 2015).

The leader's role in establishing interorganizational relationships is important and complex (Hauke-Lopes, 2014). In the private sector, it is necessary for the leader to use various types of incentives to drive development (Ostrowiecki, 2015). According to our analysis, there are potential similarities across the sectors under examination for motivation. Respondents from both public and private organizations attributed significant importance on motivation as the most important role of leaders in building relationships.

In addition to motivating, respondents from the private sector emphasized the importance of organizing as the key activity in fostering collaboration, whereas those from the public sector highlighted planning. This divergence may stem from the distinct operational framework of both sectors. Public organizations are obliged to operate in accordance with applicable law (Rostkowski, 2012), necessitating careful planning in the relationship-establishing process.

Organizations in the private sector are often perceived as taking more actions to maintain relationships with their partners (Fryczyńska, Fierla, 2015). However, according to our research, respondents from the public sector rated activities related to maintaining relationships with partners more highly. Nevertheless, all respondents acknowledged similar types of activities. Maintaining interorganizational relationships may involve demonstrating respect, fostering positive bonds, as well as promoting teamwork and open communication.

This paper shows that the role of leaders within organizations is comprehensive and influenced by the specificity of the market in which they operate. This is evident in the varied responses in the study regarding the leader's role in establishing relationships across different sectors of the economy. The right combination of leader characteristics and actions is very important in establishing interorganizational collaborations effectively. The research findings highlight the different needs and requirements for leaders and their roles in the relationship-building process between the private and public sectors.

6. Conculusion

The aim of this paper is to delineate the leader's role in both establishing and maintaining interorganizational relationships. The pilot study findings underscore the significance of a leader possessing both knowledge and appropriate character traits within an organization seeking interorganizational collaboration. The leader's primary objective should be to inspire individuals to forge relationships, complemented by effective organizing or planning tailored to the sector's requirements.

Sustaining interorganizational relationships hinges on the leader's initiatives to cultivate positive relationships, demonstrate due respect, cultivate open communication, and encourage teamwork. Nonetheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that the study lacks representativeness,

thereby restricting the universal applicability of the findings. Nonetheless, the results serve as valuable groundwork for subsequent stages of research in this domain.

In today's context, it's paramount to embrace a shared economic and social mission, as competing for authority or seeking domination only yields superficial advantages - one may hold a title of director, but not necessarily embody leadership. The contemporary challenge for 21st-century manager-leaders is to navigate with wisdom, discretion, and above all, a participatory spirit grounded in extensive cooperation. This form of participation entails balanced and somewhat controlled involvement of the organization's employees and partners in the decision-making process. Interorganizational collaboration should span across diverse sectors of the economy, fostering mutual symbiosis.

It seems interesting to deepen the theory regarding the role of a leader by including the most important values and features of a leader in both studied sectors, especially in the opinion of young people. Research conducted by the World Economic Forum (World Economic Forum, 2022), which involved 31,000 people aged 18-35 from 186 countries, showed that the most valued leaders today are: honesty, loyalty, and modesty/humility. Respondents also noted that "according to young people, the public sector should be the leader in public services, including health care, education and security, and not the private sector".

We should consider deepening the theory surrounding the role of a leader, particularly by examining the most significant values and attributes of leaders in both the public and private sectors, particularly from the standpoint of younger generations. Research conducted by the World Economic Forum (World Economic Forum, 2022), involving 31,000 individuals aged 18-35 from 186 countries, revealed that honesty, loyalty, and modesty/humility are among the most prized qualities in leaders today. Furthermore, respondents emphasized that the younger generations believe that the public sector rather than the private sector should take the lead in providing essential public services such as healthcare, education, and security. This insight underscores shifting perceptions regarding the role of leaders in addressing societal needs.

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