

## APPROACHING PODCASTS AS A LEARNING TOOL FOR IMPROVING LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

Andreea-Angela ȘEULEAN<sup>1</sup>, Emilia GRIGORAȘ<sup>2</sup>

---

*Article History: Received: July 15, 2025; Reviewed: November 25, 2025;*

*Accepted: December 8, 2025; Available online: December 18, 2025.*

©2025 Studia UBB Negotia. Published by Babeș-Bolyai University.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

---

**ABSTRACT.** This article aims to analyze how team leadership competencies can be developed and optimized through a non-formal learning tool: podcasts. The study takes as its starting point the podcast series Teamology, which explores current topics related to team functioning, the role of the leader, decision-making, conflict management and adaptability in complex organizational contexts. In an era marked by uncertainty, remote work and cultural diversity, leaders need to adopt flexible practices and acquire accessible, applicable and authentic learning sources.

The paper starts from the premise that podcasts can become a valuable educational resource for developing leadership competencies, by exposing listeners to real experiences, diverse perspectives and concrete solutions. From a methodological viewpoint, the research is qualitative and is based on the content analysis of eight representative episodes of the Teamology series, selected on the basis of thematic criteria. The analysis aimed to extract and interpret the essential team leadership competencies, the strategies presented by the guests and how they can be applied in practice, within modern teams.

The results highlight that podcasts provide an authentic and accessible narrative framework that facilitates learning through reflection, emotional connection and immediate applicability. Recurring themes, such as clear communication, psychological safety, trust and distributed leadership, are presented in a practical, easy to understand and adaptable way to various

---

<sup>1</sup> \*Corresponding author. Assist. prof. dr., Faculty of Business, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. E-mail: andreea.seulean@ubbcluj.ro

<sup>2</sup> Bachelor's graduate, Faculty of Business, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. E-mail: grigorasema@yahoo.com

contexts. The paper thus highlights the value of podcasts as a support in the formation of effective leaders and offers recommendations for their use in educational and organizational environments.

**Keywords:** team leadership, leadership competencies, leadership education, leadership, podcasts

**JEL classification:** M12, M10.

**Recommended citation:** Seulean, A-A., Grigoras, E., Approaching podcasts as a learning tool for improving leadership competencies, *Studia UBB Negotia*, vol. 70, issue 4 (December) 2025, pp. 93-117, <https://doi.org/10.24193/subbnegotia.2025.4.04>

## Introduction and review of literature

In the current context of organizations characterized by uncertainty, diversity and work in hybrid teams, there is a need to identify effective methods for developing team leadership competencies. A major challenge is the lack of applicable and accessible educational resources that provide relevant leadership models adapted to the new realities. This raises the following question: To what extent podcasts can be a valuable tool for optimizing leadership in teams?

From an overall perspective, the concept of team leadership is defined as “problem-solving activities directed at the generation of solutions that advance team goal attainment” (Zaccaro *et al.*, 2001). In its completion, Hackman (2002) emphasizes the essential role of the leader in “creating optimal conditions for the functioning of the team, both at a structural and psychological level”.

Kozlowski & Ilgen (2006) expand this definition by introducing three fundamental dimensions of leadership in teams:

1. The cognitive-strategic dimension: “The leader’s ability to analyze, plan and anticipate the team’s needs”;
2. The relational dimension: “The ability to build and maintain productive relationships within the team”;
3. The adaptive dimension: “The flexibility to respond to changing context and group dynamics”.

According to an analysis operationalized by Bell & Kozlowski (2002), teams led by leaders who effectively combine diverse competencies perform 23% better than those led by a single-track approach. In the context of modern organizations, Northouse (2022) identifies four essential characteristics of effective team leadership:

- § Clearly structured vision: “Clarity of objectives and roles”;
- § Open communication: “Constant flow of information in both directions”;
- § Effective delegation: “Trust in the skills of team members”;
- § Collective resilience: “The ability to overcome unpredictable situations”.

Katzenbach & Smith (1992) stated that a team is made up of a small group of people with complementary skills, who share a common purpose, pursue the same performance objectives and adopt a working method together, assuming mutual responsibility for achieving results. In addition, Northouse (2022) considers that a team can be described as a group within an organization, consisting of interdependent members who collaborate and align their efforts around common goals, in order to achieve them effectively. The essence of teamwork lies precisely in the collaboration of members to achieve collective goals.

The optimal functioning of a team involves going through distinct stages of development. The classic model of Tuckman (1965) identifies four main phases: formation, conflict, normalization, and performance. This evolution is influenced by both structural factors (such as task organization and resource allocation) and psychosocial factors (such as group cohesion and relational dynamics). Salas *et al.* (1992) consider that two essential factors for the success of team collaboration reside in effective communication and mutual trust between members.

One issue that leaders often face consists of generational diversity. Schultz's (2010) study identifies significant differences between the expectations of Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. Despite all these differences, the study highlights the fact that they all share a common aspiration: to become transformational leaders even in a virtual environment, suggesting that “generational differences are less important than work environment when it comes to leadership preferences”. Thus, this leadership style – which is based on motivation, clear communication, and support for professional development – yields good results for teams that work together physically as well as for those that collaborate remotely.

To address these challenges, a series of concrete solutions are proposed:

- § Implementing frequent and transparent communication to compensate for the lack of physical interactions. Using adapted technologies, such as video conferencing, to maintain human connection.
- § Encouraging all team members to participate in the decision-making process and, implicitly, to assume leadership roles for certain projects.

Organizational success in the virtual environment depends, to a large extent, on the ability of leaders to combine transformational approaches with adaptability to new technologies and generational diversity. These results provide a useful framework for analyzing leadership practices in modern organizations.

### ***The role of team leader vs. individual leadership***

Nowadays, leadership has evolved beyond traditional approaches, becoming a process that must respond to both individual and collective needs. Lu & Li's (2021) study provides a theoretical framework for understanding the two notions, presenting how leaders can influence performance at the individual and team levels. Thus, the study explores the distinction between team-oriented and individual-oriented leadership, as well as their different impacts. Transformational leaders can have different impacts depending on their focus, while individual leadership stimulates personal performance by developing self-efficacy, focusing on the specific needs and abilities of each member through personalized coaching, intellectual stimulation, recognition of individual performances, managing to increase the effectiveness of members and, at the same time, their individual performance. The research is based on data collected from 477 team members and 132 leaders, managing to provide a solid basis for understanding these processes.

In addition to these conclusions, the study conducted by Burke *et al.* (2006) highlights an important aspect for teams, namely that the success of teams depends not only on the style of the leader, but also on when and how he intervenes. The authors introduce the concept of functional leadership, focusing on the fact that an effective leader is one who responds to the needs of the team according to its stage of development and the specific challenges that define the context in which it finds itself.

The leader can adopt an individual-focused or team-focused approach, but the real value lies in the flexibility with which the two styles alternate. For example, in the initial phases of the team, the leader has a role oriented towards clarifying individual roles, while in the advanced phases it is recommended to support independent collaboration. The study also highlights the importance of distributed leadership, in which formal leaders encourage team members to take the initiative and lead essential processes, thus contributing to a culture of shared responsibility. This approach proves to be extremely effective in virtual or hybrid teams, where autonomy and trust become fundamental conditions for performance. Finally, the study confirms that organizational performance cannot be reduced to a simple sum of individualities, but must be understood as the result of a well-coordinated ecosystem. Investing in team dynamics, promoting trust and developing distributed leadership are essential elements for long-term success.

### ***The importance of podcasts in informal education and professional development***

Podcasts have become a valuable tool for learning and personal development. In this regard, a study by Norsworthy & Herndon (2020) approaches a new perspective towards understanding how audio podcasts can transform leadership training practices. Therefore, it proposes an innovative model of leadership competencies transfer through podcasts. The first component included interviews with media leaders who have managed real crises, through which listeners are directly exposed to complex experiences narrated by practitioners, which provide a clear presentation of the decision-making process under pressure. Consequently, we conclude that leaders can learn both from strategies in practice, not just from theories, and that the example of crisis management in newsrooms is transferable to any team operating under pressure. The second component consists of the learning structure, which integrates cognitive development (through theoretical application of the concepts discussed during the interviews), emotional (through the connection established through tonality and vocal inflections), and behavioral (through practical exercises inspired by the guests' recommendations). The third component refers to holographic feedback, provided through observations made after the broadcast of episodes, which reveals the processes behind the creation of content and supports deeper critical reflection. Finally, contextual adaptability is another important advantage of podcasts, allowing for asynchronous listening and adapting the pace of learning according to each leader's needs and preferences.

### ***The advantages and limitations of podcasts as a learning resource***

The study handled by Stankov (2007) provides a detailed analysis of the benefits and limitations of podcasts, highlighting how they can support or, on the contrary, limit the learning process. The advantages of podcasts in the learning process are multiple and support the idea of optimizing autonomous learning and easy access to information. First, mobility is one of the most important advantages: podcasts can be listened to at any time and in any place. This feature supports continuous learning, without time or space constraints. Second, the revision of difficult content is facilitated by the possibility of re-listening the materials. This aspect is particularly valuable for students who are not native speakers of that language or for those who want to consolidate their understanding of complex notions, which is also very beneficial in team leadership. At the same time, podcasts complement traditional materials, offering an auditory alternative and sometimes more attractive than written texts. This diversification of sources contributes to better adaptation to individual learning styles.

However, the use of podcasts also comes with certain limitations. One of the most important is related to the technical quality of the production: for a podcast to be educationally effective, appropriate equipment and a careful editing process are required, which involves additional resources. Another disadvantage is the lack of visual support, which can be problematic in subjects that require diagrams, graphs or other visual elements for a full understanding of the content.

Additionally, low familiarity with technology can be a barrier to effective use of this resource, especially among people who are new to such digital formats. Used strategically, podcasts can contribute to the development of key leadership competencies by facilitating quick access to complex and relevant information.

## **Material and method**

The Teamology podcast series is distinguished by a rigorous structure, with very well-defined episodes for the discussed leadership themes. Each episode has a very well-thought-out format to increase the educational impact, but also for its practical applicability in the right contexts. With an average duration of between 40 and 60 minutes, the episodes have an optimal interval that allows for the exploration of the content in an in-depth manner, while also maintaining the listener's attention.

The structure of the episodes combines several essential elements, most starting with a clear introduction that presents the central theme, placing it in context with other topics covered. In this opening section, the hosts emphasize the importance of the topic and, if applicable, introduce the guests, highlighting their relevant experience and skills. The central segment focuses on the main topic, which has a different format from case to case – from in-depth interviews with leadership specialists to detailed analyses of case studies from the organizational environment. A key element of this podcast series is the fact that each topic is treated starting from key concepts, followed by examples and tools that can be applied immediately by leaders. The end of each episode is reserved for consolidation of information, with the last 5-10 minutes being those in which a synthesis is made on the topics covered offering practical recommendations.

The main objective of the Teamology podcast series is to disseminate scientifically validated concepts and best practices in the field of building and leading high-performing teams. The hosts aim to bring up topics related to leadership and team building, focusing on improving fragile teams. All ideologies and discussions come from both their own experience and that of other teams of the leaders invited to the podcast.

As Alexandru & Räschip (2022c) point out, effective leadership in this framework is not limited to coordinating activities, but aims to cultivate authentic collective knowledge. This demonstrates that transforming a group into a high-performing team requires the development of interdependence, where responsibility becomes a collective commitment, not just a simple assignment of tasks. In addition, Alexandru & Räschip (2022b) focus on transforming “antifragile” teams, noting that: “this is a specific, complex and deeply satisfying process for any team that wants to achieve greatness”. The Teamology approach to team transformation offers a practical perspective on team leadership, highlighting the critical role of the leader at every stage of the process.

The current paper adopts a qualitative methodology, based on the content analysis of the Teamology podcasts series, with the aim of identifying and interpreting the essential team leadership competencies promoted through this non-formal educational resource. The analysis focuses on extracting dominant themes, strategies applied by leaders, and values conveyed through the selected podcast episodes.

The purpose of the research is to analyze how leadership competencies can be optimized through the educational content offered by the Teamology podcast series, highlighting strategies and practices that can be applied in current organizational teams.

Research objectives:

1. To identify the main team leadership competencies highlighted in the Teamology podcast series;
2. To analyze the manner in which these competencies contribute to improving team performance;
3. To explore the role of podcasts as a non-formal education tool in training effective leaders;
4. To highlight the applicability of the strategies presented in the podcasts in real organizational contexts.

The methodological approach aims to investigate a number of eight strategically selected episodes, considering the thematic diversity and practical relevance for the context of organizational leadership. Each episode was analyzed through the lens of several key dimensions: communication, decision-making, conflict management, coordination of diverse teams, and adaptability to change. Through this approach, the aim is not only to describe the theoretical competencies, but also to understand how they are reflected and supported by the experiences of the guests, through concrete examples and strategies applicable in the professional environment. The results of the analysis will be interpreted in relation to the specialized literature and the real needs of contemporary leaders, in order to formulate conclusions and recommendations applicable into practice.

## Results and discussions

### *The concept of team leadership as a prerequisite for performance in the Teamology approach*

In the episode entitled “The Difference Between a Workgroup and a Team” [“Diferența dintre un grup de lucru și o echipă”], the concept of team leadership is very well outlined, starting from the basic key concept of this discussion, namely: “Why do people come together?”. As Alexandru & Răschip (2022d) mention, teams are formed “exclusively for performance”, also explaining that they could not have other purposes, which is absolutely essential for team leadership. Understanding these differences is crucial to creating a coherent and high-performing work environment. However, people choose much more often to work individually and to gather in teams only when strictly necessary, adding that:

*[...] They don't really have any other significant motivation to meet with other people, now, from the work experiences I have with many hundreds of managers I've worked with so far, both with them and with their teams, there is a predisposition, people would rather do their own thing, meaning not to mess up their teams or the rest of the world and to gather with teams only when it suits them and they want to. [...] There is this tendency by default.*

In business, teams often work remotely, on different tasks, or with little or no time flexibility. The work group includes individual work with results that, when combined, contribute to a common goal. In this way, each member is responsible for their own performance, with minimal interdependence. The team, however, comes with other absolutely essential attributes, as members are interdependent, failing to deliver individual performance without collaborating with the rest of the team members.

“How do we produce performance as a team?” – A very important aspect for the team is to have clarity on the situations, to understand how they should work together. Clarity in the team brings understanding, understanding accumulates when team members understand which teams they are part of, they must have common perspectives so that frustrations do not arise. It is essential that leaders understand what type of structure they have in order to create processes that support that type, and if these things are not explicit enough, members can feel pressure to collaborate in a way that is not necessary, this leading to demotivation and waste of time.

In the episode entitled “Introduction to Team Performance” [“Introducerea în performanța echipelor”], Alexandru & Răschip (2022a) managed to answer the most frequently asked questions regarding organizational performance,

namely: “How do you achieve team performance?” and “How do you build and lead a team for performance?”. Most of the time, the most complicated aspects were those related to hybrid teamwork:

*I see, in general, two lines of force, of major challenge, one is hybrid work, working from home, working from the office... It is still a difficult topic, a topic that has not found a satisfactory solution for the manager in most cases. And the second is that of generational differences, because the way we have functioned in business and especially during the pandemic, and the way in which the new generations work in business especially after the pandemic, raises some very challenging topics, very difficult so to speak for managers.*

Although teams are considered today the most efficient and recommended working methods, they are also the most expensive options. Therefore, paying increased attention becomes a very important aspect so that their benefits are not completely outweighed by these high costs. For a good accumulation of benefits, one must invest, not just live with the idea that, once gathered, people form a team.

*Starting from this premise that, although the team is a very sought-after, appreciated, sometimes revered word... In fact, in reality, the team is the most expensive way to achieve results and you have to be very careful when building a team so that you don't end up with only costs. To get benefits, you have to do things well, but you have to understand that in everything else that is built in this world, there is also a technique here, there are some things that are done, that are not done, but it is important to understand that it is not as easy as it seems: “We gathered 10-12 people and now we are a team”. Things are far from this area.*

We understand that the team must generate tangible results, for example products, services, that truly meet the needs of the beneficiaries, and not just in a way of “doing something”, but the value should be recognized, useful and appreciated. If the team does not deliver visible value, it loses credibility and support from the organization. At the same time, the team must continuously evolve to consistently succeed in facing future challenges. Finally, team members must feel involved, motivated and confident that the experiences will bring them personal benefits, including professional satisfaction and personal development. A truly performing team does not choose between these dimensions, but balances all three.

*Things are more complex, because we are talking about the performance of a team and not whether the team is functional or not.*

Therefore, team performance is not accidental, it is the result of conscious leadership, processes adapted to new realities (hybrid, different generations) and a culture that values interdependence. Organizations that manage to balance the three dimensions (value, evolution, satisfaction) will have teams that are not only functional, but antifragile, able to thrive in chaos.

### ***The centrality of the conflict***

In the episode entitled “Constructive Conflict Management” [“*Gestionarea constructivă a conflictelor*”], Alexandru & Răschip (2023a) have a very relevant discussion related to the challenges of a team, which generate conflicts, when we can conclude that they could be beneficial or not, what can be done in a practical way for the efficient and constructive management of a team.

Conflict, in essence, is an inevitable, but also beneficial, part of team collaboration. What makes conflict beneficial is that, in this way, weaknesses in plans or processes are exposed, which can be subsequently improved, forcing the team to agree on alternatives related to opinions or ideas. Thus, the team must have the ability to manage strong conflicts in order to create solutions in the future, relevant and valuable. Conflict in a team should not be seen as a weakness but rather as a sign of strength, ambition, maturity, and patience. However, this holds true only when there is trust among members, allowing them to distinguish ideas from individuals while maintaining mutual respect.

This episode is based on conflicts that arise in teams unintentionally, conflicts that are not born out of malice, from things thought out in advance with the intention of creating a malicious conflict.

*People enter without wanting to create conflict, they enter because they care deeply about their own perspective, their own interest, their own understanding, their own beliefs.*

This attachment often manages to create disagreements between team members. However, it is good to understand when a conflict is good and when it is bad.

*Conflict has a personal relational component, meaning we understand each other better or less well, we agree or disagree, or we enter into conflict more or less easily with certain people depending on our personality structures, reactions, and triggers, but from my experience working with teams, this is secondary to why people enter into conflict [...].*

This fact indicates that it is necessary to understand very well the fundamental difference between apparently personal and structural conflicts, which are, in essence, the main cause of tensions formed between team members, even if they appear to be conflicts of an emotional or personal nature. Effective leadership should be able to restructure the conditions that cause such conflicts, not just limit itself to calming emotions. Conflict is not good when it is not made explicit, when it is not discussed. If a conflict remains undiscussed, it can lead to very dangerous situations for the team but, nevertheless, they cannot be discussed if there is no “psychological safety” that helps to conclude each person’s decisions, to listen to each other, to understand which ideas are good and which are less good, which are more beneficial and which are less beneficial, so that all team members reach a common sense.

Often, a conflict can turn into an argument, and the most common reasons that generate arguments depend on the context, intentions and emotional dynamics. Sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, which happens as a result of unresolved situations, when the topic is used to gain power and status, indicating that the dispute is not about content, but about demonstrating superiority, using tactics such as invalidating the experiences of others or humiliation, when people are impatient to truly understand the topic, when the parties become very defensive, remain very closed in their own perception and are simply not receptive at all to opinions, to questions, to that curiosity to learn more and to see the issue from other angles, the parties adopting rigid positions, avoiding responsibilities.

To understand how such situations can be managed through different practices, it is necessary to consider that:

*It goes from the area of “I am right” to “let’s seek the truth together” and, simply, if you really change your perspective, just mentally, different words come to you, different interventions instead of very firm and determined sentences, rather questions come to you, they arouse mutual curiosity. This change of angle seems fantastic to me and, whenever I have proposed this change in teams, it has been like that, a breath of fresh air.*

This tactic proposes changing, mainly the mentality, by moving from a competitive mentality to a collaborative one, with a curious language, having the effect of opening the space for mutual learning through creative solutions. In this way, if a teammate feels that another sees him as an obstacle, he becomes defensive, but if he feels that he is seen as an ally, he becomes open. This tactic reduces tensions, people feeling listened to, not judged, stimulates innovation, bringing new ideas between team members and builds trust, showing that the truth is

much more important than the ego. Another way to change the dynamics of a conflict is the premise of good intention and good faith, which refers to the fact that there may be a voluntary assumption according to which another team member involved in the conflict does not intend harm, is not wrong through negligence or malice, and that his perspective deserves to be listened to and understood, even if it is different.

It is very important to verbalize the valuable parts of the other person's opinions, thus showing that they are being listened to and respected, as well as that we are willing to collaborate, thus creating a constructive framework, where the conversation is directed towards "how to improve", instead of "who is right". "Clarity from the beginning on the purpose of the discussion" is another very good conflict resolution tactic. Consequently, when one of the members feels that the initial discussion is no longer present, he should remind himself whenever necessary, what the purpose of the discussion actually is. The more focused the team is on what needs to be resolved, the greater the chances of being able to understand each other.

### ***Decisions made as a team***

In the episode entitled "Practices for Team Decision Making" [*"Practici pentru luarea deciziilor în echipă"*], Alexandru & Răschip (2023c) focus on how the best decisions are made at the team level, discussing "the principles that govern them and the decision-making processes that we should use to achieve the best possible outcome." The main idea is based on the fact that, most of the time, decision-making is individual, but at the team level, things are different.

*In terms of the relevance of a team, the purpose of a team, this is a very important point. A team is worth all the effort and all the cost and all the trouble of being, creating, and maintaining a high-performing team because of the decisions it makes.*

This represents the fact that the team is not just an organized group of people, but a true collective system that, together, is capable of making much better decisions than an individual, due to the diversity of perspectives. In this sense, all investment in the team is subsequently justified by the superior results it will obtain, and to justify the results, leaders must verify how each member contributes to subsequent much better choices. Decisions are described as a function, based on two essential components: the quality of the decision, a rational aspect, aiming to observe how well-founded and logical the choice made is, through clear information, through the team's experience and through clear thinking, as well as the team's dedication, as a human part, which aims to present the team's involvement and motivation to carry out a decision, even if not everyone agreed

with it from the beginning. The goal is to “produce effects in practice”, because a good decision is not measured by how smart or good it is, but by what kind of results it obtains after applying it.

Another aspect that is highlighted in the episode is that relating to the role of principles in the decision-making process:

*Principles, in fact, set a framework for decision-making. With them in front of us, it is much easier to ensure that decisions will be made in an ethical, consistent way, in line with the company's values. In their absence, there is a risk that decisions will be exclusively opportunistic, which is not what we want.*

This statement emphasizes that the role of principles is to transform decisions from hasty and selfish choices, which could harm us later, into good decisions, functioning as a guide. An important example of a principle is the “principle of long-term decisions”, where:

*The decisions we make together as a team are long-term, meaning we always look at the long-term effect of the decisions we make, rather than the short term.*

This is a principle that refers to the idea of always looking at the long-term impact compared to the short-term. The long-term impact is much more important in evaluating options, because in this way we avoid superficial solutions that can solve problems now, generating much greater risks in the future.

*If we, at the team level, made a certain decision, but I, at the personal level, did not agree with it, at the principle level we agree that I will embrace that decision and implement it as if it were my own, even if I initially at the input level did not agree with it.*

This principle is often used in large work teams, based on the idea that you can initially disagree, freely express your opinion on the decision, debate and bring arguments, but if that idea is decided to be applied, even if you initially did not agree, you must accept it 100% and help it succeed. Another example is the “principle of always putting the customer's interest first”.

*Here in the team, when we make decisions, we always put the client's interest first, that is, we ask ourselves: “Is this decision in the client's interest?”. If so, we follow the path, if not, we don't. I know that this may seem a bit extreme, that sometimes you can't make all decisions in the client's interest, but this is something worth discussing, because, on the other hand, a company that doesn't make decisions in the client's interest doesn't last long. On the other hand, if this is the principle of*

*“every decision we make must serve the client’s interest”, this is something that we have to take into account in every decision we make, sometimes it can happen maximally, other times it can’t happen maximally, but it’s still important to know that this governs us. Some teams also use the empty chair technique, where, between us at the table, there is an empty chair that we say is the client and, whatever decision we make, we role-play and ask ourselves what the client would say about the decisions we make: does it help them or does it not help them?*

This principle manages to increase customer trust, choosing companies that put them first, because many companies make choices that make their work easier, but without thinking about the needs of their customers, and this principle also helps to orient in the long term in the idea that there may be small losses now, but they will certainly gain the loyalty of current and future customers. Another principle is called the “ethical nature principle”:

*A simple question that the team can ask itself to validate or invalidate ethics could be: “If tomorrow the decision we make today were to be public, how would we feel? Is it something that makes us proud, is it something that we can support at any time and argue the decision, is it something that makes us happy?”. That is, to avoid making decisions that we would rather hide than share.*

The last two principles discussed are that of data-driven decisions, also called “data driven” and the “consensus-seeking principle.” The principle of data-driven decisions refers to the fact that the decision-making process should not be based on assumptions, intuitions or opinions, but on relevant, objective and critically analyzed data.

*There are other companies that have a lot of focus on data driven, on principles that are driven by data, and then it is clear that any decision we make together will be governed by this principle and we will have a set of reliable data with which we can make our decisions. This does not mean that we make decisions only with a database, it means that we tend not to make decisions without data, meaning that data is a very important input in our decision.*

This shows that this decision-making process is critical for the team, because it eliminates arguments that are based on what team members think, although they should be based on what the data says. In addition, it eliminates uncertainties, because the results anticipated by the data work much better than the intuited ones, but also the fact that there will be no more arguments because they will be based exclusively on what the data shows. The last principle stated is represented by the “principle of seeking consensus”.

*It is very clear that, we will certainly have opposing opinions, I will always seek to find that consensus, I will try to convince you with all the arguments I have at my disposal, and I will also remain open to your arguments so that we can reach a consensus together. So the simple search for it greatly changes the perspective with which we conduct the dialogue in the team, precisely to find an answer and reach a result.*

This is a very beneficial principle for teams, because team members feel listened to, even though the final decision does not entirely depend on their preferences, it increases the quality of decisions made by the team, and people accept decisions more easily that they did not agree with at the beginning, but which prove to be beneficial in the end, still having the certainty that their opinions were listened to.

### ***Effective communication within the team***

In the episode entitled “Practices for Team Communication; Team Feedback” [“*Practici pentru comunicarea în echipă; feedback-ul în echipă*”], Alxandru and Răschip (2023d) delved into topics such as team communication tools, normalizing the interaction between team members as well as the feedback. Most of the time, team communication is the most common problem that needs to be mediated:

*Whenever a team has communication problems, chances are that its members don't have enough things in common. Usually, naturally, without going to a lot of training, we communicate very well with people with whom we feel we have a lot in common. We communicate so-so with people with whom we feel we have something in common, and we communicate not at all or poorly with people with whom we either feel we have nothing in common or feel we are antagonistic.*

When this type of problem arises within teams, a first step would be to try to highlight the things the team has in common. Communication is very important in this regard, but it must be used with a common ground, sharing the truth to bring good results.

Regarding the discussion on how we can identify whether socializing is healthy or not in a team, we need to identify some key aspects, such as speaking time and how it is divided, in the sense that everyone should have the right to speak, not just one person, so that everyone feels listened to and has the chance to contribute. In addition, we need to convey clear information through concise messages: there is no need to believe that if we speak more, we convey better information. From this we conclude that a very important aspect is also the way in which the message is conveyed, in a respectful tone. It is essential that, in a good team, everyone speaks freely when they feel the need to, not just a discussion in which the boss asks questions and the rest answer.

Next, the norms of communication are discussed, starting from a key question, namely: “Do we listen to understand or do we listen to give answers?”.

*Sometimes, we don't even listen, but use the time the other person is speaking to construct our own responses, either to something the other person says or to something we say to ourselves in our minds.*

This aspect refers to the fact that it is much more important to listen to understand, to decode the message transmitted, not just to wait for us to respond in turn, or to impose our point of view. In communication, we must start from the premise that everything happens together: we cannot validate the idea of singularity, because this nullifies the notion of a group. Finally, we conclude that the most important component of collaboration and understanding in a team is communication. For a team to be functional, it is essential to develop a framework of trust, shared responsibility, curiosity about the interests of the team, all of these things leading to effective communication, which will have a real and lasting impact.

### ***The impact of leadership on team performance***

In the episode entitled “The Role of the Leader and Individual Performance” [“Rolul liderului și performanța individuală”], Alexandru & Răschip (2022c) analyze how leadership influences the collective behaviors and results of the team, starting from the idea that leaders “perceive their role as being extraordinarily important”, both from a psychological point of view and for creating a space in which each member feels valued and listened to.

It is noteworthy that the leader must clearly state what he wants from the team and why, through honesty, clarity and commitment, which defines leadership. On the other hand, when the leader omits things and lies in order to convince team members more easily, manipulation is born. A common mistake of leaders is that many of them ask themselves the question: “What should I do, or what should happen for my people to agree to do what I ask of them?”, a question that often leads to undesirable results by creating a transactional relationship based on a constant effort of persuasion, the consequence being that leaders get tired, because they are constantly having to push the team from behind. However, this question operates with another, namely:

*What should happen, what should I do so that the people from my team want to perform?*

Ultimately, the goal is to change the perspective of leaders, based on internal motivation and how leaders can cultivate the motivation of those in the team, being an alternative with a much better long-term result. In addition to these, it is important to mention some fundamental ideas about the role of clarity and alignment in leadership, namely that the leader must form from the beginning the ideas and desires he has about how he wants to lead, what kind of relationship he wants to have with the team and what values guide his actions. It is much more essential that, in addition to a clear vision, he communicates with the team and ensures that there is a consensus among all its members.

At the same time, it cannot be ignored that the leader is responsible for creating the structure and processes with which the team manages to function efficiently, ensuring a clear organization and close collaboration between them. Last but not least, the leader aims to create and support the team, because without this very important pillar, even the best-defined objectives can remain unachieved. These responsibilities that a true leader should assume and master contribute to authentic leadership, which only a true leader can perform.

### ***Coordinating interconnected teams in a systemic vision***

In the episode entitled “The Organization as a Team of Teams” [“*Organizația ca echipă de echipe*”], Alexandru & Răschip (2023b) address the issue of extending the principles of team leadership to the organizational level, arguing that a modern firm must function as a network of autonomous teams, deeply connected to each other, not as a rigid hierarchy.

The pandemic accelerated this transformation: organizational cultures were “pulverized” and reconfigured at the team level, as teams continued to collaborate constantly online. In the new context, teams created their own rituals of connection, micro-cultures, and iterative feedback processes to maintain cohesion and performance, even in the absence of a shared physical space.

*Teams had to create a way of doing things, build a culture and structure to be able to progress in this very uncertain environment [...].*

A key component of this model is the “two elevators” dynamic, which describes the constant interaction between the strategic and operational levels of the organization.

*On the one hand, the cascading of strategic objectives from top to bottom; on the other hand, the need for higher hierarchical levels to provide concrete support to operational teams. Managing this tension is essential.*

Another pillar of the model is the real autonomy of each team, which is impossible to be achieved without sharing information. “Power holds information and does not share it” – as long as this logic works, teams cannot act as part of a larger system. That is why the episode insists on the “continuous education” of the entire organization, so that all members understand their system and make decisions that take into account the interests of other teams.

The essence of the “team of teams” concept thus becomes the ability of members to see beyond the boundaries of their own team and propose solutions that are “useful to the entire system”. Therefore, the contribution of the episode consists in highlighting how leaders can coordinate effective collaboration between teams, promote transparency in the exchange of information and support a fair balance between the autonomy of each team and the assumption of responsibility at a collective level, thus transforming environmental uncertainty into a strategic advantage for the organization.

### ***Adaptability and antifragile culture in contexts of uncertainty***

In the episode “Antifragile Teams” [*Echipe antifragile*], Alexandru & Răschip (2022b) address the idea that team performance is not only about resistance to stress, but also about the ability to grow and become stronger in the wake of it. Taking as a starting point the concept of antifragility formulated by Taleb (2012), it is explained that high-performing teams not only survive uncertainty, but also thrive on it.

Antifragility of teams involves five key directions: avoiding excessive team protection, redefining the relationship with mistakes, being open to conflict as a source of clarification, continuous collective learning, and training for the unpredictable. For example, leaders who overprotect teams – hiding problems, avoiding tensions, or shielding them from difficulties – unintentionally contribute to their fragility. Also, in the absence of a healthy relationship with mistakes, team members end up preferring inaction over responsibility, which generates stagnation. Antifragility requires the exact opposite: an environment in which mistakes are openly discussed, assumed, and used as a resource for development, within a framework of psychological safety.

A central element is the conscious assumption of small, controlled risks that generate continuous learning. Therefore, leaders of antifragile teams cultivate a culture of experimentation, rapid feedback, and psychological trust.

*The first step in increasing antifragility lies in the leader's beliefs. [...] I have also met companies that, more or less consciously, have set out to be robust.*

These teams accept conflicts not as threats to cohesion, but as valuable opportunities to clarify differences of perspective and strengthen relationships. Tensions become learning moments, in which expectations can be adjusted, work processes can be refined and a climate of authentic trust can be built. At the same time, failures are not interpreted as blockages or definitive failures, but as important sources of adaptation and progress. An antifragile culture capitalizes on mistakes to extract concrete lessons, which contribute to the evolution of the team. Within this framework, flexible work systems are developed, capable of adapting quickly to changes, and iterable structures, which allow for continuous testing, frequent feedback and progressive improvement of performance.

Another essential principle is the conscious intention to learn, not just to execute. As Edmondson (2012) points out, teams that organize work around collective learning tend to achieve superior performance than those that only aim for efficient short-term delivery. In this sense, leaders of antifragile teams view tasks not just as goals, but as tools for people development, assigning them to those who have the most to learn, not just the most competent.

*Fragile systems – break in the face of stressors. Robust systems – persist in an unchanged state. Antifragile systems – become stronger than they were before under the influence of stressors.*

The episode's contribution to the theme of leadership is to highlight the essential role of the leader in cultivating an antifragile culture within the team. The leader is no longer seen simply as a source of direction or control, but as a facilitator who creates the conditions for the team to develop through challenges. He supports the autonomy of members, encourages the assumption of controlled risks and normalizes learning from mistakes. In an environment characterized by uncertainty and rapid change, the antifragile leader does not try to eliminate uncertainty, but learns to transform it into an engine for adaptation and innovation. By creating a climate of psychological trust, by promoting constant experimentation and reflection, this type of leadership helps the team not only resist external pressures, but to use them to become more agile, more united and more efficient.

## Conclusions

The paper examines in detail how leadership competencies can be developed, understood and applied in organizations, drawing on the content analysis of the Teamology podcast series. The results highlight a complex perspective on contemporary leadership, which appears as a dynamic, adaptive and interactive mechanism, shaped by cultural, relational and educational

factors, not just as a rigid set of competencies. A key aspect of the analysis is that, in essence, team leadership does not focus on the role of the leader, but is defined as a collaborative process, equally distributed among team members. Team performance derives from the interaction and constructive and interactive collaboration between its members, not only from individual efforts, an idea supported in the literature by Katzenbach & Smith (1992) and Northouse (2022), but also by the episode entitled “The Role of the Leader and Individual Performance” [*Rolul liderului și performanța individuală*], which discusses how the leader must create conditions for each member to contribute to the common success of the team, in no case to control or direct their activity in isolation (Alexandru & Răschip, 2022c).

Another fundamental element of effective team leadership is the leader's ability to adapt. Leadership, following the recent changes in the organizational context marked by diversity and uncertainty, can no longer be exercised through a rigid model. Leaders must demonstrate a continuous ability to adjust their leadership style according to the particularities, emotional needs and development of their team, as well as the challenges that may arise. This ability to adapt is supported by Schultz (2010), who emphasizes that effective leaders do not only react to change, but also integrate it into their work strategy. In the analysis of the Teamology podcast series, adaptability was illustrated in the episodes that talk about conflict management and decision-making within the team. For example, in the episode “Constructive Conflict Management” [*Gestionarea constructivă a conflictelor*], Alexandru & Răschip (2023a) describe a practical tactic: changing the mindset from “I am right” to “let's seek the truth together”, using open-ended questions to manage conflicts. This refers to how conflicts can be transformed into learning opportunities. Therefore, a good leader must be flexible, empathetic and have a vision for the future, these things being not only assets, but also the fundamental conditions of the team to be kept united and at peak performance.

In parallel, research has highlighted the significant value of podcasts as non-formal education resources. They provide direct access to authentic perspectives, personal reflections, and examples applied by leaders in their teams, contributing to a deeper understanding of leadership. According to the study conducted by Norsworthy & Herndon (2020), media formats of this type help develop critical thinking, contextual learning, and the training of contemporary leaders, observations that synthesize four important pillars that support the effectiveness of team leadership: clarity of common purpose, providing direction in team actions, communication, and mutual trust, which allow an open exchange of opinions and ideas, respectively the leader's ability to adapt depending on the context and the particularities of his team.

The research results confirm that team leadership is a competency that can be learned, improved and adjusted, it is not a quality that leaders are born with. Therefore, organizations can support the development of these competencies through structured interventions and well-defined strategies. A first direction that can be highlighted is the establishment of a common goal, in which the leader must invest in a good initiative that the team can follow, this being possible by organizing interactive workshops, team-building activities or collaborative planning sessions.

Promoting open dialogue and psychological safety plays a very important role in the team. An environment in which people feel confident to express their opinions, admit mistakes, and approach conflicts constructively is essential for team performance. According to studies conducted by Katzenbach & Smith (1992) and Lu & Li (2021), teams with such practices have much greater creativity, people share ideas without fear, conflicts are resolved more easily, and they have greater commitment because they feel valued and listened to.

In the episode entitled “Constructive Conflict Management” [*“Gestionarea constructivă a conflictelor”*], Alexandru & Răschip (2023a) emphasize that “highly trusting teams can manage intense conflicts without falling apart”, to highlight the importance of members’ decision to separate the person from the idea, managing to transform conflicts into sources of innovation. Psychological safety is discussed in the episode “Practices for Team Communication; Team Feedback” [*“Practici pentru comunicarea în echipă; feedback-ul în echipă”*], where it is clarified that the leader can build psychological safety through various methods. The applicability of the concepts discussed is high, especially in organizational environments characterized by complexity, uncertainty and interdependence between members. Team leadership can no longer be reduced to a series of formal attributions, but becomes a continuous process of adaptation, learning and facilitation of collaboration. In this dynamic, leaders must assume a dual role, that of mentors and good coordinators, encouraging teamwork and collective performance.

The analyzed podcasts highlight that effective leadership essentially involves cultivating a climate of trust, clarity of roles and expectations, and open and solution-oriented communication. It also highlights the importance of team decision-making, where member involvement generates higher commitment and more effective implementation of tailored solutions.

Another aspect of practical relevance is the recognition of the differences between the types of teams (co-located, virtual, hybrid) and the adaptation of the leadership style to the specifics of each. In particular, hybrid environments require additional strategies for maintaining cooperation, managing conflicts and supporting motivation, especially in the absence of direct interaction.

Podcasts offer a series of validated solutions, such as clarifying the decision-making structure and supporting collective learning, which can be successfully applied in practice.

In conclusion, the applicability of the concepts discussed in the Teamology podcast series is evident in various organizational contexts, and their use in leader training can contribute to the development of more effective, more adaptable and more united teams.

The podcast series highlighted the process of continuous professional development, contributing to the development of key competencies, such as communication, team decision-making and conflict management. The value of podcasts lies in their practical applicability and the authentic nature of the discussions. In this sense, active listening and analysis become essential elements for transforming these audio resources into an effective and valuable learning tool, as well as self-assessment in the field of leadership.

Thus, the learning process through podcasts involves not only exposure to content, but also active work of interpretation and contextualization, which contributes to a deeper and more applicable understanding of team leadership in modern organizations.

The aim of this paper was to explore ways in which team leadership competencies can be developed and optimized, using the Teamology podcast series as the main source of analysis. In an increasingly complex and dynamic organizational environment, the ability to effectively lead a team is becoming an essential competency for long-term success and adaptability.

In the first part of the paper, the analysis of concepts highlighted the differences and interdependencies between individual and team leadership, emphasizing the importance of adaptability, effective communication and a clear structure in teams. Also, relevant theoretical models regarding the role of the leader and the factors influencing collective performance were presented.

In the applied part, the content analysis of the episodes subscribed to the Teamology podcast series offered a practical perspective on the challenges and solutions encountered in team leadership. The selected episodes brought to discussion relevant topics, such as team decision-making, psychological safety, conflict management and the particularities of working in hybrid environments. The examples prove that non-formal learning is useful for leaders, but must be complemented with critical analysis to be truly valuable. Podcasts can be a useful tool in the leadership development process, especially when used complementary to other educational resources, such as specialized literature, case studies or personal experience. Leadership education thus becomes a continuous process, based on multiple learning and on connecting theory with practice.

Based on the analysis carried out in this paper, the following practical recommendations can be formulated for developing team leadership competencies through podcasts:

- § Integrating podcasts into internal training programs: Organizations can include relevant episodes from podcasts like Teamology in leadership training sessions as a starting point for applied discussions, case studies, or individual and team reflections.
- § Using podcasts as a coaching and self-development tool: leaders can use audio content as a resource for personal reflection, choosing topics that correspond to challenges in their own team, to explore tested solutions and best practices.
- § Facilitating group listening and collaborative learning sessions: Collective listening to an episode followed by open discussions can stimulate social learning, clarify shared values, and improve team collaboration.
- § Adapting podcast content to the specifics of the team: leaders can select episodes relevant to the team's stage of development and the specific needs of members.

By applying these recommendations, podcasts can become an effective, accessible and relevant tool for training leaders on an ongoing basis, stimulating both individual development and team performance.

Ultimately, optimizing leadership competencies requires an integrated and flexible approach that includes both traditional training and alternative resources, such as podcasts. In the current context, high-performing leaders are those who manage to combine theoretical knowledge with a deep understanding of team dynamics, supporting collaboration, innovation, and collective development.

## REFERENCES

- Alexandru, C. & Răschip, R. (Hosts). (2022a, September 12). *Introducere în performanța echipelor* [Audio podcast episode]. In Teamology. Teamology Institute.  
<https://teamology.ro/podcast/introducere-in-performanta-echipelor/>
- Alexandru, C. & Răschip, R. (Hosts). (2022b, October 18). *Echipe antifragile* [Audio podcast episode]. In Teamology. Teamology Institute.  
<https://teamology.ro/podcast/echipe-antifragile/>
- Alexandru, C. & Răschip, R. (Hosts). (2022c, September 21). *Rolul liderului și performanța individuală* [Audio podcast episode]. In Teamology. Teamology Institute.  
<https://teamology.ro/podcast/rolul-liderului-si-performanta-individuala/>

- Alexandru, C. & Răschip, R. (Hosts). (2022d, September 28). *Diferența dintre un grup de lucru și o echipă* [Audio podcast episode]. In Teamology. Teamology Institute. <https://teamology.ro/podcast/diferenta-dintre-un-grup-de-lucru-si-echipa/>
- Alexandru, C. & Răschip, R. (Hosts). (2023a, October 10). *Gestionarea constructivă a conflictelor* [Audio podcast episode]. In Teamology. Teamology Institute. <https://teamology.ro/podcast/gestionarea-constructiva-a-conflictelor/>
- Alexandru, C. & Răschip, R. (Hosts). (2023b, October 27). *Organizația ca echipă de echipe* [Audio podcast episode]. In Teamology. Teamology Institute. <https://teamology.ro/podcast/organizatia-ca-echipa-de-echipe/>
- Alexandru, C. & Răschip, R. (Hosts). (2023c, March 28). *Practici pentru luarea deciziilor în echipă* [Audio podcast episode]. In Teamology. Teamology Institute. <https://teamology.ro/podcast/practici-pentru-luarea-deciziilor-in-echipa/>
- Alexandru, C. & Răschip, R. (Hosts). (2023d, April 4). *Practici pentru comunicarea în echipă; feedback-ul în echipă* [Audio podcast episode]. In Teamology. Teamology Institute. <https://teamology.ro/podcast/practici-pentru-comunicarea-in-echipa-feedback-ul-in-echipa/>
- Bell, B.S. & Kozlowski, S.W.J. (2002). A Typology of Virtual Teams: Implications for Effective Leadership. *Group & Organization Management*, 27(1), 14–49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601102027001003>
- Burke, C.S., Stagl, K.C., Klein, C., Goodwin, G.F., Salas, E. & Halpin, S. M. (2006). What type of leadership behaviors are functional in teams? A meta-analysis, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 17(3), 288–307. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2006.02.007>
- Edmondson, A.C. (2012). *Teaming: How Organizations Learn, Innovate, and Compete in the Knowledge Economy*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Hackman, J.R. (2002). *Leading teams: Setting the stage for great performances*. Harvard Business Press.
- Katzenbach, J.R. & Smith, D.K. (1992). *The wisdom of teams: Creating the high-performance organization*. Harvard Business Press.
- Kozlowski, S.W.J. & Ilgen, D. R. (2006). Enhancing the Effectiveness of Work Groups and Teams. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 7(3), 77–124. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1529-1006.2006.00030.x>
- Lu, H. & Li, F. (2021). The Dual Effect of Transformational Leadership on Individual- and Team-Level Performance: The Mediational Roles of Motivational Processes, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 606066. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.606066>
- Norsworthy, C. & Herndon, K. (2020). LEADING BY EAR: Podcasting as an Educational Leadership Tool, *Journal of Leadership Education*, 19(3), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.12806/V19/I3/A1>
- Northouse, P.G. (2022). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (9th ed.). Sage.

- Salas, E., Dickinson, T.L., Converse, S.A. & Tannenbaum, S.I. (1992). Toward an understanding of team performance and training. In R. W. Swezey, & E. Salas (Eds.), *Teams: Their training and performance* (3–29). Ablex Publishing.
- Schultz, R.W. (2010). *Exploring Leadership within the Modern Organization: Understanding the Dynamics of Effective Leadership of a Virtual, Multigenerational Workforce* (Publication No. ED522556) [Doctoral dissertation, Capella University]. Capella University. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Stankov, I.E. (2007). *Benefits and Limitations of Podcasts and Video Blogs as Instructional Media* [Doctoral dissertation, Europa-Universität Viadrina Frankfurt]. Europa-Universität Viadrina Frankfurt. <https://www.e-stankov.com/thesis-stankov.pdf>
- Taleb, N. N. (2012). *Antifragile: Things that gain from disorder*. Random House.
- Tuckman, B. W. (1965). *Developmental sequence in small groups*. *Psychological Bulletin*, 63(6), 384–399.
- Zaccaro, S.J., Rittman, A.L. & Marks, M. A. (2001). Team leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 12(4), 451–483. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843\(01\)00093-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(01)00093-5)