

Leadership model for founders required for a startup's success in India – A pilot study

Mr. Sanket Jack

Doctorate Student

Manipal GlobalNxt University

Email: sanketjack14@gmail.com

Abstract: Over the past 5-8 years, the number of new businesses has quickly increased on a global scale. These businesses place a high priority on providing goods and/or services that significantly improve the quality of life for their customers. Local and federal government initiatives in India have given new businesses and entrepreneurs a lot of momentum and support, helping India become the top startup location in the world. In order to encourage entrepreneurship and assist enterprises in achieving this goal, the Government of India (GOI) established the "Startup India" campaign in 2015 (Babu, S., Sridevi, K., 2019). The startup eco-system of India is the third largest in the world, projected to soon become the second one by year 2025 (Inc24.com, 2022). Burns (1978) noted that "Leadership is one of the most observed, yet least understood, phenomena on earth" (p. 3). The scientific and managerial communities have different leadership definitions. Over time, leadership recognized subordinates' responsibility and encouraged implementers to contribute to mutually accepted goals. New factors including collaboration, teamwork, work-life balance, continual feedback, and learning cause a paradigm change (Vecchiotti, 2018). Therefore, the latest definition is: "Leadership can be conceptualized as a protracted, value-driven undertaking that motivates those in positions of authority and those responsible for executing decisions to undertake endeavors that advance the attainment of a shared objective. Moreover, it entails a voluntary commitment to making substantial contributions towards the fulfillment of mutually agreed-upon targets.." (Vecchiotti, 2011). Zaech, S. and Baldeggarr, U. in their 2016 research paper, use Bass and Stogdill's definition for leadership in startups: Leadership can be conceptualized as a dynamic phenomenon that takes place within a collective setting, encompassing the interplay between multiple persons. This process generally entails the establishment or modification of the organization's structure, as well as the shaping of members' views and expectations. Leadership is the phenomenon in which a member of a group influences and alters the motivation or skills of other individuals within the same group. Every individual inside the group has the potential to demonstrate varying degrees of leadership. As per observation made by Zaech, S. and Baldeggarr, U. in their research on Leadership in startups (2016), leadership, a crucial aspect often overlooked by the majority of entrepreneurs, is sometimes disregarded as a motivating force behind the establishment of a business. On the contrary, an excellent leadership team or founders are undoubtedly a key factor in the success of a startup as observed by various researchers. The style of leadership plays no small part in determining the success of a startup, especially when honing in on the type of startup that is at hand (Zhao, A., Ren, Y., 2022). Dvalidze, N. & Markopoulos, E. (2020) suggest that while Startups are an important part of the world economy, and despite the high rates of startup creation, the likelihood of their success remain to be relatively low. Among the various complex reasons for startup failures, the significance of leadership in determining the performance of start-ups has been well acknowledged. Startups' chances of success are minimal, according to Yang, M. (2016). Leadership is indispensable in this effort. Leadership creates the vision and gathers resources to achieve it. It's crucial to recruit and retain staff. Coming to how leadership impacts people and human resources, Brüggemann, H. (2014) states that entrepreneurs must be conscious of their rising obligation to their employees as the business and workforce grow. They may lose focus of directing their colleagues in the best way. They also highlight that leadership in startups and larger companies is similar. They believe a democratic leadership style is most supported by employees, increasing commitment and engagement.

This research paper is a pilot study attempting to study ten leadership models and identify key attributes of each model. Using qualitative methodology, we attempt to understand which aspects of each leadership model are applicable to Indian startups and consequently build with a model which will serve as the base for leadership model for startups in India.

Keywords: Startups, leadership models, leadership models for startups, leadership styles.

I. Introduction

1.1 What is a "Startup"?

A startup is a young company that is just beginning to grow and develop and is in the early or beginning stages of its business operations, according to Mishra, S. (2017). Usually, a small group or just one individual provides the funding for such a company. Salamzadeh et al. (2015) assert that great ideas are the main components of startup companies' foundations and that these ideas grow and prosper. A key component of entrepreneurship studies, encompassing the creation of new ventures, the creation of value, and the identification, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities, startups are about turning ideas into businesses. This is a major distinction. According to Blank (2010), a startup is a short-lived company created with repeatable operations and a scalable model in mind.

Entrepreneurs should leverage and combine resources and ideas to develop enterprises, according to Kim et al. (2018). Kurode et al. (2016) defined a "startup" as a new venture or business idea that aims to provide cutting-edge products or services in order to enter new markets. A startup could be a freshly founded company that challenges the norms in the market by using novel or innovative business ideas.

Due to the subjectivity and complexity involved, there is no definitive definition of a "startup" in India (Thornton, G., and Assocham, 2016). Kotashev (2022) discovered that a startup frequently possesses two key characteristics: Innovation is the first, and it relates to a startup trying novel theories. Using and adopting relatively new products, services, markets, or technologies may fall under this category. Second, startups have the potential for exponential growth as opposed to the usual linear expansion of corporations. The concept of beginning a business is thought to be scalable on its own. Startups can accomplish this through making use of technology.

The Indian government defines startup as follows on its official startup portal, located at <https://www.startupindia.gov.in/>:

1. In the case of a private limited company, partnership, or limited liability company (LLP) in India, the company has not been in existence for ten years.
2. Since the company's incorporation or registration, its yearly revenue hasn't surpassed Rs. 100 crore.
3. Either the organization is in the business of manufacturing, enhancing, or developing things, processes, or services, or the business model is scalable and has a significant potential for generating wealth or new employment possibilities.

It should be noted that a business won't be considered a "Startup" if it was founded by slicing or reassembling an already-existing firm. Sharma et al. (2018) listed Startup India as one of the top initiatives of the Indian government to create an environment that is favorable of startups and encourages the growth of startup businesses in India. This project also sought to generate scalable and long-lasting economic growth, which would result in a considerable rise in employment opportunities. Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a compelling argument for startups in his Independence Day speech in 2021 by characterizing them as India's future wealth creators. The government's dedication to making India's startups and startup ecosystem the best in the world was also stressed by him.

The multiple initiatives the Indian government is launching to assist entrepreneurship in the country are mentioned by Babu, S., and Sridevi, K. in their research on challenges and concerns facing startups in India in 2019. The Government of India (GOI) started the "Made in India" campaign in 2014 to encourage regional firms to participate in improvements to the manufacturing sector. Additionally, this made accessing foreign investments for startups straightforward. To increase startup confidence, the GOI has increased foreign direct investment (FDI) limitations for the majority of sectors. Additionally, it strengthened the defence of intellectual property rights (IPRs), underscoring the government's support for startups.

The "Digital India" initiative, started by the Indian government to make sure that all citizens may access government services online, is highlighted by Thornton, G., and Assocham (2016). The Indian Prime Minister launched the Digital India program in 2015 to connect rural communities. For startups, this presents a substantial commercial opportunity. Indian e-commerce businesses want to target the nation's rural consumers as part of the government's Digital India initiative.

According to Kim et al. (2018), from a global perspective, the growth of online and mobile businesses, as well as the content and knowledge industries' development, as well as the cultural and creative industries', have widened and diversified existing business models and produced new ones, leading to new business model interpretations and discussions.

Startupindia.gov.in has observed the following intriguing details:

1. The startup scene in India has grown significantly, with a 15% increase in 2018 (year over year). Additionally, the number of incubators and accelerators that provide help for companies has grown to 11%.
2. The proportion of women who own their own businesses climbed to 14% from 10 and 11% the previous two years.
3. There are now 1.6–1.7 lakh employment created by startups, and 40,000 more are anticipated to be created in 2018.
4. Bangalore was designated one of the top 20 startup sites in the world and one of the five cities with the fastest growth rates in the 2019 Startup Genome Project ranking.

India ranks as the third-largest startup ecosystem globally, following China and the United States of America, according to Inc24.com's "State Of Indian Startup Ecosystem Report (2022)." More than 57,000 businesses in India have been established, with a respectable 10% receiving funding. By 2025, the number of startups is predicted to have doubled, reaching 1 lakh or more. In the unicorn club (startups valued at more than \$1 billion), there are 105 Indian companies. By 2025, the Indian startup ecosystem is anticipated to surpass that of the United States. Between 2014 and 2022, 131 billion USD were given to Indian startups.

1.2 About Leadership Models

True leadership is the ability to inspire individuals to improve an organization or group (Brady, K., 2014). The influence of leaders extends to other aspects, including employee well-being, financial performance, fostering an innovative culture, promoting beneficial societal transformations, and other related outcomes. Managers influence 70% of workforce engagement (Ratanjee, V., 2023). Not only executives can lead. Leaders and managers are found at every level of a business, from departmental managers to global project managers (Kruse, K., 2013). Leadership models are theoretical frameworks for managing personnel, according to Lacoma, T. (2017). It proposes a response approach to employee and organizational needs that works in that model. Leadership models help define your management style and personality. Knowing your leadership style—where it came from and where you want to take it—gives you a benchmark from which to increase your effectiveness and impact. Leadership models don't exist in a vacuum. You may use elements from multiple models or switch models over time or in different contexts. Leadership styles and models are different. The model describes what makes a great leader, whereas the style describes their leadership practices (Robertson, T., 2021).

II. Research Objective of Pilot Study

1. To learn about existing leadership models and *identify a mix of leadership models* that are suitable for startups in India
2. To conduct semi-structured interviews and *develop a model* that will serve as the base for a leadership model for startups in India to succeed

III. Research Question

What is the right mix of leadership models required for a successful startup in India?

IV. Literature Review

A lot of literature exists on leadership styles and models, and a substantial amount of research has been done globally on their application to startups by authors and research scholars. Leadership is explained, classified, theorized, and defined in current literature. Classifying and clarifying active leadership has generated significant organizational and social study on leadership styles and behaviors. The existing literature is reviewed in this chapter, followed by an understanding of the key attributes identified for each model.

4.1 About Leadership Models

For the purpose of this research, we have considered ten leadership models. This section will help in understanding the purpose and origin of each of these models. Although various leadership models and styles have been suggested for startups, the results of the research work done by Zaech, S. and Baldeggar, U. in 2016 indicate that there is no single type of leadership behaviour to guarantee success.

1. Kurt Lewin Leadership model

Kurt Lewin, a psychologist, studied three leadership styles and their effects on team members in 1939. His studies also indicated that leaders' styles affect team performance. The three core leadership styles he identified were:

Autocratic model:

Making decisions without informing your team is autocratic leadership. In this model, the team is instructed on what is to be done. Authoritarian leadership is efficient because one can make quick choices and people have no say in the decision process. Authoritarian workplaces demoralize and demotivate employees. This strategy may also prevent leaders from gaining advice from experienced, knowledgeable team members, limiting creativity and performance.

Participative (democratic) leadership:

You make decisions, but you involve team members. Participative leadership might hinder decision-making and miss opportunities. This is especially harmful in emergencies.

Delegative (laissez-faire) leadership:

USAHS's blog(2023) defines "laissez-faire" as "allow to do." It signifies inactivity in politics, economics, and leadership. Laissez-faire leaders supply the tools and let their team figure out the rest. This hands-off approach shows deep trust. Laissez-faire leadership has perks and cons. Laissez-faire executives let workers work and make decisions. When workers are educated, experienced, and skilled, it can be useful. However, inactive leadership can cause unregulated output (Quinton, N.,2023).

2. Management by Objectives

Thomson, T. M. (1998) defines "Management by Objective" (MBO) as the strategy, which compels all managers to set explicit goals for the future and pushes them to explore what else may be done, may help address this question of organizational health and creativity. Peter Drucker coined "Management by Objectives" in 1954.. Supervisors use MBO to create goals with their subordinates and hold them accountable. All businesses have a purpose, and top management establishes company-wide goals and objectives to fulfil it. Most planning and aim setting to attain these common corporate goals is downward in non-MBO organizations. Managers tell subordinates what to do and what they're responsible for. The MBO method adds discussion to the transfer of corporate goals. The superior brings precise goals and metrics for the subordinate to a meeting, while the subordinate brings acceptable or job-improving goals and measures. They set goals, measurements of success, and timeframes for the subordinate to attain them. The subordinate must achieve the agreed targets. The manager and subordinate may have progress reviews and re-evaluation meetings, but the subordinate is judged on results at the conclusion of the given time. He or she may be fired or transferred to a job that provides training or supervision, or promoted or paid more for success. The subordinate's goals will determine the performance outcome.

3. Transactional leadership

Transactional leadership is simple rewards-based. It assumes that personal motivations, not company interests, motivate employees to accomplish tasks or perform well. If you're a transactional leader, you'll set performance targets for workers, promise a reward, then either reward them or punish them if they don't. This leadership style is good at getting work done, but it doesn't encourage teamwork or fresh ideas.

4. Transformational leadership

According to Quinton, N. (2023), leaders who use the transformational model of management can inspire workers and support its functioning. Since they have "positive qualities and ethics," managers push employees to go "beyond expected levels" and "think beyond self-interest." This leadership paradigm achieves corporate goals well. Hongyun Tian et al. (2020) say transformational leaders have integrity and vision. A transformative leader achieves goals through communicating with staff, showing integrity and respect for their expertise and knowledge. Respect improves staff satisfaction and retention.

5. Empathetic leadership

Empathetic leadership emphasizes empathy and understanding people. Empathetic leaders care about others—what motivates, inspires, and affects them. They seek to understand why people are the way they are, which helps them become outstanding leaders who can connect with many different individuals and adjust their style accordingly.

6. Blake and Mouton Leadership Grid

The Blake Mouton Grid compares a manager or leader's task-centeredness to their person-centeredness and defines five leadership styles. Management theorists Robert Blake and Jane Mouton created it in the early 1960s as the Managerial Grid or Leadership Grid.

Behavioral dimensions:

Concern for People: how much a leader considers team members' needs, interests, and personal development when making a decision.

Concern for Results: how much a leader prioritizes concrete goals, organizational efficiency, and high productivity while selecting how to complete a task.



Fig. 1. The Blake-Mouton grid

The diagram below shows Blake and Mouton's five leadership styles.

- **Impoverished Management—Low Results/Low People**
Impoverished or "indifferent" managers are ineffective. This manager's results are disarray, unhappiness, and disharmony since he doesn't care about systems that work or team motivation.
- **Produce-or-Perish Management—High Results/Low People**
"Authoritarian" or "authority-compliance" managers see their employees as tools. Productivity always trumps team needs. Autocratic managers have tight work rules, standards, and procedures and may use punishment to motivate employees. This technique can initially boost output, but low team morale and motivation will eventually hurt performance, and this leader will struggle to keep good performers. They probably follow Theory X, which assumes employees are naturally unmotivated and despise working. Theory Y managers believe workers are self-motivated and happy.
- **Middle-of-the-Road Management—Medium Results/Medium People**
A Middle-of-the-Road or "status quo" manager balances results with people, yet this method is ineffective. They compromise too much and don't motivate or satisfy people. Their team will likely underperform.
- **Country Club Management—High People/Low Results**
The "accommodating" Country Club manager prioritizes team members' wants and feelings. They think happy, secure workers will work hard. The outcome is a calm, pleasant workplace that lacks direction and control, resulting in low productivity.
- **Team Management - High-Productivity/High-People**
Team management is the best leadership style, according to Blake Mouton. It shows a committed leader that works hard for their team. Team or "sound" managers support their company's mission, inspire their staff, and push them to achieve excellent outcomes. They're also role models and team leaders. Team managers empower and respect their employees, who are dedicated to success. Team leaders value production and people. They do this by ensuring team members understand the organization's objective and engage them in production needs. When employees care about the company's success, their production needs match. This fosters trust, respect, and great satisfaction, motivation, and performance. As noted, team managers use Theory Y to motivate.

7. Hersey and Blanchard

The Hersey-Blanchard Leadership Model emphasizes staff skill and willingness. The Situational Leadership Model was developed by Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard.

The Hersey-Blanchard model doesn't believe organizations need a particular leadership style. The approach suggests a leadership style that adjusts to each workplace's specific circumstances. Leaders can foster professional development by assessing each employee's skills and experience. Leadership strategies evolve with an employee's professional growth.

1. Unable and Unwilling (D1)

D1 followers lack the abilities to execute tasks. They lack motivation and self-confidence.

2. Unable and Willing (D2)

D2 followers often fail due to inexperience and lack of abilities. However, they will attempt the assignment. It represents ambitious but inexperienced new hires.

3. Able and Unwilling (D3)

D3 followers can fulfill their jobs but won't. They may lack self-confidence or motivation to follow their leader.

4. Able and Willing (D4)

D4 followers are competent and confident. The workers are most capable and accountable.

Leadership under the Hersey-Blanchard Model

The Hersey-Blanchard approach requires leaders to adapt to their followers' abilities and willingness. D2 and D4 followers should be led differently. Thus, the Hersey-Blanchard model defines four leadership styles for each employee growth stage.

1. Directing (S1)

S1 leaders direct workers. Leaders must clearly explain their roles and help followers build the abilities they need at the S1 stage. S1 leaders give clear directions and supervise.

2. Coaching (S2)

S2 leaders guide and support followers. S2 followers are driven but unable to complete their tasks. Leaders must ensure that followers learn the essential skills while preserving self-confidence. This creates independent followers.

3. Supporting (S3)

S3 leaders support rather than lead. S3 followers have the skills to perform their job. To motivate and grow employees, leaders should provide feedback and assistance.

4. Delegating (S4)

Since the follower is self-sufficient, the S4 leadership style requires little guidance. The S4 leader should support the follower but give them responsibility.

8. Servant Model

Gomez, A. (2022) suggests that the servant leadership model is based on the notion that leaders should put the greater good of employees first. This kind of leader puts the needs of the group and the company first. Their own goals are not given first priority. In an organizational setting, it is observed that employees tend to perceive a greater sense of being listened to and acknowledged when they operate inside a framework of servant leadership. As a consequence, their likelihood of working diligently increases. Employees can then develop and learn while contributing their own knowledge and perspective. Instead of employing control and destructive leadership techniques, this depends on developing influence and authority. Employees are empowered by servant leadership. However, the leader doesn't simply disappear.

The servant leader prioritizes:

- Defining the company's strategic goal and communicating it to the team level
 - Encouraging ownership and giving the team supported trust
 - Ensuring that the group has the necessary tools, funds, expertise, and focus to have an impact
 - Establishing a structure within which their team may thrive (instead of giving them detailed instructions on how to perform each of their jobs)
 - Building their team members' self-assurance, decision-making capabilities, and collaborative capacities is a form of bottom-up empowerment.
9. Great Man Theory
- Harappa Blogs (2020) notes that the Great Man Theory was one of the first to emerge in the 19th century. Thomas Carlyle developed it extensively. "The history of the world is the biography of great men," he

claimed. Leaders are "heroes" with courage, intelligence, and mass influence. These people were considered role models. The Great Man Theory states that some people are born to lead. Leadership is intrinsic.

10. Entrepreneurship Model

In their research, Dvalidze, N. & Markopoulos, E. (2020) note that one recent definition of entrepreneurial leadership is influencing and directing group members to achieve organizational goals that involve recognizing and using entrepreneurial opportunities. The present research adopts Leitch and Volery (2017)'s definition of entrepreneurial leadership as "leadership role performed in entrepreneurial ventures, rather than in the more general sense of an entrepreneurial style of leadership". Entrepreneurial leadership emerges at the intersection of leadership and entrepreneurship and has a significant impact on both research fields, despite its similarities to mainstream leadership theories. Thus, entrepreneurial leadership is a combination of leadership and entrepreneurship. Renko et al. (2013)'s entrepreneurial leadership construct, which incorporates eight factors for understanding entrepreneurial leaders, is the main theoretical basis of this research. These behaviors are: (1) Often comes up with radical improvement ideas for the products/services we sell; (2) Often comes up with ideas of completely new products/services we could sell; (3) Takes risks; (4) Has creative solutions to problems; (5) Demonstrates passion for his/her work; (6) Has a vision of our business's future; (7) Challenges and pushes others to act more innovatively; and (8) Wants employees to challenge the current ways.

4.2 Salient Features of Leadership Models

Based on section 4.1, a list of salient features of each model has been understood and noted by the author. This will form the base for sample study and semi-structured interviews going ahead.

4.2.1 Kurt Lewin Leadership Model

4.2.1.1. Autocratic Model

- Centralized decision making

Watch out: No empowerment of employees

4.2.1.2. Participative (democratic) model

- Involve team members in decision-making

Watch out: Becomes a challenge in critical situations

4.2.1.3. Delegative (laissez-faire) leadership

- Hands-off approach, decision-making by teams but required guidance provided

Watch out: Becomes a challenge in critical situations

4.2.2 Management by Objectives

- Goal-based working style (think Key performance indicators)

- Accountability towards decided goals

4.2.3 Transactional Leadership Model

- Rewards-based working style

- Motivate employees to accomplish tasks or perform well

- Set a target, promise a reward, then either reward or punish depending on the outcome

Watch out: Does not encourage teamwork or fresh ideas

4.2.4 Transformational Leadership

- Leaders become an inspiration

- Managers push employees to go beyond expected levels and think beyond self-interest

- Ideal for corporate goals

- Leaders are respected for their knowledge and expertise

4.2.5 Empathetic Leadership

- Practice empathy with employees

- Understand people and adjust working style accordingly

4.2.6 Blake and Mouton Leadership

4.2.6.1. Country Club Management

- Concern for Results is low
- Concern for People is high

4.2.6.2. Team Management

- Concern for Results is high
- Concern for People is high
- This model shows a committed leader who works hard for their team
- A leader who supports the company's mission, inspires staff, and pushes them to achieve excellent outcomes

4.2.6.3. Produce-or-perish

- Concern for Results is high
- Concern for People is low
- Managers see their employees as tools
- Productivity trumps team needs
- May use punishment to motivate employees

Watch out: Can initially boost output, but low team morale and motivation will eventually hurt performance, and this leader will struggle to keep good performers

4.2.6.4. Impoverished

- Concern for Results is low
- Concern for People is low

Watch out: Results in unhappiness and disharmony in team

4.2.6.5. Middle-of-the-Road Management

- Status-quo for concern for results and people
- Balances results with people

Watch out: Leaders compromise too much and don't motivate or satisfy people. Their team will likely underperform.

4.2.7 Hersey and Blanchard

This is a leadership style that adjusts to each workplace's specific circumstances

4.2.7.1. S1 model - Directing

- Supervisors give directions and supervise
- Clearly explain the role to team members

4.2.7.2. S2 model - Coaching

- Guide and support followers

4.2.7.3. S3 model - Supporting

- Motivate, support, provide feedback and assistance

4.2.7.4. S4 model - Delegating

- Focus on empowerment

4.2.8. Servant Model

- Leaders put the greater good first
- Leader puts the needs of the employees first
- Employees can then develop and learn while contributing their own knowledge and perspective
- Encouraging ownership

Watch outs:

- Time-consuming and demanding for the leader
- Invest a lot of time and energy in listening to and serving the needs of their followers, as well as in developing and mentoring them

4.2.9. Great Man Theory

Leaders are considered as role-models

Watch outs: Employees tend to have a bias and follow decisions of the leader without questioning

4.2.10. Entrepreneurship Model

- Leader comes up with radical, innovative ideas and solutions

- Leader is a risk-taker

- They have creative solutions to problems

- Leaders have a vision

Watch outs:

Entrepreneur becomes responsible for all on-goings of the company at inception and prototype stage

4.3 Gaps Observed in Literature Review

The reviewed literature lists leadership models that apply universally across roles, industries, and geographies.

None of the models are specific to a particular industry and geography. Thus, this paper attempts to build a leadership model that is suitable to be adopted by the Startup industry in India.

V. Research Methodology and Design

5.1 Universe of the Study

For the study, the startups in India that are active and registered with the Ministry of Corporate Affairs are considered. The study's sample population consists of startup experts and founders/co-founders.

5.2 Sampling Frame

The government website (startupindia.gov.in), which served as the sampling frame for the study, provided the list of startups. According to Jansen (2010), a qualitative sample should reflect the variety of the phenomena being studied within the target population. The sample strategy for this study will be convenience sampling. Potential volunteers will be contacted via WhatsApp and LinkedIn. These participants will be first-, second-, or third-degree connections of the author.

5.3 Methodology

To comprehend the qualities of leadership models for startups in India, this study would employ a qualitative methodology. Semi-structured interviews with startup executives and subject matter experts will be used in the study.

5.4 Study Participants

Braun & Clarke (2013), p. 50, have presented guidelines that categorize recommendations according to the type of data collection and the project size (small, medium, or large). For modest projects, it is recommended that 6–10 participants take part in interviews, 2–4 in focus groups, 10–50 in participant-generated content, and 10–100 in secondary sources. For the purpose of this project, *three* people will be chosen for semi-structured interviews. According to Creswell (2014), semi-structured interviews are useful for learning about participants' experiences, perspectives, and attitudes towards particular occurrences. Researchers can also dig deeper and study participant responses because semi-structured interviews allow for unrestricted inquiry. According to Flick (2014), the interviews recreate the elements of the subjective theory. Each begins with an unanswered enquiry and ends with a direct question. In addition to asking respondents questions, which is the most popular sort of survey, statistical and qualitative surveys may also collect data by watching interactions or artifacts in any setting (Jansen, 2010).

A selection of three participants was done, based on the age of the startup the participant belongs to:

1. Startup with age < 2 years – 1 participants
2. Startup with age 2-5 years – 1 participants
3. Startup with age 5+ years – 1 participants

The interviews were recorded with the participants' consent, and transcriptions were made for analysis. According to Jamshed (2014), the interviews would last 30 to 60 minutes. With space for any additional comments or questions, an interview guide will be created to act as the interview's framework.

5.5 Data Analysis Method

This study will employ the narrative analysis approach. According to Dr. Lumsden (2022) narrative knowledge is formed and constructed through stories of lived experience and sense-making, the meanings individuals attach to them, and as a result, it offers significant insight into the complexity of people's lives, cultures, and behaviors.

The procedure that will be used for coding is outlined in the following steps (Delvetool, 2020).

Step 1: Transcription

Once the interview is over, transcription will allow you to fully assess the contents of the interview. For interview coding, a transcript is necessary. Descript will be utilized for auto-transcription.

Step 2: Coding

Qualitative coding is the process of categorizing excerpts from your qualitative data to find themes and patterns. It enables you to group unstructured or partially structured material into themes and patterns for analysis, such as focus group or in-depth interview transcripts.

For the purpose of conducting rigorous systematic analysis, qualitative data must be coded. Coding enables the discovery of insights that represent data and the underlying human narrative.

Coding can be started with a set of codes and then adhered to (deductive coding), or the codes can be created as you read what you see in your data (inductive coding), or you can combine the two methods. For this study, deductive coding will be used, deductive codes representing the attributes identified in the literature review.

Step 3: Using NVivo

The computer tool NVivo, developed by QSR International for qualitative data analysis (QDA), offers a number of advantages and could significantly improve study quality. NVivo's assistance has made qualitative data analysis easier and results more professional. For trend-spotting, theme-spotting, and conclusion-making, NVivo has been used.

VI. Results

6.1 Coding Results

Transcripts from the Interviews were created using the Descript Auto transcription tool, and the generated Word document was uploaded on NVivo. The following analysis sections were used from NVivo:

1. Word Cloud (represented below by Fig. 2)
2. Tree Map (Fig. 3)
3. Word count which becomes an input to the distribution of code (Figure 4)



Fig 2. Word Cloud

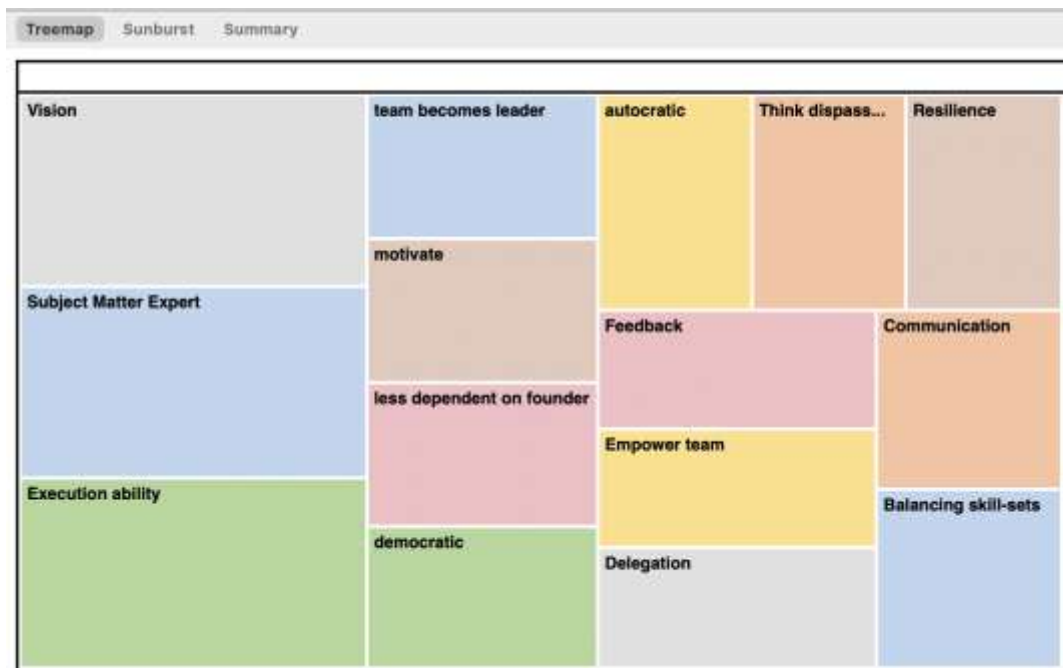


Fig 3. Tree Map

Codes	Number of coding refe...
Codes\\Execution ability	2
Codes\\Subject Matter Expert	2
Codes\\Vision	2
Codes\\autocratic	1
Codes\\Balancing skill-sets	1
Codes\\Communication	1
Codes\\Delegation	1
Codes\\democratic	1
Codes\\Empower team	1
Codes\\Feedback	1
Codes\\less dependent on founder	1
Codes\\motivate	1
Codes\\Resilience	1
Codes\\team becomes leader	1
Codes\\Think dispassionate	1

Fig 4. Distribution of Code appearances

6.2 Discussion

The semi-interviews were structured in 2 parts. The *first part* was to get an understanding of the leadership qualities based on the interviewee's expertise and experience. In the *second part*, the interviewer explained each leadership model, and attributes, quoted examples where necessary, and asked for interviewees' responses to each. This ensured the interviews were conducted without bias or affinity to any leadership model concept. The interviews were conducted with the Head HR of a FinTech company in Bangalore, India (tagged as Interviewee

1), with the co-founder of an E-commerce company in Mumbai, India (tagged as Interviewee 2), and with a consultant to startups across India, in operations and people management (tagged as Interviewee 3). At the request of the interviewees, the identity has been kept confidential.

One of the key observations that was made by all three interviewees, is *no single leadership model* can fit the dynamic requirements of a startup, especially in India. Another important point that was highlighted by all three interviewees is how attributes or styles of leadership or elements of leadership models are suitable at *different stages of a startup's journey*. An attempt has been made to capture these features across a startup's journey in Fig. 4.

Let's look at some of the salient features of a proposed leadership model, as discussed with the interviewees. These have been identified as codes in the Analysis section.

1. *Expertise in the industry of operation/Subject Matter Expert*: Interviewee 3 suggests that a founder or co-founders cannot be experts in everything. However, having a realistic expectation of what their core expertise is, is highly critical in order for the organization to evolve. Interviewee 1 suggests that "Leaders in startups have the expertise in the industry that they're in, in the product that they're trying to build, the service that they're trying to provide; this helps to ensure that they are bringing the right knowledge and the expertise and insights which are required to help the organization."

2. *Resilience*: Interviewee 1 suggests that "The second important skill set is resilience. If a founder, or a co-founder, is not resilient enough, They may be prone to bow down to the pressure of failure sooner than the others. You have to be resilient to keep trying, to keep trying to achieve, to try to get up after every failure, and also to ensure the team, the founding team, and the core team are motivated to be resilient as well."

3. *Balancing skill-sets*: Interviewee 1 suggests balancing skill-sets between co-founders of leaders of a startup "The third one is quite subjective to the number of co-founders. If there are two or three co-founders, their skill sets should balance each other out. Every co-founder cannot come with the same skill set because there is no balancing act there." This is also attributed to Hersey Blanchard model section discussed later.

4. *Having a clear vision*: Interviewee 2 articulates and highlights the importance of having a clear vision during the initial days of a startup. "At the inception stage, you need a founder or a leadership team or a founding team which has a very, very clear vision and is in a position to articulate and explain that vision. Generally startups and more so in the Indian context at the idea stage or at the inception stage May not be funded, may not have resources, may not be able to pay top dollar compensations to those first few people who buy in, and the only thing that they are buying into is the vision of the founder." This is further validated by Interviewee 3, "You have to constantly tell people why we're doing what we're doing, why we're doing where we are."

5. *Empowerment*: This seems to be a consensual point among all three interviewees, where they agree empowerment plays a crucial role in the evolution and success story of a startup. Interviewee 2 stresses that this is in fact crucial in a country like India, where the education system does not necessarily teach the impact of empowerment. There is also a caveat for leaders, for empowering other members which is highlighted by Interviewee 3 "For you to transform from a manager to a leader, you need to first be an example as a leader yourself. And second is you need to really push people into the deep sea make them think, make them lead, make them take decisions."

Let's look at each leadership model discussed in the Literature review in detail next, as to what the interviewees opined on them. Table 1 captures broad-level acceptance/rejection of models and the reasons thereof.

Model	Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2	Interviewee 3
1. Kurt-Lewin Model	-	-	-
1.1 Autocratic Model	No	Required initially	Yes
1.2 Participative (democratic) leadership	Yes	Required on maturity	For crisis management only
1.3 Delegative (laissez-faire) leadership	No	No	Yes
2. Management by Objectives	Yes, required on maturity	Yes	Yes
3. Transactional Leadership	No	Selective usage	Yes
4. Transformational Leadership	Yes	Yes	No, difficult to achieve
5. Empathetic Leadership	Selective usage	Selective usage	Selective usage
6. Blake and Mouton Leadership Grid	Yes - Team Management	Yes - Team Management	Focus on results, supplement with people management
7. Hersey and Blanchet Leadership model	Yes, if multiple leaders	Selective usage	-
7.1 Directing	-	-	Yes
7.2 Coaching	-	-	No
7.3 Supporting	-	-	Yes
7.4 Delegating	-	-	No
8. Servant Model	No	No	No
9. Great Man Theory	No	No	No, but common in India
10. Entrepreneurship Model	Yes	Required initially	Yes

Table 1. Responses for Leadership models by Interviewees

1. Kurt-Lewin Model

1.1 Autocratic Model

Interviewee 1 believes that a startup won't succeed with an autocratic leadership style. This is because one person making the decisions is going to slow down the growth and the progress. Interviewee 2 suggests “You want team members to opine. You still want people to give feedback. You want people to ask the right questions. It may not necessarily be giving the right solutions, but you definitely want people to ask the right questions. And you need people to sort of zoom out and think about building a startup or a business in a dispassionate way. What typically an autocratic kind of leadership does or this particular model of leadership does, is discourage people from doing that. It discourages people from asking the question. And for those reasons, I would say that I definitely discourage this style of leadership.”

1.2 Participative (democratic) leadership

Based on conversations with the interviewees, it is noted that this leadership style needs to be balanced with autocratic, depending on the stage of maturity of the startup. Interviewee 2 makes a keynote that “The point of a round table in democratic leadership is to expand the margins of the amount of information, but the decision should still come from the leader”, thereby stressing the fact that a balance is required in both approaches. Interviewee 3 brings up a very key point that focuses on the leader’s psychology –“The number one job of a founder is to manage your own psychology. And I think no one likes to talk about this, but a founder is brutal.” This is where a leader can engage in democracy and ensure responsibilities and decision making is participative.

1.3 Delegative (laissez-faire) leadership

This is to be used when there is a requirement to only facilitate decision-making. Interviewee 3 ties this to the criticality of the task at hand - A leader should delegate when it is smaller stakes because it is not a good use of their time. The CEO, who is generally the most highly paid person in the organization, is not a good use of their time to think about smaller things. A CEO should only be focusing on three or four areas, which, number one, they are accountable to.

2. Management by Objectives

For Management by Objectives (MBOs), while there was general consensus to accept the model, the discussion was again that this exercise is majorly required on maturity and not in the initial phases of the startup journey. Further, Interviewee 3 also suggested how it is tough to keep focus on objectives in a startup as tasks can be ad hoc. Interviewee 1 believed this helps in having a focused approach to decision-making in an organization, however, Interviewee 2 added the extra ingredient required for it to be successful and overcome the watch out of MBOs is that as long as one of the objectives is to have a strategic initiative, it should be fine as MBOs should not curb thing out-of-the-box solutions for startups.

3. Transactional Leadership

Interviewee 1 dismissed this leadership style as one which is a bane for startups as it curbs a non-transactional way of thinking and discourages the next set of leaders to grow. MBO is a far better approach than Transactional leadership. Interviewee 3, however, presented a different story where it was stated that “We can have a philosophical answer, but the reality is disproportionately commission these types of models. Public recognition is all carrots that are, have very, very powerful effects.” Interviewee 2 suggests identifying relevant verticals/resources where this can be applied, For example, can it be relevant for “Sales roles” where individual contribution is more important?

4. Transformational Leadership

There was a general consensus that this leadership model is an absolute must for startups. However, it is also noted that this is one of the most difficult aspects to practice and achieve.

5. Empathetic Leadership

There was a general consensus that while empathy is an extremely key attribute to have, selective usage of the same is an absolute must. Interviewee 2 suggested that this type of leadership style has a recipe for failing in the long run, and suggests that “I've seen people take a lot of advantage of this style of leadership. It ends up building expectation in employees and the team, which a leader not always can consistently deliver.” Interviewee 3 takes a more contemporary take “Gen Zs globally and in India talking about things like mental health, wellness, that matters a lot to them. But I think there's also a challenge within Indian startups of the work-life integration or balance of when does personal life affect professionalism.”

6. Blake and Mouton Leadership Grid

Interviewee 3 suggests that a perfect balance for the Blake and Mouton grid is not possible. Team Management or middle-of-the-road-management are too idealistic and are not possible in the dynamic environment of a startup. Whereas, Interviewee 1 suggests that startups should keep their core DNA and North Star as “Team management” only then the organization will take strides in the right direction.

7. Hersey and Blanchard Leadership model

The Hersey Blanchard model is an interesting one for the interviewees as this majorly depends on the size of a startup, which leads to the maturity point mentioned earlier. “If a startup has multiple founders or leaders and the size of a startup is more than 20-30 people, then this model makes sense; else it does not seem relevant for startups”, quotes Interviewee 1. Interviewee 3 suggests that directing and supporting are the leadership styles that are required in startups; delegation and empowerment are at a far later stage.

8. Servant Model

The general consensus on this model was a strict no for startups. While empathy is promoted, the servant model is not.

9. Great Man Theory

The Great Man Theory model becomes interesting in the Indian context where the halo effect of founders is perceived across the board and becomes a personality for the organization or startup as a whole. However, this is not a model that is in the best benefit of the organization in the long run. Interviewee 2 quotes “In an ideal world having a leader who inspires people to join and ties tie into the vision and all, of course, that's an advantage, but not many startup leaders have that at the start”.

10. Entrepreneurship Model

There was also a general consensus on the Entrepreneurship model being an absolute must for startups as the name suggests. This is also relevant to the second-in-line in startups as creative problem-solving, hustling, and other entrepreneurial attributes are promoted in this model.

VII. Conclusion

The pilot study was conducted to understand the skills required for startup leaders to create successful startups, focusing on India as a geography. *Ten(10)* leadership models were considered and studied in the literature review – salient features were understood and noted.

As this was a pilot study, data collection and subsequent qualitative study was conducted on *three(3)* respondents from the startup sector in India.

The following attributes were recommended for leaders of startups in India. These were noted to be relevant and have high consensus/validation.

1. *Expertise in the industry of operation*
2. Resilience
3. *Balancing skill-sets*
4. Having a clear vision
5. Empowerment

For the noted leadership models, the author has tried to capture them on the basis of the age or maturity of startups. The reference of startup lifecycle has been inferred from HBR (1983).

At the *inception stage* of startups:

1. Autocratic Model
2. Results focus, supplement with people focus (Blake Mouton grid)

At the *maturity stage* of startups:

1. Democratic Model
2. Management by Objectives
3. Team Management (Blake Mouton grid)

Across *all stages* of startups:

1. Transformational Model
2. Entrepreneurship Model

Selective usage:

1. Empathetic Leadership
2. Transactional Leadership

The above has been captured in the figure below.

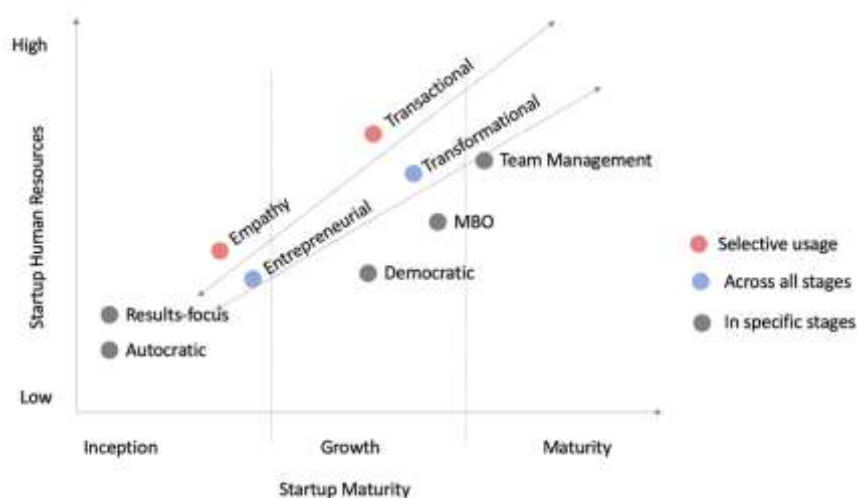


Fig. 5. Leadership Models plotted across the startup lifecycle for startups in India

For a more comprehensive study, more such leadership models need to be studied and included in the study. The sample size is small, and a higher sample size is suggested to be evaluated to get more insights into the founding team members' skill sets. This can serve as the base for future research across different industries, within the startup space and understanding if future researchers want to research a specific industry. Also, a quantitative study is proposed to understand the correlation between leadership skills and success metrics for startups. This will assist in building a more comprehensive model that links leadership skills to success. Another paradigm to study, which was briefly covered in the paper is correlating leadership models to the stage of startup lifecycle.

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