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**THRIVING LEADERSHIP – CONCEPT, FACTORS AND COACHING FOR  
LEADERS AND TEAMS DEVELOPMENT.**

**ABSTRACT**

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The dissertation consists of an introduction, three main chapters comprising ten sections, a conclusion, a bibliography, and appendices. The total length of the dissertation is 319 pages of which 254 is the main text. The bibliography comprises 89 sources, including 12 literary sources in Bulgarian, 77 in a foreign language as well as 42 online sources.

The dissertation defence has been scheduled for: .....2024, at 00:00 hours, in lecture hall:.....at New Bulgarian University, city of Sofia. The dissertation defence material is available in office....., New Bulgarian University campus .....

## I. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISSERTATION

### 1. Relevance of the Issue

We live in times where leaders realize that what used to bring good results to shareholders, customers, people and society in the age of knowledge, is not sustainable in the environment in which organisations exist today.

Organisations "live" in a "constant flow of change," and mobilizing human energy towards achieving the corporate vision and implementing the goals and values of the company turns into a very challenging mission. In such a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world (VUCA world) in which organisations operate, leaders realise that a substantial transformation is a must. This transformation is not external. Changes in strategy or process optimization, for example, will not make a significant difference. A deeper transformation is needed. This profound transformation is a process that takes time and starts from within because only the inside-out approach can be sustainable. And this inside-out transformation must start with the leaders in the highest positions. They are the visionaries, the driving force and the role models. They inspire others and are responsible for creating a harmonious environment where people unfold their potential and thrive. The leadership intrapersonal transformation is the key to sustainable organisational thriving. This deep transformation involves a paradigm shift which leads to a shift of consciousness. Overcoming limited thinking patterns as well as leaders' wholehearted commitment to the process of transformation is the essence of intrapersonal transformation. Combined with the individual transformation of leaders, the interpersonal transformation within their teams is what will help organisations' sustainable thriving.

The main practical question is: "**How does this intrapersonal transformation happen?**" **Executive leadership coaching** accelerates leadership, team, and organisational thriving. We, the executive coaches, have initiated a dialogue with them. The message may be well-received on the surface but the true and deep inner work has not yet begun. By "floating on the surface" in their personal development, the leader is in internal comfort. Why? Profound inner work requires the display of courage and honesty towards oneself. This internal transformation demands the bravery to step into the unknown. As Dr. Joe Dispenza says: "*The unknown is the only place where you can create- you cannot create anything new from the known*".

The so far provided information categorically substantiates the relevance and dissertability of the selected issue, concerning the intrapersonal and interpersonal transformation of leaders and leadership teams for sustainable organisational thriving.

### 2. Object and subject of the study

**The dissertation object** is *two international organisations, differing in size, origin, and culture*. They provide different environments for the leaders and the teams and this affects the observed results.

**The subject** of the study is *how coaching leaders and teams influences the thriving of leadership. This provides an answer to the questions "How does coaching affect the thriving of leadership, and how the leader and the team can achieve thriving?"*

The author also examines *the conditions for the thriving of leaders and teams*. These conditions encompass both personal and interpersonal aspects. Here, the author seeks an answer to the question: "What are the conditions for the thriving of leaders and leadership teams?"

### 3. Aim and objectives of study

The dissertation *studies the conditions (environment) in which leaders and leadership teams thrive and makes a theoretical overview of such issues as leadership, thriving and coaching*. The researcher focuses on how executive leadership coaching influences individual and team thriving and organisational prosperity. *This dissertation explores the intrapersonal and interpersonal transformation of leaders and their teams through coaching*. This is the natural sequence leading to sustainable organisational prosperity.

To achieve the stated aim, the following **study objectives** have been outlined:

- To **analyse leading theories** in the field of leadership, coaching, intrapersonal and interpersonal transformation
- To study **the intrapersonal transformation** of two leaders working in two different cultural contexts.
- To examine the **interpersonal transformation** within a management team and its impact on the organisation.
- To explore how coaching, as an approach to intrapersonal and interpersonal transformation, **accelerates** this transformation.
- To demonstrate the significance of intrapersonal (the leaders') and interpersonal (of the leadership teams) transformations for the **improvement of the company's results**.

### 4. Limitations of the study

**The limitations** concerning the present study are both theoretical and practical.

The theoretical limitations of the study are the following:

- The theory of leadership is a concept extremely voluminous in terms of content which makes the dissertational research concentrate only on the specific leadership theories chosen by the author and relevant to the study.
- The holistic nature of the study and the emphasis on human energy, which is at the core of sustainable leadership thriving, necessitates the use of other theoretical and scientific perspectives, which the author only touches upon without delving into explanations, thus increasing the complexity of the study.
- The practical limitations of the study are the following:
  - The study was conducted only in international organisations.
  - The studied organisations are only two due to the depth and duration of the research.

In order to achieve the aim of the dissertation, a holistic research approach was employed.

## 5. Research thesis and working hypotheses of the study

The main research thesis in the dissertation *is that sustainable organisational thriving is achieved through leaders' dedicated efforts towards intrapersonal transformation and the leadership teams' wholehearted commitment to interpersonal transformation. This process can be accelerated through a coaching approach.*

The author defines **intrapersonal transformation** as alterations in the leader's energy vibration and the leader's level of consciousness, while **interpersonal transformation** is linked to shifts in the team's collective energy vibration, strong interdependence, and synergy.

In connection with the formulated aim and subject of the study, the present work examines and analyzes the validity of three **working hypotheses**:

- Leaders thrive and maintain this state (being at their best) when they are wholeheartedly committed to their intrapersonal transformation, when they are driven by a meaningful purpose, and when they predominantly use their natural thinking style ('brain dominance').
- Leadership coaching expedites intrapersonal transformation towards thriving leadership.
- When leaders thrive, they guide their teams toward interpersonal transformation and thriving which leads to organisational thriving. prosperity.

The author derives the research thesis and its supporting working hypotheses based on personal observations over a number of years, in her capacity as HR director, CEO, and, in the last nine years, an executive leadership coach and a team coach.

## 6. Methodology of the study and sources of information.

In **methodological terms**, the lay-out is based on qualitative and quantitative approaches. The researcher has employed the following research methods: case studies, Energy Leadership Index™ Assessment, assessment of brain dominance, interviews, testimonials of members of the organisation, and documentation.

As a result of the literature review on various perspectives on the essence of case study research, the author determines this method as **the most suitable for investigating the phenomenon of thriving leadership** and how it is influenced by the organisational environment (culture), the social environment (relationships with teams and coach), and the internal environment for the leader (influenced by energy, level of consciousness) and impacts the organisational and social environment (culture and teams) in the long term, ultimately influencing organisational outcomes (thriving).

For the objectives of this study, *the process of the leader's intrapersonal transformation and the process of interpersonal transformation within the management team* will hereby be referred to as '**the case**'. *This is the process leading to the thriving of the leader, the team, and consequently to organisational thriving.*

**The case approach** acknowledges the reality of conditions, the positivistic nature of the study (hypotheses testing), and also the long period of time. It also considers the diversity of environmental factors that inevitably influence the observed phenomenon of 'thriving leadership.' Since the context of studying the phenomenon of 'thriving leadership' is complex, the author adds a comparative approach (multiple cases) and a long period of observing the transformation, using the corresponding measurements.

**Energy Leadership Index™ Assessment** is a scientifically validated tool for measuring energy, which the author uses as a marker to measure progress resulting from coaching of leaders.

**The self-assessment of brain dominance** is used to determine the natural dominance. It will serve for proving the hypothesis that brain dominance influences internal conditions for thriving. The significance of Benziger's scientific discovery about brain dominance (2000) is that it connects the present 'hard' scientific knowledge about the brain, its structure, and physiology with the 'softer' psychological knowledge about thinking and learning styles. Benziger (2000) describes the law of dominance as governing the internal dynamics of our brain.

By including **interviews**, the author aims to enrich the knowledge that will be gained by asking qualitative questions. This way, the researcher will sense the nuances of the specific and unique internal experiences of the leader and team members.

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**Chapter 1** of the dissertation, consisting of two sections, is titled "**Theoretical foundations of thriving leadership and optimal experience, Thrive Space**"

In section 1 "*Development of leadership theories. The Future of leadership: a comprehensive (holistic) approach. Thriving leadership,*" the author conducts a **detailed theoretical analysis** of leadership theories and examines **established leadership theories and emerging leadership theories**.

Leadership is a topic that will always be at the forefront of organisational discussions. The question here is not *which model is the "correct one"* but rather how leaders should become effective. In this regard, as mentioned by Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, and McKee (2013), **researchers and practitioners should seek new questions and their answers**.

In this dissertation, the author raises the question of achieving sustainable organisational thriving through the attainment of thriving leaders and thriving teams. The new question is how to achieve sustainability in the organisation through leaders and teams. The author seeks answers by integrating a theory in order to achieve a comprehensive view of leadership, individual, and interpersonal transformation through acquired practical knowledge. An essential aspect is the practical application of this integrated and holistic approach, which the author addresses in the third chapter. The holistic approach integrates knowledge derived from established and emerging leadership theories (biological, leadership and emotions, teams).

For the purpose of studying **thriving leadership**, the following leadership theories are briefly reviewed:

- From the group of **established leadership theories** and specifically neo-charismatic theories, the author examines **transformational leadership**, which has attracted much scholarly attention.
- From the group of **emerging theories of leadership** the author examines the theories of ethical / moral leadership, more specifically authentic leadership and biological approaches to leadership, including emerging 'neuroleadership', team leadership and leadership for innovation and change.

As a researcher and professional in the field of coaching, the author is interested in understanding individual and collective behaviour in depth. Through theoretical knowledge, intuition and knowledge refined through practice, with this dissertation, the researcher seeks an opportunity to positively influence leaders in their search for thriving and organisational prosperity.

The version of transformational leadership theory formulated by Bass and his colleagues stands out in the studies of Yukl (1999).

They define **transformational leadership** primarily in terms of the leader's effect on followers and the behaviours used to achieve that effect. Followers feel trust, admiration, loyalty and respect for the leader and are motivated to do more than the initially expected. The basic process of influence is described in terms of motivating followers. Transformational leadership is distinguished from transactional leadership

which involves a process of exchange (transaction) to motivate followers to meet the demands and expectations of the leader and the rules of the organisation.

According to Yukl's analysis (1999), transformational leadership is the most widely researched leadership style, recognized as effective and as addressing organisational tensions as well as overall performance. According to Yukl (1999), the transformational leadership literature has demonstrated the positive effects on organisational outcomes, including improved performance at managerial and team levels and better staff performance. Transformational leadership has also been associated with **improved staff attitudes, job satisfaction, organisational commitment**, and reduced negative outcomes such as intentions to leave and stress burnout.

The analysis of **charismatic leadership** is based on the scientific article by Gary Yukl (1999), who conducts a thorough critical analysis, citing 72 sources on the subject of transformational and charismatic leadership theories, seeking their conceptual weakness. According to the author, the theory of charismatic leadership remains the most speculative in the entire set of theories.

The shortcoming of these theories, according to Yukl (1999), is the strong identification with the leader's charisma which creates loyal, "obedient" followers but may hinder them from providing feedback to the leader or showing initiative. They are less likely to disagree with the leader, criticize the leader's plans, or deviate from them. They are inclined to ignore or rationalize any evidence that the plans and policies proposed by their leader are unrealistic and impractical. This limitation, stemming from excessive focus on the dyadic level, should be taken into account. **Not enough attention is paid to group processes which are important not only because they are necessary to explain how the leader can influence the performance of an interacting group but also because the influence of the charisma is unlikely to be the same for all members of the group.** Charismatic leaders tend to polarize people into loyal followers and opponents.

The conclusion is that instrumental compliance is most important for transactional leadership, internalization is most important for transformational leadership, and personal identification is most important for charismatic leadership. A transformational leader is more likely to take actions that empower followers and make them partners in the pursuit of important goals. A charismatic leader would more likely emphasize the need for radical change, which can only be achieved if followers trust the leader's unique experience. **The theories should place greater emphasis on reciprocal influence processes and explicitly address issues of shared and distributed leadership.** The practical implications for organisations need to be identified more carefully. Transformational leadership seems broadly applicable, but there may be situations where it is unnecessary or has negative consequences alongside the positive ones. The relative importance of different transformational behaviours most likely depends on the situation.

Successful organisations are built not only through human capital but also through social and psychological capital, with the latter including employee well-being. **The psychological well-being (PWB) of employees can be the foundation for innovation, peak performance, and realization of human potential.**

A distinction has been made between **subjective well-being (SWB)**, the hedonistic view of well-being, including happiness, pleasure, and satisfaction and **PWB** – eudaimonic well-being, including the achievement of human potential, psychological growth and purpose.

**Seven key dimensions of PWB** have been examined. They are based on a literature review, primarily on Ryff's theory (Ryff 1989): **a feeling of purpose and meaning in life, self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, and stress tolerance**. A deeper understanding of **PWB** and its origins would help to understand **how people can thrive in an organisational context**. While SWB theories are more like abstract representations of phenomena like satisfaction and happiness, PWB researchers use discrete dimensions, providing greater "depth." This, in turn, allows a focused theorizing and a measurement of workplace thriving.

In the dissertation, the author explores (analyses) **the seven key dimensions** of PWB, seeking the relation between PWB and people's thriving in the organisation and how leadership in particular influences this. ***Thriving leadership is a factor in interpersonal thriving and organisational prosperity.***

Based on the analysis of non-charismatic theories, it can be concluded that we cannot view leadership as a phenomenon isolated from the social environment, namely the attitudes of followers and the quality of relationships between leaders and followers. We cannot isolate the context which is the internal and external environment where the organisation operates. The constantly changing conditions of the external environment where people work are a source of stress. Stress is what people interpret as a personal threat to their well-being. In this sense, thriving leaders are those who, besides being role models, are also creators of an organisational environment ("**organisational epigenetics**") in which people thrive. This leads to organisational thriving.

Examining the interdependence between leadership, relations (with oneself and others), and environment, would provide us with information about the conditions under which individual, team, and organisational thriving is possible. This will be supported and explained from a neurobiological, quantum, and epigenetic perspective up to the current level of scientific knowledge, which will naturally continue to evolve rapidly in the coming years.

***For this reason, the presented in this dissertation integrative and holistic approach on leadership will lead to a significant contribution to building sustainable organisational prosperity based on thriving leaders, followers, and teams.***

The interest in authentic corporate environment has significantly increased over the last decade. The theory of **authentic leadership** holds a prominent place in emerging theories of the new millennium. Above all, these theories appeal to the mass audience eager to learn, be inspired by, or emulate those perceived as successful in business. Taking into account the popularity of these concepts borrowed from positive psychology, Alvesson and Einola (2019), claim that the entire field of leadership studies risks failing as a serious scientific endeavor. The field badly needs a

replacement of optimistic ideologies, that fuel fantasies about the moral, ethical, good, strong leader, who is a central figure creating all positive outcomes by adopting the right leadership formulas, **with a theoretically more solid and less ideological research**. They conduct a thorough analysis and propose a **realistic leadership concept**.

As a critical reflection of the scholars' analyses of leadership, the author expresses the position that the *"recipes" for being a good leader- authentic, transformational, charismatic, etc.-might not achieve the desired effect*. The reason for this is the complex external environment in which leaders lead their organisations. This environment is cultural and also influenced by STEP (social, technological, economic, and political) factors. On the other hand, the "internal environment," constituted by the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the leader, is completely unique and specific to them. It either opposes or, ideally, harmonizes with the "internal environment" of their followers. This makes the environment a very complex factor, hence, making the existence of refined recipes and prescriptions for leadership impossible. *Adaptability, harmonization, and alignment of the individual with the collective and the complex, as well as the interdependence of factors are aspects that researchers need to work on.*

The author of the dissertation explores **the new paradigms of leadership**. The discussion begins with the requirements for the new leadership paradigm, as outlined by Panayotov (2008, p. 217). He categorizes these requirements into three main thematic groups: (1) first, regarding the dominant characteristics of the leader, (2) second, concerning the six guiding principles for the leader in conditions of change, and (3) third, relating to the five ways of thinking and management that need to be integrated (or balanced) for effective managing or leadership. Panayotov's summary (2008, p. 217) in regard to the new leadership paradigm is in harmony with the researcher's analysis mentioned above, and **acknowledges the interdependence of individual and collective factors, as well as the influence of the context (environment)**. *Only such a multi-layered and integrated approach can provide adaptability, expressed as an adequate response to the changing environment. This response is relational, i.e., a product of relationships.*

Another interesting perspective focused on **the new leadership paradigm** is related to **biology**. Connecting biology and leadership is a new trend. The interaction between cognitive neuroscience and organisational science is necessary and important, **but only if they are two separate areas of study, including not only new methods but also theoretical explanations**. Only this way can the two parent disciplines, as expressed by Lee, Senior, and Butler (2012), continue to evolve.

An emerging trend in the field of leadership is the so-called **neuroleadership**. This term was introduced by Dr. David Rock, who sees value in creating a new field where neuroscientific research supports fields such as coaching, leadership development and organisational change. Rock (2010) develops this new area which he calls **neuroscience of leadership** through his institute, annual summit, a journal, and academic education. In the dissertation, the author examines the arguments for and against neuroleadership.

The concept of *limbic leader*, described by Brown, Kingsley, and Paterson (2015), is also explored. According to them, to apply a brain-focused approach, leaders need to know enough about how the brain functions and apply that knowledge to both themselves and their teams. Critical knowledge is the one about the role of emotions in improving work performance, bearing in mind that building trust-based relationships is crucial. According to Brown, Kingsley, and Paterson (2015), only through **the leader's impact on the team's emotions** can any change in behaviour and motivation be sought. **Understanding the fact that the brain is an organ of relations is crucial. Understanding how the brain works enhances leadership capacity.**

The author examines leadership in the aspects **of emotions, innovation, and change** and discusses the U-model (Scharmer's innovation model). According to this model the stages of innovation are primarily related to intrapersonal and then interpersonal transformation.

The author also explores **team leadership**. Teams are a direct consequence of the challenge to achieve organisational effectiveness. They stimulate the unfolding of human potential, and according to Hadzhiev (2015), being a phenomenon of group dynamics, they have a strategic role. Hadzhiev (2015) highlights three reasons, necessitating their use in organisations:

*First*, they unite in one group specialists with additional skills and experience, which usually exceed those of the individuals included in the team (synergistic effect).

*Second*, when jointly defining goals and methods, teams establish common values and norms that support real-time problem-solving and initiatives.

*Third*, teams provide a unique social dimension that enhances the economic and administrative aspects of the activity.

The functions of effective team leadership and their sub-functions, according to Hackman and Wageman (2008), are examined and the essential and activating conditions for team effectiveness are analyzed.

### **The Essentials:**

**Condition 1 - Creating a real team not only a group of people called a team.** According to Hackman and Wageman (2008), if the team is too big, its life is too short and it is too dispersed for its members to work interdependently, making the odds of it being effective very low.

**Condition 2 - Composed of the right people, depending on the nature of work:** a broad task, interpersonal skills, good strategic approach, identifying the knowledge and skills that the task requires to cover all critical aspects of the project. The softer skills are key to enabling and maximizing people's potential.

**Condition 3. With a clear direction captivating minds and hearts,** critical for energizing the team, focusing on core goals, engaging talent. The direction is a key element, as it dictates the structure of the team and the needed organisational support, as well as the most appropriate type of coaching. Even more, the inspiring direction engages in a way that minimizes the need for managerial control and real-time management of team processes.

### **The Enablers:**

**Condition 4. Sound structure:** a well-designed task and the right number and mix of members to implement it, behavioural norms that enhance development and presentation strategies (usually agreed upon at the start of the team, clear and explicit, helping the team work together to achieve the goals).

**Condition 5: Supporting organisational context:** a reward system – rewarding team performance, information system – necessary data and systems, and tools for their management, an educational system – technical and educational support for all aspects of work, including the potential improvement of members' skills, such as communication and collaboration on collective tasks.

**Condition 6: Expert team coaching,** assisting team members to work together in ways that enhance the benefits of the process and minimize the losses, concerning efforts, execution strategy, knowledge, and skills.

Hadjiev (2015) claims that **a genuinely engaged team is the most productive unit of management.** *According to the author, it is the high-performing team that reaches a level of engagement at which the team thrives.*

The author discusses the topic of global cross-cultural teams, as well as the topics of leadership and teamwork in a virtual environment.

On the ground of a thorough theoretical analysis of established and emerging leadership theories, the author summarizes her own perspective on leadership, termed **thriving leadership.**

***Thriving leadership is about guiding yourself toward optimal experience and about the way you influence others to achieve the same. Optimal experience is encountered when we are in the Thrive Space.***

The author's operational definition of thriving leadership is:

***Thriving leadership is a holistic form of leadership that includes:***

- 1) ***The relationship the leader has with oneself is healthy and harmonious.*** It impacts the internal integration of the leader (harmony with their essential nature) and that of the followers (how they feel with the leader and how they are influenced by them).
- 2) ***The relationship of the leader with the followers involves thriving relationships*** based on trust, nourished by healthy communication, directed towards growth and realization of the organisational vision and mission, a behaviour harmonizing with organisational values.
- 3) ***The way these multi-layered relationships impact the achievement of sustainable organisational prosperity and affect the external environment,*** both social (society and culture) and physical (nature and natural resources).

***Thriving leadership is about guiding yourself and others towards sustainable thriving.*** It involves interconnectedness and shared sense of meaning, expressed in the form of a purpose, conditions for harmony and growth. It focuses on and addresses

human and organisational challenges at their roots. This means not staying at the level of surface behaviors but exploring their root cause, both at an individual and collective level.

***Thriving leadership is centered on the internal processes at both individual and team levels, rather than just on symptomatic leadership behavior.*** In this sense, it concentrates on the leader's energy and the energetic team interaction, taking into account the complexity of the environment and how it impacts individuals and teams.

*Thriving leadership is an integrative and comprehensive (holistic) approach to self-leadership, as well as to team and organisational leadership.*

In terms of the conducted analysis of scientific sources on leadership, the author can summarize that the concept of **thriving leadership is in sync with emerging trends in scientific research on leadership**. It studies leadership not only at dyadic level, but also at relational and contextual levels, and how these three dimensions influence sustained organisational thriving.

In section 2, "***Thrive Space: Psychological and Neurobiological Foundations of Optimal Experience***," the researcher provides an overview and analysis of optimal experience (thriving) from psychological and neuroscientific perspectives and explains fundamental concepts such as **energy, emotions, and consciousness**. As leaders and teams go through the process of intrapersonal and interpersonal transformation, they work at the levels of energy and emotions, as well as of alteration of thought patterns, associated with an increase in self-awareness. Intrapersonal and interpersonal transformation leads to individual and team thriving and, consequently, organisational prosperity.

In this section, the researcher focuses attention on the first research question: ***What are the internal conditions under which leaders thrive?***

After making a thorough analysis of the theories and scientific perspectives mentioned below, the author provides a description of the space that she calls the "**Thrive Space**"

- The optimal experience is described by the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) who reveals that what makes an experience truly satisfying is a state of consciousness called **flow**. During flow, people typically experience joy, they create and are completely immersed in the activity. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990), this state can be controlled instead of being left to chance.
- In a study Wright (1998), examines **visionary leaders** and refers to them as upper class – (effortless high performers).
- Another scientific perspective on optimal experience is the **window of tolerance**. According to Ogden and Siegel (Ogden et al., 2006; Siegel 1999), the "window of tolerance" is ***the optimal zone of arousal (stimulation) in which we are able to thrive in everyday life.***

However, the author's extensive professional experience in the field of coaching has shown that clients rarely experience this **elusive state of flow** and, if it does occur, is often brief and episodic. In elite sports, this state is referred to as "**in the zone**." Not everyone can reach the flow state due to complex internal reasons. The most



challenging task for a professional coach is to help clients move from the *fog zone* (as the author calls it in the essential coaching model) to the space where they have the **internal conditions** to thrive. It is in this space that they can experience flow. This is the **Thrive Space**. **The internal conditions for thriving include: high-vibrational energy, thrive-oriented emotions, and a high level of self-awareness.**

The researcher's assumption is that **leaders thrive when they are at their best**. Thriving happens as a result of **wholehearted commitment to the process of intrapersonal transformation**. **Optimal experience (thriving)** directly reflects and influences the improvement of the leader's and team's performance. This improved performance contributes to organisational thriving and leads to sustainable business results.

The author of the dissertation has conducted a comparative analysis between the conditions for experiencing *flow* and *effortless high performance*. **The flow model and the model of effortless high performance** differ, and the difference is that Wright's model of *effortless high performance* (Wright 1998) includes a **meaningful purpose**, while in Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) *flow* model **meaningful purpose** is not a condition for experiencing flow. The conclusion that can be drawn is that any activity that directs attention to dealing with a challenge and that brings accomplishment and growth can lead to the experience of flow. The question is how sustainable this flow experience is and why sustainability is important. Sustainable thriving is crucial, natural and connected to unfolding leadership, team, and organisational potential, and leads to prosperity.

The optimal experience is explored not only from a psychological perspective but also from a neuroscientific standpoint and is based on analyses of social, neuropsychological, and neurobiological research.

From a neuroscientific perspective, analyses show that subjective flow is negatively correlated with low-frequency (LF) heart rate variability (HRV) and positively correlated with the depth of breathing. Increased depth of breathing during a strong flow is indicative of a calmer state with increased parasympathetic activity. This provides partial support for scientists' research theses, namely that **there is no connection between the frontal cortical oxygenation and the flow**. Scientists have found that the flow is not associated with a state of hypo-frontality. Such a conclusion naturally leads to the need to study the deeper brain regions **related to emotions and their connection to optimal leadership experience (thriving)**.

The question of **energy, emotions, and consciousness** is thoroughly examined in the dissertation because it has a direct relevance to the thriving of leaders and teams. Energy, emotions, and consciousness form the core where intrapersonal (individual) and interpersonal transformation begin. **This individual transformation is accelerated through holistic coaching, which addresses the root cause rather than the surface-level behaviour. Thriving leaders and teams, and organisational thriving is achieved through transforming human energy with the help of coaching.**

Understanding energy, emotions, and consciousness is crucial for comprehending holistic coaching, which works precisely with this "material."

A person is at their best when they are in an internal space of *high vibrational energy*. The author analyzes the definitions of energy from the perspectives of psychology, physics, quantum physics, and neuroscience. She differentiates between emotions and feelings and analyses the scientific theory of the number and types of emotions.

The author also explores thriving organisations, bringing up the term "**organisational epigenetics**." From an organisational view point, *a thriving state could be achieved in a specific organisational environment (epigenetic factor)*. This is an environment where behaviour is powered by deeply rooted values recognized throughout the entire organisation. In this culture, learning and unfolding the individual and collective potential is a priority. It is a culture with psychological safety where all voices are heard. Thriving organisations have a clear and distinct vision and a well-defined meaningful purpose. Most importantly, people and teams understand and are inspired by this vision and purpose. When this organisational environment exists, teams thrive, and organisations prosper. It is a holistic and sustainable experience of one dynamic organism, such as the team and the organisation (interconnected teams) unlike flow, which is episodic, elusive, and challenging to achieve in a complex organisational environment.

A key conclusion the author draws after developing the first chapter of the dissertation is that *thriving leadership*, defined in the author's working definition, is a phenomenon that reflects the complexity of the environment in which modern organisations exist. From this main conclusion, we can draw the following insights:

(1) The multilayered leadership dimensions derived from the analysed classical and emerging leadership theories raise the question about the place of the holistic form of leadership (*thriving leadership*) that is not dyadic (classical concept) but holistic. This holism relates to understanding the root of human behavior- energy, emotions, and consciousness, and how they can be transformed and lead to a state of thriving.

(2) Thriving leadership is associated with the "**Thrive Space**", described by the author where the leader can perform at an optimal level effortlessly. The state of effortless high performance is explored by psychology and neuroscience and is called a flow. Based on a thorough theoretical analysis, the author generalizes that flow cannot be sustained but can be often achieved when internal conditions, depending on external factors (*organisational epigenetics*) and the leaders' adaptation capacity are present.

(3) Thriving leadership is at the core of sustainable transformation leading to team and organisational thriving. The leader's awareness to undergo intrapersonal transformation, which to inspire and support interpersonal transformation on a team and inter-team levels, is the key to the sustainability of organisational prosperity.

(4) An external intervention is necessary to create the conditions for this intrapersonal and interpersonal transformation towards thriving leadership and its acceleration.

**Chapter two, consisting of two sections, is titled "Coaching as an approach for intrapersonal transformation leading to thriving – Methodology and Development of Specific Research Questions " .**

In Section 1, the author conducts a thorough analysis on coaching essence, its historical roots, structure, the types of coaching and the coaching process, and examines in depth Executive Coaching as well as its impact on increasing personal effectiveness and business results. She also discusses the coaching trends, characterised by a growing interest in brain-based coaching and team coaching.

Coaching is a new, rapidly evolving profession driven ( particularly in the last decade) by the existing need for the development of people, leaders, teams, and organisations. Coaching aims for transformation and its realisation, particularly individual transformation, as it leads to external transformation. The sustainability of business results is crucial for senior executives. The questions here are: What do people working for these organisations seek, and how does senior leadership engage them to achieve sustainable performance? From the author's perspective, this relates to harmonizing teams around a meaningful purpose , vision, and values. This issue becomes increasingly relevant in the daily lives of leaders. From the perspective of the dissertation's author, this is also the issue about *thriving people and teams and organisational thriving which is the primary focus of this work*. **And what is the relationship between the processes of harmonizing around purpose, vision, values, and thriving?** We will look for the answers in the research thesis.

Before presenting the research thesis along with sub-hypotheses, the author conducts a thorough analysis of coaching, paying particular attention to Core Energy Coaching™ as it aligns with the author's holistic view of work on the level of intrapersonal transformation and ensures sustainable results. She also examines the types of coaching with the key differences between coaching and other helping modalities. Executive Coaching (EC) is extensively covered, including its historical roots, definition, impact, process, structure, assessment of effectiveness and results. The author reviews coaching trends, focusing on **brain-based coaching and team coaching**, offering her own insights on the practical aspects, grounded on an analysis of authors about the application of neuroscience knowledge in intrapersonal transformation through coaching.

The author reviews the potential of team coaching to enhance team performance and, more importantly, their thriving for sustainable organisational prosperity. The essence of team coaching is reviewed, highlighting its distinctions from other team development modalities.

Section 2 is titled "Theoretical Foundations and Development of Hypotheses"

In the dissertation, the researcher poses three research questions and formulates one research thesis and three working hypotheses.

**The research thesis is:** Sustainable organisational thriving is achieved through the wholehearted commitment of leaders towards intrapersonal transformation\* and the wholehearted commitment of leadership teams towards interpersonal transformation\*\*. This process can be accelerated through the use of a coaching approach.

*\* Intrapersonal transformation refers to changes in energy vibration and the level of self-awareness.*

*\*\*Interpersonal transformation is associated with changes in the collective energy vibration of the entire team, as well as strong interdependence and synergy.*

**Research Question 1:** What are the internal conditions under which leaders thrive (are at their best)?

**Hypothesis 1:** Leaders thrive and maintain this state (are at their best) when they are committed to intrapersonal transformation, when they are driven by a meaningful purpose, and when they mostly use their natural way of thinking ('brain dominance').

**Research Question 2:** Does coaching accelerate a leader's intrapersonal transformation toward thriving?

**Hypothesis 2:** Executive leadership coaching accelerates intrapersonal transformation toward thriving.

**Research Question 3:** Does the change in leaders' behaviour (when at their best/thriving) lead to interpersonal thriving and organisational thriving?

**Hypothesis 3:** When leaders thrive, they lead their teams to interpersonal transformation and thriving, which leads to organisational thriving.

The primary approach to individual and team transformation explored in the dissertation is **holistic coaching** combining the leader's energy coaching with an understanding of how the brain works. This approach is combined with leadership team coaching.

The formulated three hypotheses rest on: in-depth theoretical analysis, the author's personal experience in her own process of intrapersonal transformation, the individual transformation of numerous leaders coached by the author over the past nine and a half years, and the interpersonal transformation of the leadership team she coached.

The proof for the research thesis and the three working hypotheses comes through a strong analysis of sources related to a meaningful purpose, wholehearted commitment to intrapersonal transformation, and brain dominance. The author seeks an answer to the question "**why does coaching accelerate the path to the Thrive Space?**" and examines aspects such as neuropsychology and coaching, research related to an empirical test of the results of executive coaching (EC). The active components determining the outcomes of EC are also explored. Evidence about the active components of EC is still insufficient and focuses on the **characteristics of clients and coaches, as well as on the relationship between coach and client**. This confirms the key role of individual characteristics and of building a solid working team relationship. On the other hand, **the executive coaching process and contextual elements remain insufficiently explored fields**. The literature review also sheds light on neglected aspects, such as **the need for competent coaching experts who can**

**effectively and ethically handle** all stakeholders in the triadic relationship that arises in EC.

**The impact of thriving leadership on teams and organisations** has been examined, as well as how executive leadership coaching brings strategic value to organisations and how coaching creates value for both the individual and the organisation. According to some studies, as the coaching relationship progresses, the client average monetary benefit increases. This is determined by the long-running work with a coach, which passes from enhancing intrapersonal effectiveness through improving interpersonal effectiveness, and ultimately to enhancing group and team effectiveness, based on intuitive insights, leading to inspirational leadership.

On the ground of facts from interpersonal neurobiology and numerous empirical studies in the Executive Coaching, the researcher concludes that the relationship between the coach and the client plays a key role in achieving intrapersonal and interpersonal transformation, leading to thriving. The longer and deeper this relationship, the more sustainable the thriving. The synergistic effect of concurrent intrapersonal and interpersonal transformation leads to significant impacts on the sponsoring organisation's business. The empirical research in this field is still limited but one of the studies analysed in the dissertation is promising.

**Chapter Three is titled "The Path to Thriving Leadership through Coaching: Research Cases. Practical Application, and Future Impact. An Essential Model for Coaching Leaders and Teams (CORE MODEL<sup>®</sup>)," and it consists of two sections.**

Section 1 gives the description of the research methods.

**The subject of study** in the present dissertation is the **impact of Executive Coaching (EC)** on thriving leadership. This answers the question of HOW? How does coaching influence thriving leadership, and what is the process leading to the leader's thriving?

The author also investigates the **conditions for the thriving** of leaders and teams, both at intrapersonal and interpersonal levels. Here, the author seeks an answer to the WHAT question. *What* are the conditions for thriving of leaders and leadership teams? Firstly, these are internal conditions (the state of the leader). These internal conditions manifest externally in interpersonal relationships and in the way the leader inspires and leads their teams towards thriving. The thriving of leaders and teams influences organisational thriving.

Section 1 provides a description of **two international organisations (the object of study of the dissertation)**. The analysed organisations chose to keep their names confidential due to the use of sensitive information provided throughout this study. For the purpose of the study, they will be referred to as **Company A and Company B**. A brief overview of each company's history, current operations, vision, purpose, values, and management has been presented.

**The research method** is a combined one, including qualitative and quantitative methods, financial documents and testimonies.

The author presents an all-around view of the **following qualitative methods**:

- **Case studies**, including the history and development of case research, justification for their use, definition, advantages, types, and limitations.

The dissertation studies the phenomenon of *thriving leadership* and the process of achieving it. The investigation of a particular phenomenon involves a deep analysis of the cause for its manifestation (in this case, the interdependent factors for intrapersonal thriving, outlined in the initial working hypothesis). On the other hand, the influence of the environment (organisational in this context) and that of the coach create an amalgam of intertwined relationships. It is evident that thriving leadership is a product of complex interdependent factors. Hence, case study is the most suitable method.

- **Interviews**

Interviews are another research method the author uses. By incorporating this method as well, the author aims to enrich the knowledge she receives by asking qualitative questions. Thus, the researcher senses the subtleties of specific and unique inner experience. The author uses this method carefully following the best practices, such as: preparation, localisation and marking the cooperation of participants, motivation, explanation, quality monitoring of the answers, use of probing techniques.

The author examines the following **quantitative methods**:

- **Energy Leadership Index Assessment™**. The essence of this tool is examined, as well as the justification for its use in support of proving a first working hypothesis. Its reliability and validity are considered. The seven levels of consciousness (energy levels) are described in detail.

**The Energy Leadership Index Assessment** study is one of the **first to use quantitative evidence, collected globally to measure the relationship between coaching, internal energy and life satisfaction**. This study supports the research literature by providing reliable and validated information on the effectiveness of coaching, demonstrating that people from different backgrounds and circumstances can learn how to gain better control over their internal energy and achieve better results in their work and personal lives. They do this by increasing their personal awareness of how their thoughts and perceptions affect their emotional responses which influences their behaviour.

- **Brain dominance assessment**

Understanding the leader's brain dominance and the extent of harmony with their naturally preferred way of thinking are key to creating internal conditions (environment) for thriving. The author explains why brain dominance is relevant to thriving and describes the **Benziger self-assessment test of brain dominance, which supports the author's hypothesis**. This self-assessment test serves to determine the natural dominance. It was used to prove the hypothesis that brain dominance affects the internal conditions of thriving because it is related to the energy expenditure that the brain uses to perform certain activities. When the activities performed are in harmony with the natural way of thinking of the leader, they are performed with high energy efficiency – with ease. Ease is related to the feeling of thriving. And since this aspect is underappreciated in practice, the author considers the **brain dominance index** to be the key in research on executive leadership thriving. Using the brain dominance self-assessment test as a complementary research tool leads to explanations

regarding the state of thriving of leaders. It actually complements the explanatory nature of the cases.

Based on the examined in detail and tested in practice quantitative and qualitative methods, the author presents **her own model for measuring the leader's status, named Thrive Matrix**<sup>©</sup>. It is a means of visualizing the leader's current state in relation to their level of energy vibration, the type of brain dominance in terms of harmony with their current role in the organisation, as well as their subjective feeling of thriving, measured on a scale of one to ten. A subjective score above seven, with a high energy vibration of fifth energy level and higher, and an activity that harmonizes with the client's natural brain dominance, places the client in the fourth quadrant, i.e. the Thrive Space.

The matrix is practically applied to both cases (the leaders' individual status) after a certain period of coaching and in the second measurement with the ELI index.

Its benefit is that it illustrates not only the current state but also the path that the leader has been through since the beginning of the process of intrapersonal transformation, with three important factors: current level of consciousness, correspondence to the energy levels on the Schneider map, and correspondence of natural brain dominance with current activity in the organisation. A subjective score for thriving on a ten-point scale, where ten is the highest score.

Section 2 provides a detailed analysis of two case studies related to intrapersonal transformation of leaders from both organisations, as well as the interpersonal transformation of a team from the first organisation which are the subject of this study. They are international, different in size, origin and culture, and provide a different environment for changing leaders and teams.

The intrapersonal transformation of the leader and the interpersonal transformation of the team can be described as a journey – exciting and sometimes frightening because of the challenges that arise along the way. The process of turning these challenges into opportunities for growth is what really makes the journey exciting and bringing a lot of joy and satisfaction. Why? Because this engages the energy of the coach, leaders and entire teams to unfold their creative potential and provokes them to challenge their own paradigms in search of the right path to the consciously chosen direction.

- **Research case study 1: Individual and team transformation of *Leader A* and leader transformational team from *Company A, Great Britain***

Examination of this long-term case study started from the stage before the individual coaching of leader A, with an analysis of the leader and company status and data collected in an interview. The results have been presented in the dissertation, along with a detailed description of the intrapersonal transformation of leader A. The process of individual transformation has been illustrated using the main measuring indexes, including the Energy Leadership Index (ELI), the Brain Dominance Assessment and an interview. The results of the energy level measurement for leader A from organisation A have been presented in the dissertation.

The researcher took three measurements with ELI - before the start of the individual coaching in March 2016 (baseline level), after an intensive coaching in April 2017 and two and a half years after the coaching, in October 2022.

First of all, the change of energy in the energy profile was considered in regard to the three main circles - ego, self-mastery and self-transcendence. There was a constant trend of decrease in the catabolic energies of the ego circle, whereas from 2016 to 2022 the total decrease was by 5.4%. A greater rate of decline (3.1%) in catabolic energy levels occurred after a period of intense coaching. This trend continued after the coaching intervention became less intensive and even after its end. The decrease in catabolic energy was by 2.3%.

In the self-mastery circle, we had a trend of decrease in the low and medium anabolic energy levels by 2.2% after intensive coaching, and a trend of increase after coaching concluded. This increase was retained for a period of five years and was 5%. It means leader A had transformed their catabolic energy into low to medium anabolic energy. That stability in the energy pattern was still observed in normal situations even after coaching became less intensive.

Interestingly, the high and the highest anabolic energies, represented in the self-transcendence circle, had increased from the baseline to the last measurement in 2022 by 2.4% but the highest energy levels reached their actual peak after the intensive coaching. The observed increase compared to the baseline measurement after the intensive coaching was of 5.2%.

What does that mean? Extended coaching leads to a sustainable change in the level of consciousness reflected in the leader's energy levels. The energy profile stability in normal situations is maintained over time, compared to the initial measurements, although there are notable changes after intensive coaching.

**Secondly**, changes in the stress reaction of leader A, that occurred as a result of coaching, were monitored. A stress reaction is a specific cascade of chemical reactions triggered by the hypothalamus. One of its end products is the stress hormone called cortisol which turns out to be a key player in our emotional lives. Cortisol is a catabolic hormone. All kinds of emotional and physiological reactions happen automatically. Waves of hormones come and go throughout the day, adjusting and responding to events outside or inside the body.

In 1932, Harvard physiologist Walter Bradford Cannon introduced the term 'fight-or-flight', which is the usual response to our perception of stress. It corresponds to catabolic energy levels; energy level 1 is flight and energy level 2 is fight.

Developing skills to regulate the stress response is key when working with leaders. This process goes through the awareness of the stress reaction type and its transformation both in physiological (1) and cognitive (2) ways to restore the state of physiological and psychological balance. Stress reaction is an essential part of the human body's response to life and the basis of an amazing range of disorders. When it doesn't work well, we become vulnerable both physiologically and psychologically.



During my work with leader A, sustainability was achieved in reducing catabolic energy levels in stress response. This directly affected the E-Factor for success and the feeling of satisfaction in all aspects of Leader A's life.

Here are the results for the period 2016 – 2022: **the catabolic stress reaction of leader A decreased by 18.70% which is a significant energy change.** Immediately after the intensive coaching, catabolic energy levels decreased by a total of 8.6%. After completion of the intensive coaching and before the third measurement, catabolic energy levels continued to fall (10.2%) which is a persistent trend. The qualitative transformation of this "under stress" experience is probably due to adaptation and successful application of self-work approaches, as well as to accumulated experience and wisdom.

The analysis of the changes in the energy stress reaction of leader A confirms the benefits of energy coaching for steady transformation of the response to the environment "threat" (stress response).

*Thirdly*, the researcher also analyses the results of leader A's 360-degree feedback. This measurement was done after the intensive coaching. This feedback is the accumulated subjective perception of those who report directly to leader A. Detailed results of 360-degree feedback have been presented in **Annex 3**.

What distinguishes leader A is **their accessibility**. If we go back to the conversation before the start of the coaching intervention, this was their key goal, namely to be perceived as an accessible leader. Another thing that stands out in this feedback is the **calm confidence of the leader**. Those who report directly, clearly recognize how the leader harmonizes with organisational and team values and maintains composure when facing challenges.

Behaviours that showed greater differences were addressed during the coaching sessions. The areas in which we worked thoroughly were deep listening and stress reaction. Leader A showed surprise, especially in terms of the large discrepancy between what he considered actions to create a "happy" workplace for the people and their perception of it.

*Fourthly*, an analysis was made of the interviews conducted with leader A. The design of the questions was consistent with the examined phenomenon, i.e. the state in which the leader is at their best and thriving. The questions were aimed at exploring this inner experience.

The researcher conducted three interviews. The first in the middle of the coaching intervention (2017), the second - three years later (2020) and the third in October 2022. The subsequent interviews were aimed at checking to what extent the leader's individual transformation was established and sustainable. In the second interview, new and additional questions were added for a more in-depth examination of the leader's condition. The design and manner of performing the interviews are consistent with the best world practices, described in the research methods.

The researcher's purpose is to understand the state of the leader when at their best (when thriving), i.e. functions at the highest level with ease/effortless high

performance. The researcher's thoughts on this topic have evolved for two reasons – her intrapersonal transformation, as well as the validation of this transformation through the prism of scientific literature.

The state of effortless high performance is transformed into the "**Thrive Space**" concept. The reason is that the word "performance" (as a verb) is more associated with performance in a working context, while the "**Thrive Space**" is a **holistic state that relates to performance in all aspects of life and is associated with balanced energy management in its four dimensions – spiritual, mental, emotional and physical**. For this reason, the first part of the interview explores how the leader understands “effortless high performance”, which in the second interview is replaced by the term "**Thrive Space**". The intersection of these two concepts is the state of the leader "at their best", measured on a scale of 1 to 10 (the subjective feeling of the leader, where 10 is the highest score).

Performance, energy, impulse, ease, sense of control, harmony between different elements (physical, social well-being, financial, meaningful purpose, trust and faith in people) are united as variables in the leader's point of view and affect their thriving. All these elements are mixed in one amalgam i.e. the amalgam of thriving.

The feelings a leader experiences in the "Thrive Space" are balanced between **ease** (calm, balanced, confident, with a sense of control) and **focus** (physical and mental performance), **energy resonance** (one's own and others') and **well-being** (physical and mental).

The leader's subjective rating on a scale of 1 to 10 in terms of whether they are at their best was 9 both in 2017 and in 2020. This is a steady result. What is impressive is that the leader has maintained a high level of energy in the face of a crisis (pandemic). The assessment they made in terms of presentation capacity was 10.

The 2022 interview focused more on the team, as it was conducted a year after the team coaching ended. The researcher also included three questions concerning only leader A- to examine the intrapersonal transformation sustainability after the individual coaching was over.

It is noteworthy that the "at their best" level dropped from 9 to 5, which is a direct reflection of the lack of sufficient challenges for leader A at the time of measurement. Linking the flow state theory, and more specifically the flow channel (**Annex 1** Conditions for experiencing the flow and effortless high performance according to Csikszentmihalyi and Wright) this is perfectly understandable. In a state of boredom, when the skill level is higher than the leadership skills needed to deal with the situation, the energy drops and the leader leaves the flow channel. This is also documented by leader A's response. Leader A confirms the benefits and sustainability of transformation resulting from the executive coaching intervention.

**Fifth**, the results and analysis of Leader A's brain dominance test show that Leader A's profile is **diagonal – frontal left, basal right**. What's intriguing here is the high score of two diagonally positioned brain areas that are not connected by a bridge, i.e. Thinking Style 2 and Thinking Style 4.

The interesting research questions are:

1. In this case, what is the natural dominance of the leader – basal right or frontal left
2. What is the practical dominance (developed, not natural) – basal right or frontal left

According to Benziger's study (2000), the diagonal areas that determine certain thinking styles are natural weaknesses, likely developed with significant effort over the years, most probably, to serve life adaptation or a specific career. Brain areas that are not physically connected do not correspond. In the case of Leader A, these are the frontal left and the basal right. Test results showed that both were dominant with an equal score of 18 points. From a leadership perspective, the leader's profile is ideal since these two thinking styles support both key aspects, i.e. the harmony between the analytical mind and the heart (compassion, empathy, listening skills and inspiring people). From a neuroscientific perspective, this result does not make sense, as there is no physical connection, i.e. there is no bridge between these two brain regions. For this reason, one of the thinking styles is a natural weakness, developed as a practical dominance, which is good as long as it doesn't hinder the internal conditions for thriving. Continued use of this thinking style developed for practical purposes, though, can lead to fatigue. In an additional interview with Leader A, aiming to establish the natural and the developed dominance, the researcher found that the basal right is Leader A's natural dominance.

*Sixth*, the Thrive Matrix of Leader A provides an instant picture of the leader's condition, considering the two key thrive factors grounded in the theoretical part of this work, namely energy vibration and brain dominance. They create a certain internal environment that supports the leader's thriving and effortless high performance.

**The result shows that the leader is in the Thrive Space.**

*Seventh*, the author explores the interpersonal transformation accelerated by team coaching. This includes the process of team coaching and how Organisation A prepared for it – the process preceding team transformation, including the team's ELI diagnostics as early as 2016. Before the launch of the team coaching, a diagnostic phase was conducted by interviewing the ten participants. The detailed results from the diagnostic phase and the team coaching process have been described in the dissertation.

*Eighth*, the results of the interpersonal transformation through team coaching are both material and immaterial. An inspiring and meaningful vision of the company was created and communicated throughout the organisation. The main leadership values were refined and defined with key behaviours. A team, named the Transformational Leadership Team, was created and officially launched after intense work which led to the adoption of the team's charter. At the beginning of the coaching intervention, we had a hybrid of organisation A's leadership team and members from the broader organisation (operational team) which essentially was a work group united around a common purpose and strategic goals. The maturation of this group occurred following the acceptance of the company's vision and the alignment with their team charter. Moving from vision to action happened through the adoption of an action plan outlined in the team's RACI (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted and Informed) chart.

The immaterial results relate to the newly formed team culture, characterized in the feedback after the coaching intervention as harmonious, positive, calm, team-spirited, with a high level of respect, communicative, grateful, honest, innovative, fair, flexible, motivating,

listening, collaborative, meaningful, inspiring, enthusiastic, engaging, supportive, clear and creative.

The average ratings from the feedback show that the highest ratings come from indicators such as harmony with the team's purpose and values (9), team harmony (8.44) and psychological safety (8.11). On the scale evaluating organisational thriving from 1 to 10, the team's average rating is 7.22, which is higher compared to the average rating on this scale before the coaching intervention when it was 6.80. At first glance, this may seem like a minor upward movement but the subjective collective feeling is of sustainable movement in the right direction for the organisation. This is reflected in the perception of the team culture after the conclusion of the team coaching when descriptions like 'lack of communication,' 'disconnected,' and 'frustration within the team' given before the team intervention no longer appear.

Looking at the team harmony before and after the coaching intervention, we see an increase from 7.3 to 8.44. This new result pertains to the new transformational leadership team. Before the intervention, we had a group of individuals intending to change the organisation towards alignment between strategic goals and culture. Therefore, the initial rating of 7.3 applies solely to the management team undergoing transformation for this specific organisational project.

*Ninth*, a final interview was conducted with Leader A to assess the sustainability of the team coaching, 11 months after its conclusion. Key themes included the team's unity, cohesion, belief in themselves and the company's vision, developing enthusiasm and creative problem-solving amidst new challenges (economic crisis). This team exhibited shared leadership, lack of conflicts over an extended period, clarity regarding vision and goals and high accountability. The project's sponsor (Leader A) noted the sustainability of the leadership behaviours aligned during coaching. According to them, the team was at its best, displaying a high level of autonomy. The team was happy, which meant Leader A's initial goal to build a happy organisational culture, set in 2016, was reached. A recurring key theme was the team's strong cohesion and mutual drive toward success, happiness, belief in the purpose and the company's vision as well as improved communication. **The sponsor saw the thriving of the transformational leadership team as a result of the team intervention and considered the team coaching sustainable. They also expressed belief that the change in team dynamics and work processes had led to an increase in financial performance.**

According to Leader A, who was also the project sponsor, the **dissemination of the coaching philosophy throughout the entire organisation is the pathway to ongoing sustainability.**

*Tenth*: Examination of Company A's financial indicators.

It was impressive that, since Leader A took office, sales steadily increased with only slight fluctuations. The highest sales levels were observed after intensive intrapersonal coaching in 2017 and intense team coaching in 2022. This applied to post-tax profits as well. A decline trend in sales and post-tax profits was noted during the pandemic, which is entirely normal. The investment in team coaching, despite the sales decline, is evidence of Leader A's belief

in the results of this intervention. Other key factors are the team's maturity and readiness for coaching.

There possibly is a positive correlation between the leader's transformation through coaching and the sustainable positive financial trend. This relates to Leader A's efforts to transform their leadership style and build a reliable and innovative management team.

Case Study 1 is an excellent example of what can be achieved through a sustainable holistic transformation in the organisation toward leadership, team and organisational thriving.

***Eleventh:*** Limitations and next steps for organisation A.

The primary limitation in Case Study 1 is the lack of comprehensive research within organisation A as well as among clients and partners outside the organisation, identifying the presence of a 'happy organisational culture,' recognition and alignment with the vision and values within the wide company and the external stakeholders' attitude to organisation A.

- **Case Study 2: Intrapersonal transformation of Leader B from Company B, Japan, Headquarters in Brussels, Europe**

The second case study was explored before the initiation of the coaching process for the intrapersonal transformation of Leader B. A brief analysis was conducted on the factors that led Leader B to coaching and the process of EC was thoroughly examined. What was unique in working with this leader was that the coaching intervention started at a slow pace and continued with increasing intensity during the second year. This came as a result of the benefits Leader B observed from the coaching and the necessity to continue the internal work in order to realize their purpose and achieve intrapersonal and team thriving. The second measurement with ELI (Energy Leadership Index) assessment was conducted two years after the first one, as it was logical that work with sufficient intensity had been done. The third measurement with ELI took place in October 2022, a year after the coaching concluded. The overall duration of the work with Leader B was four years and with varying intensity.

***First***, the study examined the change in energy within the energy profile along the three main circles – ego, self-mastery and self-transcendence. A persistent trend of decline in catabolic energy was observed within the ego circle, by 12.7%. This trend remained sustainable one year after coaching. There was also a persistent trend of increase in low and moderate anabolic energies from the self-mastery circle. From the baseline level to one year after coaching, there was a 4% increase in the anabolic energies from the self-mastery circle. There was also a consistent increasing trend **by 8.7%** in high and very high anabolic energies of the self-transcendence circle from the baseline level before coaching to one year after it, **which is a sustainable trend**.

The transformation of Leader B's energy as a result of ongoing coaching is reflected in their energy profile in normal situations as well as in the A.R.L. (Average Resonating Level of Energy), also known as the E-factor.

Leader B considerably elevated their E-factor from low anabolic to high anabolic. This was due to the significant decrease in catabolic energies and the increase in anabolic energies, especially the high and very high ones.

**Second:** Changes in Leader B's profile during stress reactions.

The intensity of the fight-or-flight stress reaction greatly decreased due to coaching (27.5%). This trend was sustained as the decline in catabolic energies during stress response continued a year after the coaching intervention.

It's interesting to see how catabolic energy was distributed as a result of transformation within the circles of self-mastery and self-transcendence. A notable fact is that high and very high anabolic energies in the stress-energy profile increased by 7.5% from the baseline to the final measurement after the coaching. Low and moderate anabolic energies in the stress-energy profile also increased significantly by 20.1% from the baseline to the final measurement.

The final measurement taken a year after coaching showed that the energy stress response had changed and Energy 4 had become secondary in stress response for Leader B. This indicated the ability to quickly shift from an internal state of "fight-or-flight" to a state of compassion and care for others.

**Third:** Results of Leader B's 360-degree feedback.

At the beginning of the coaching intervention in 2017, Leader B initiated a reflection session on the results of their 360-degree feedback, focusing on consciousness and improvement in specific areas within the organisation. The analysed skill clusters included strategic, leadership, awareness, business acumen and people management. The analysis revealed that Leader B possessed a talent for strategic and leadership skills, as well as business acumen. However, they needed improvement in the areas of people management (social intelligence) and emotion work.

The coaching intervention focused precisely on developing emotion work skills, i.e. transforming energy so that the goals and purpose were easily achieved.

**Fourth:** Results of the interviews with Leader B.

Three interviews were conducted: one before the coaching process, another one three and a half years later and the third in October 2022 (one year after coaching concluded). The purpose of these interviews was to measure the sustainability of the intrapersonal transformation after the coaching intervention. The researcher chose large time intervals to avoid the influence of previously given answers to the same questions and added new questions in the second interview for a deeper investigation into the state of thriving. The third interview examined the team as well. The questions in the first and second interviews with Leader A and Leader B were the same, which made the results comparable. It's worth noting that Leader B held different positions in the three interviews. The second interview was conducted during the pandemic and reflected a transitional phase from one position to another. The interviews showed Leader B's consistent stance regarding what it means to be at their best (in their Thrive Space). Serving a purpose, contribution and positive impact were key for this leader, along with inner peace and harmony with others (individual life and career). There was a positive trend in their self-assessment on a scale from 1 to 10 (at their best). The increase from 6 to **7.5** was associated with achieved inner peace and positive influence on others, as well as with the changes in the leader's career path. Leader B attested to the sustainability of the intrapersonal coaching intervention. From the third interview, it

became evident that Leader B's new team was not at its best and considering team coaching as an accelerator of interpersonal transformation was advisable.

**Fifth:** Results of the brain dominance measurement.

Leader B's results indicate a frontal left profile. This means their preferred mode of thinking is associated with the left anterior part of the brain. The question here is whether this is a developed preference or natural dominance, which relates to their capacity to be in the Thrive Space. The interview showed that Leader B is at their best when doing what they love and doing it with passion. This leader does not falsify their type (think in a non-preferred mode). They thrive when they are able to fulfil their purpose and are in harmony with their natural tendency towards dominance. Scientific research has confirmed that leaders with a leading frontal left dominance naturally gravitate towards positions such as CEOs and financial directors. For instance, a CEO position would serve Leader B well to maximise their influence while fulfilling a meaningful purpose.

Considering that the focus of this study is Thriving Leadership, it's logical to conclude that we would seek harmonization between the developed preference and the nature of the current leader's work. This is an internal condition for thriving since a developed preference leads to ease in performance. When someone uses their natural dominance, they have the energy and potential to experience the state of flow. A leader can experience the flow when in the Thrive Space. Let's recall that from a psychological perspective the state of flow is termed "ordered consciousness" and from a neurobiological standpoint – "quiet focus."

In conclusion, we can summarize that Leader B's leading mode of thinking is in harmony with the nature of their work, stemming from their leadership position.

What the researcher notices is the result of Leader B's thinking mode 2 (**basal right**). This thinking mode is associated with skills in working with people, building harmonious relationships through empathy and recognizing the emotions and feelings of others. According to neuroscience, diagonal brain areas are not connected. Hence, diagonal dominance of the leading mode would be a natural weakness. Of course, diagonal thinking can be developed through dedicated practice but it will always consume more energy. **According to Benziger's studies (2000), for Leader B the basal right should have a score between 0-5 but in this case it is 11.**

The 360-degree feedback showed the lowest scores in the cluster of skills related to people management, social skills, consciousness and emotional intelligence, while the highest scores were attributed to strategic and leadership skills as well as business acumen. These were the results for 2017. The brain dominance test was conducted after intensive work specifically in the areas identified as necessary for development in 2017. These were the skills and competencies corresponding to **the basal right mode of thinking**. The researcher assumed that the basal right result of Leader B outside the standard norm established by scientific studies was due precisely to the intrapersonal transformation of the leader, supported by coaching.

**Sixth**, the Thrive Matrix of Leader B is an instant snapshot of Leader B's state in 2020, before stepping into their new leadership position. Their energy vibration and natural dominance placed them in the lower part of the Thrive Space. The leader's self-esteem regarding the sense of thriving was lowered only because in this transitional stage they

could not fully unfold their potential and live their purpose. During coaching sessions, Leader B shared they had achieved complete harmony, inner peace and acceptance of others. They had also laid a solid foundation concerning internal work and were ready to fully unleash themselves in a more favourable environment, serve their purpose and thrive sustainably.

**Seventh:** Results of the leader's intrapersonal transformation in the broader organisational context – people and financial results.

**Leader B's team members** were positively influenced, working in an environment with an inspiring leader of integrity, faithful to the company's values and purpose. They had grown together and impacted the financial results.

The first leadership role lasted from 2015 to 2018. The coaching intervention took place in January 2017 and lasted only 6 hours. Leader B's most intensive work regarding intrapersonal transformation supported by coaching was done during their second leadership role, 2018 – 2020, when they managed a team of 35 people. A higher CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate) of 8.9% was observed in the second year (2019). Certainly, the positive growth was influenced by a complex mix of various factors and the coaching intervention had undoubtedly affected Leader B's leadership style, especially their consciousness, increase in energy, self-regulation, empathy, listening skills and relationship management. Enhancing their skills in dealing with emotions and people helped Leader B harmonize the teams and improve the EMEA team's collective performance as well as cross-functional cooperation.

The third position which Leader B held for a year and a half and was responsible for 300 employees had the most significant organisational and societal influence. The CAGR growth in the second year of holding this position was 11.1%.

**A summary of the work in both case studies** has been made in [section 3](#).

The general trend in both leaders is positive with regard to transformation of moderate anabolic energies into high anabolic energies and reduction of the intensity of stress reactions. This finds expression in the leadership style in the following directions: strong, impactful, inspiring, with the ability to lead and leverage every opportunity encountered, expecting the best from others and usually getting it. They see the people in the companies as talented, with much potential and expect from them a positive attitude, autonomy, teamwork and, most importantly, top performance. They demonstrate what they believe in, clearly communicate their expectations to people and continuously seek opportunities through partnerships and collaboration. These leaders always think about synergy and ways to succeed and they also manage with much less fear.

In both case studies, the leaders have a crystal-clear purpose and strive to create a harmonious and happy work environment where people can thrive. This meaningful purpose serves as an engine for their internal work and intrapersonal transformation toward thriving.

The differences between Leader A and Leader B lay in their work environments and the nuances of organisational culture. Leader A had much more freedom, working in a small organisation, albeit under the umbrella of a large holding, and got serious support from the board of directors, comprising the owners of the holding. For Leader B, the environment



was uninspiring during their directorship due to political reasons, which did not allow the unfolding of their potential regarding strategic influence and organisational change toward thriving. At the moment, in the role of vice president, Leader B has more freedom and support from their direct supervisor.

The organisational context inevitably influences the achievement of a thriving state. This is evident from comparing their results to the 2020 Thrive Matrix. Organisational environment is an epigenetic factor, i.e. it has a direct relation to people's thriving.

The conclusions regarding the leaders' brain dominance are that both have excellent potential to develop as holistic-thinking leaders with equally developed modes of thinking – 1,2,3, and 4.

- Their brain dominance profiles support their leadership function which is a favourable condition for achieving and maintaining a thriving state.
- Work on developing **basal right, thinking skills for Leader B** and **frontal right for Leader A** is recommendable. It would help create an excellent internal environment for thriving.
- Neither of the leaders is a **Falsifying Type**. FTs often experience anxiety, exhaustion and increasing health problems. These are experiences related to the Fog Zone.

#### **Conclusions of the author drawn after a detailed analysis of qualitative and quantitative data:**

- A meaningful purpose is the core of sustainable thriving.
- The ability to serve something larger than one's own interests generates energy for intrapersonal transformation.
- Wholehearted commitment to intrapersonal transformation is an action focused on the effortless realization of one's purpose.
- Effortlessness can be described with feelings such as a sense of control over the situation/ life, happiness, feeling good, completeness, euphoria, self-belief, pleasure and satisfaction from serving others.

#### **Comparing the Thrive Matrices in both cases proves that both leaders are in the Thrive Space (2022 compared to 2020). This positioning is based on:**

- The current energy in their energy profiles was over 90% anabolic which was confirmed by the measurement with the Energy Leadership Index in October 2022. For both leaders, this measurement was done sufficiently long after their coaching concluded.
- **For Leader A**, the last measurement showed 66.10% anabolic energies in the self-mastery circle and 29.60% high anabolic energies in the self-transcendence circle. This makes **95.70%** anabolic energy.
- **For Leader B**, the last measurement showed 58% anabolic energies in the self-mastery circle and 34.40% high anabolic energies in the self-transcendence circle, which makes **92.40%** anabolic energy.

Consequently, the higher the quantity of anabolic energy and the feeling of being "at one's best," the higher up and to the right in the Thrive Space the leader is positioned.

- In terms of current leadership functions, the leaders use their preferred mode of thinking – the leading dominance corresponds to the skills required of the leader.

- For Leader A, the result is more strongly and clearly expressed.
- There are no signs of a Falsifying Type, leading to anxiety and prolonged stress reactions.
- Both leaders possess clarity regarding their individual purpose and the ability to accomplish it, which are other important factors determining a position in the Thrive Space.

## **Discussion**

The research thesis has been confirmed for Case 1, Leader A and organisation A. For Case 2 and Leader B, the research thesis has been partially confirmed which is reflected in working hypothesis 1 and working hypothesis 2.

### **First, Case 1 – organisation A and Leader A**

The research thesis for Case 1 has been confirmed since, during the long-term case study of this organisation, the leader and the team went through a path linked to the leader's intrapersonal transformation and the interpersonal transformation of the transformational leadership team, which led to specific sustainable non-material and material results for organisation A.

Below are the results for Case 1 confirming the working hypotheses.

o **Working hypothesis 1** has been proven for Leader A who underwent a prolonged intrapersonal transformation, resulting in a shift in their energy vibration, measured and confirmed by ELI. Three assessments, reflecting the energy profile and energy stress reaction were conducted: before, during and two years after the coaching. The transformation of catabolic energy into anabolic energy was a sustainable change that occurred due to Leader A's increased consciousness. This was confirmed in the last interview. Leader A's brain dominance was measured during their transformation process. The leading modes of thinking were in harmony with the nature of their work. It was also confirmed that Leader A is not a Falsifying Type, which ensures optimal internal conditions for leadership thriving. Leader A had successfully collaborated with the transformational leadership team to create an environment that fostered growth and development for the company. However, the only factor that caused a decrease in their intrapersonal sense of thriving at work was the lack of sufficient challenges within the company, stimulating them to fully utilize their potential. During the initial meeting in 2016, it was noted that a meaningful purpose had always been a driving force for Leader A's choices. This was reaffirmed throughout the extensive work and interviews, highlighting the importance of a meaningful purpose as a driving and energising factor for Leader A.

o **Working hypothesis 2** has been confirmed for Leader A. Coaching accelerated their intrapersonal transformation toward thriving. This was confirmed not only by ELI measurements but also during the final interview after the coaching intervention concluded. Leader A confirmed that coaching helped transform their leadership paradigm and also shared that this transformation remained sustainable over time.

o **Working hypothesis 3** was confirmed for Leader A and their team. According to Leader A it took them some time to undergo intrapersonal transformation and understand the process from within. This was a stimulus to engage the team in interpersonal transformation, accelerated through team coaching. The team's maturity, awareness and willingness to

undergo this process were other contributing factors. As a result, the team's collective energy increased, and they achieved specific material and non-material results, including increased sales and profits, which have been presented in this dissertation when examining Case 1. According to Leader A, 11 months after the team's interpersonal transformation was accelerated with team coaching, the team is in its best shape, self-motivated, highly committed, inspired by the vision, happy and looking forward despite the challenges. The financial results correlate with these transformations.

What Leader A sees as the next steps to maintain this state is to continue being a team coach and to spread the coaching philosophy throughout the entire organisation. This is confirmation of their belief in coaching as an approach that accelerates individual, team and organisational transformation toward thriving.

## **Second: Case 2, organisation B and Leader B**

In Case B, the researcher was only able to investigate Leader B's intrapersonal transformation. The study period from 2017 to 2022 did not provide an opportunity to examine the interpersonal transformation of Leader B's team as the leader changed three leadership positions. In the final interview in 2022, after identifying the main challenges facing the team, Leader B confirmed the need for a highly motivated and united team. The team's rating was 4 out of 10 (at its best), with the main reasons being the lack of a common inspiring purpose and disunity. Leader B clearly outlined the steps for their team, including restructuring and transformation, wholehearted commitment, distillation of decision-making processes and turning the team into a conscious one where everyone's voice is heard. This demonstrated Leader B's maturity in initiating interpersonal transformation in their new team.

- o **Working hypothesis 1** was confirmed for Leader B who achieved a sustainable intrapersonal transformation accelerated by coaching. Their energy vibration changed significantly and permanently which was proven by three measurements with the Energy Leadership Index assessment. Leader B's brain dominance was found to be in harmony with their leadership role. The intensive work on emotional intelligence during the intrapersonal coaching phase resulted in an elevated level of Thinking Mode 2, associated with working with people. This means that, despite thinking mode 2 being a natural weakness for Leader B and thinking mode 4 their dominant one, changes occurred, contributing to the leader's improved performance in working with people. This leader's high level of consciousness and dedicated work on emotions led to specific results. Having a purpose has always been an energizing and growth-driving factor for Leader B's thriving, despite the significant challenges the leader faced during the extensive case study. The personal feeling of being in their best shape continued to steadily increase. In the final interview, it received a score of 7.5 and was coupled with inner peace, which was one of Leader B's key goals set at the beginning of our joint work. The increased score on this scale means an ability to comprehensively influence in their new leadership position in order to achieve their meaningful purpose, harmonized with the organisational purpose.

- o **Working hypothesis 2** was confirmed for Leader B. Coaching indeed accelerated their intrapersonal transformation toward thriving, confirmed not only by the three measurements with the ELI but also by the leader's own words during the interview. The fact that Leader B chose to continue with the coaching intervention in 2023 speaks to their conviction about its

benefits. During this period, Leader B faced new and more complex challenges due to changes in their leadership position. As a result, they required a quiet and psychologically secure space for self-reflection, while at the same time, seeking a partner who could challenge their thinking and help them find sustainable, purpose-aligned solutions.

**Third:** Limitations of the study.

The **first limitation** is that it unfolded holistically at both levels – leader (intrapersonal transformation) and team (interpersonal transformation) – only in Case 1. In the case of Leader B (Case 2), limiting conditions such as position changes, time and finances prevented the study of interpersonal transformation.

The **second limitation** is that the nature of an extensive case study and the depth of the work require a significant investment of time, energy and finances as well as wholehearted commitment. Unfortunately, few organisations are willing to make such multi-layered investments which limits the scope of this type of study. The approach presented in this dissertation should be applied in more organisations so that the research thesis and the working hypotheses are tested in teams with different cultures and strategic goals.

The **third limitation** is that the sustainability of transformation needs to be continuously tested long after coaching interventions have concluded. Many forces can inspire a change of direction in any organisation over time, and the best example is the change in leadership. When there is a change in the senior leaders or the leadership team and a lack of strong continuity, new challenges arise that affect interpersonal dynamics, the organisation's direction and values (leadership behaviour). On the other hand, this opens up the possibility for new coaching interventions to aid change adaptation and help the organisation realign. Starting new coaching interventions depends on the motivation, maturity and awareness of the benefits of those in power.

The **fourth limitation** of the study (relating especially to Case 1) is that the interviewed were only members of the leadership transformational team, and we had only their perspectives on the transformations after team coaching. A broader scope within the organisation would have enriched the research data and insights.

The process of intrapersonal and interpersonal transformation requires individual and collective readiness for deeper and insight-provoking work. Executive Coaching (EC) is a process that facilitates overall individual, team and organisational thriving. Since coaching is a profound and thought-provoking process, it leads to the necessary internal transformation in the thoughts and feelings of the coached leader, which in turn affects the external organisational environment. This is the principle of interconnectedness. **Thriving leaders inspire and guide their teams and organisations toward sustainable thriving.**

Section 4 presents the author's proprietary essential coaching model, **the CORE MODEL**®.

The word "CORE" was chosen to represent the foundation of intrapersonal transformation for the leader and team, leading to thriving. According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, the term 'CORE' has been in use since the early 14th century. It originally meant "the heart or the innermost part of anything." The origin of the word is unclear but it is believed to have originated from the Old French word *cor*; *coeur* which means "heart" and the Latin word *cor* which also means "heart."

The most essential work on intrapersonal transformation starts from within or at the core.

The author presents the models for intrapersonal transformation of leaders and for team transformation toward thriving. These models are not linear or descriptive, i.e. they are not ready formulas but rather holistic processes tailored to individual and team needs. The executive leadership coach follows the client's (individual or team) agenda, and elegantly and intuitively guides the process of self-discovery including essence, strengths, limitations, goals, values, vision, etc.

The observations made during my nine and a half years of coaching practice with leaders and leadership teams prove that the process of transformation starts intuitively with clarifying the core. Clients seek answers to essential questions like: "Why do I exist?", "What is my vision for the future?" and "How can I be in harmony with myself and others?"

The question of purpose is essential for individuals, teams and organisations. Another crucial question is that of vision because without a clear, inspiring and challenging direction, the path (strategy) cannot be delineated. The internal harmonization of oneself and the team with the core that outlines the path to thriving begins with clarifying the values and the way they are manifested in specific behaviours. It is important to evaluate how aligned the individuals and the teams are with these values and to identify the work that needs to be done to achieve harmony. It's a fluid process that requires continuous and dedicated work to harmonize the leader's internal energy (physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual) and the collective energy of the team. A person is an essential energetic system. Therefore, the author discusses the role of energy in this coaching model for intrapersonal and team transformation toward thriving.

To achieve harmony, it's essential to first address the leader's filters, which determine their perceptions and how they interpret reality and make assumptions. This, in turn, reflects their internal energy environment, directly impacting their leadership behaviours and those of their followers. It's important to remember that, since we live in a constant flow of change, external environmental factors affect both leaders and teams as well as organisations. Therefore, fortifying the core is crucial. Based on this foundation, adequate response to transformation becomes a driving force for capitalizing on creative thinking and innovations when perceived as an opportunity rather than a threat. This defines the ability for rapid organisational adaptation. The stronger the core of the leader and the better the alignment between the teams and the organization's core, the more adaptive and sustainable the organisation.

In the team coaching model, the inside-out work harmonises leadership teams with the organisational core. The outside-in work is directed towards alignment with stakeholders (SH) outside the organisation. These are all partners of the organisation as well as society. The way an organisation interacts with and influences external SHs reflects its fundamental understanding of social and environmental responsibility. A strategically important task for any organisation is clarifying the model and positively impacting the environment—social and natural.

In an ideal scenario, when an organisation chooses coaching as an approach to expedite the process of deep essential transformation, executive leadership coaching is combined with team coaching of the leadership team.

The **CORE MODEL**<sup>®</sup> has been inspired by the work of Dr. Bruce Lipton. It is represented by a cell with its nucleus (depicted by a green inner circle) and the cell membrane (represented by a red layer). The metaphor of cells and their functioning is used to explain the idea of thriving leadership. In this context, a cell represents the leader and employees, and the community of cells represents the teams that make up the organisation as a whole (the organisational body). The way an individual or a collective unit of people reacts to signals from the environment improves the quality of organisational life and the organization's capacity to thrive. Creating a quality organisational environment (an epigenetic factor, determining what the author refers to as organisational epigenetics) is the responsibility of the leader and the leadership teams.

The **CORE MODEL**<sup>®</sup> is designed specifically for systemic coaching. The intrapersonal coaching model focuses on the internal world of the leader, while the team coaching model encompasses the internal layers of the organisation, as well as its interactions with the external world.

Systemic coaching of teams requires an understanding of the mutual influence of systems and acknowledgment of the interconnections in the world we live in as well as in the business environment.

The **CORE MODEL**<sup>®</sup> for team coaching comprises all forces influencing the functioning of an organisation. Adaptation is a constant and dynamic process. It's the external factors of the environment and their dynamics that determine an organisation's adaptation behaviour and its sustainable thriving.

External factors for a team, for instance, are the other teams within the organisation and the relationships with them, as well as the organisation's political environment. These are highly complex factors from a relational standpoint and must be considered for their impact within the context of sustainable organisational thriving.

When a team has strengthened its core, the essential work has already been completed and it is ready to start working and interact with other teams in a manner that is meaningful (aligned with the organisational purpose and vision), satisfying, productive and sustainable. Such interaction also happens with all stakeholders beyond the organisation. The role of the team coach is to create an environment for the team, stimulate it and help it build the capacity to work at an inter-team level, where the energy exchange between the teams is directed towards collaboration in the name of a meaningful purpose, with care for people and the planet.

Section 5 discusses the application of **the approach for intrapersonal and interpersonal transformation of leaders and leadership teams for sustainable thriving in Bulgarian conditions**. The author defines not only **the factors** but also **the instruments and approaches** when applying the accelerated by coaching intrapersonal and interpersonal transformation toward thriving, in Bulgarian conditions.

According to the author of the study, several factors determine the successful application of the approach in Bulgaria. These factors include:

- 1) The attitude, influence and decision-making power (for transformational projects) of the leader of the organisation;

- 2) The maturity of the organization (at intrapersonal and team levels) to accept an open and non-directive approach to intrapersonal and interpersonal transformation;
- 3) The dedication and wholehearted commitment of the leader and the teams to continuously undergo intrapersonal and interpersonal transformation;
- 4) Financial resources.

During her work with Bulgarian organisations, the author discovered that two of the aforementioned factors usually hinder sustainable interpersonal and intrapersonal transformation. These are the organisation's maturity and financial resources. In two instances where the author coached organisations in Bulgaria on interpersonal and intrapersonal transformation, one lacked financial resources while the other lacked maturity.

In Bulgarian organisations where individual coaching was conducted with team leaders, the leaders who sponsored the programme did not undergo the process of intrapersonal transformation. This creates a gap in thinking and attitudes, leading to demotivation and often resignation to circumstances.

The **CORE MODEL**® is applicable in all cultures and different types of organisations because it is not linear and directive but guides leaders and teams on where to focus their efforts. Understanding this approach requires maturity. Against the backdrop of the growing popularity of mentors and mentorship programmes, the freedom and responsibility of making decisions for oneself, the team and the organisation might seem daunting and unpopular.

**The crucial issue is that of maturity.** As I have already noted, this factor may be a stumbling block even in the presence of sufficient financial resources. Speaking of maturity, I should add that it pertains to the leader and the coach.

The author of this study believes that every individual we work with is both our student and teacher. This is because transformational coaching, being a collaborative and creative process based on interaction, leads to an ongoing development of self-knowledge and transformation.

The responsibility for the process of intrapersonal transformation is shared between the coach and the coachee, both requiring a certain level of maturity. The coach is responsible for creating an environment that promotes intrapersonal transformation, while the coachee needs to be open and willing to explore new perspectives and make decisive changes through focused actions. When both the coach and the coachee reach the same level of maturity, the coaching dialogue becomes deeper and more meaningful, resulting in exponential growth and development.

### **Approaches and instruments for the implementation of intrapersonal and interpersonal transformation toward thriving in Bulgaria**

The basis for sustainable interpersonal transformation of leadership teams in Bulgaria is the work with their leaders. **Leadership coaching** is essentially the first approach to cultivating maturity.

**Organisational culture** is also an important prerequisite. Quick decision-making and innovation-oriented organisations that have a flat organisational structure and place a strong focus on learning and development are fertile ground for the application of the approach demonstrated in this dissertation.

**The size of the organisation** is another key consideration. Medium-sized organisations (up to 500 employees) are best suited from the author's point of view. Large corporations whose management teams make decisions in unison with the strategies of their overseas headquarters are harder to reach. They look for economies of scale, quick turnover and quick results, which is contrary to the philosophy of the approach used for deep intrapersonal and interpersonal transformation of leaders and leadership teams.

The following **instruments** can be used to make an impact if the above prerequisites are present (a leader with an open mind and heart and with strong motivation for change, organisational culture and size of the organisation):

- 1) Brief coaching interventions to give experience and stir inspiration and desire to work at a deeper level;
- 2) Diagnostics of leaders and leadership teams with scientifically validated instruments which opens the door to self-knowledge and getting to know interpersonal dynamics, arouses one's curiosity and appetite and gives a vision of the possibilities if the leader and the leadership team wholeheartedly take the path of intrapersonal and interpersonal transformation. From the author's point of view, a good combination is the use of the Energy Leadership Index Assessment™ (measuring individual and collective attitude and addressing key energy) and the Belbin Assessment to identify team strengths and the possibilities to compose potentially sustainable and thriving teams (measures the behaviour of the individuals in the team through the prism of self-evaluation and the other team members' evaluation). A rich picture of attitudes and behaviour allows for building awareness, which is a solid foundation for change in the desired direction.

**The structure and content of the dissertation follow a logical sequence**, covering leadership theories and their development and defining the Thrive Space, as well as the psychological and neurobiological foundations of optimal experiences. It extensively examines how executive leadership coaching can impact intrapersonal transformation, interpersonal transformation in leadership teams and business results. The dissertation offers a broad theoretical basis for the development of hypotheses specifically related to meaningful purpose, brain dominance, wholehearted commitment, coaching, teams and relationships. The chosen qualitative and quantitative research methods are detailed in the context of the study. Two research cases have been examined in detail, and the results have been analysed and compared. Based on years of testing and in-depth theoretical analysis, the author has produced her unique model for holistic coaching and defined the factors for its application in Bulgarian conditions.

As a result of developing **the dissertation**, the author has come with *the following conclusions*:

***Sustainable organisational transformation is possible*** and can be accelerated by coaching leaders and teams. Results can be measured over time and serve as a roadmap for further individual, team and organisational growth. The cases presented in this long-term study can



also be used as a roadmap for other organisations willing to invest energy, time and financial resources in sustainable organisational transformation.

The present study confirms that *holistic coaching (coaching of leaders and teams for intrapersonal and interpersonal transformation with a focus on the essential energy underlying human behaviour) accelerates intrapersonal and interpersonal development.*

The research also confirms that *holistic transformation sustains organisational thriving, including positive impacts on financial results.* It's important to note that there are many other complex factors, beyond the control of organisations, impacting financial results like economic crises, wars, pandemics and other force majeure circumstances that can lead to a decline in financial success measures.

***Holistic success is about thriving. It's about the organization's ability to adapt, innovate and retain people, providing them a high quality of life and unfolding their potential in an environment where they recognize an inspiring vision and a meaningful purpose.*** Success is when the organisation designs and implements its activities in a way that doesn't harm but rather helps the environment recover from destructive human actions. Success is when organisations invest resources in meaningful causes that resonate with their policy.

In the constant flux of changes, organisations will always be tested on how flexible, adaptive and true to their purpose they can be. This research demonstrates the viability of the process of interpersonal, intrapersonal and organisational transformation, accelerated through coaching.

The dissertation has proven the research thesis and the three working hypotheses. This gives a significant practical application to the dissertation, making it a suitable source of measures and solutions that can be used in the future.

### **III. SCIENTIFIC AND PRACTICAL APPLIED CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE WORK**

The primary contributions of the dissertation can be divided into two categories: scientific contributions and practical applied contributions:

#### **Scientific Contributions:**

- 1) The dissertation *investigates, evaluates and summarises* the theoretical frameworks related to leadership. It traces the development of leadership theories from classical to contemporary ones and identifies existing trends in this area. Based on this, the author presents her working definition of **thriving leadership**.
- 2) *It presents a holistic approach and a new research perspective*, integrating established and emerging theories of personality, psychological and neurobiological studies, cognitive neuroscience and organisational and management sciences.
- 3) *It examines, evaluates and summerises* the psychological and neurobiological foundations of optimal experiences associated with thriving leadership. On this basis, **the author introduces and defines the concept of the "Thrive Space."**

- 4) It presents *a thorough theoretical analysis* of executive leadership coaching and its impact on intrapersonal and interpersonal transformation within leadership teams as well as business results.
- 5) *The author presents her definition of leadership team coaching.*

### **Practical Applied Contributions:**

- 1) *The author has developed an **original essential model for coaching leaders and teams (CORE MODEL®)**.* This non-linear model doesn't merely describe a formula for thriving but focuses on intrapersonal and team transformation as a holistic process adapted to individual and team needs. It incorporates approaches and philosophies aligned with the essence of coaching and the science of neurobiology. The model stimulates coaching discussions aimed at the transformation of leaders and leadership teams.
- 2) *The author has developed an original methodology, called **Thrive Matrix®** for measuring leaders' current state regarding the "Thrive Space."* This diagnostic method can be applied before and after leadership or team coaching.
- 3) *An author's graphic model has been derived to represent the helping modalities in a coordinate system with two dimensions: directive/empowering and past/future.*
- 4) The dissertation presents a good practice for intrapersonal and interpersonal transformation accelerated through executive coaching (EC) and team coaching, *based on in-depth case studies of two leaders and their teams.* By using qualitative and quantitative methods, this comprehensive research produces results in real conditions and demonstrates the transferability of the approach to organisations of various sizes and cultures.
- 5) It *identifies and analyses factors, instruments and approaches* for implementing the method of intrapersonal and interpersonal transformation of leaders and leadership teams for sustainable thriving in Bulgarian conditions.

### **IV. PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE DISSERTATION RESEARCH:**

1. Hinova-McNamee, E. (2022). *Thriving Leadership - Reality or Utopia?* Economic Thought Journal, 67(4), 473-502 (in Bulgarian).
2. Hinova-McNamee, E. (2023). *Thriving Young Leaders in the New Turbulent Environment.* Pages 145-160. Academic Values and Digital Transformations. Purpose, Standards and Leaders in Education. NBU Sofia. ISBN 978-619-233-268-6.
3. Hinova-McNamee, E. (2023). *Thriving Leaders and Teams: The Case of Intra and Interpersonal Transformation in Business.* Pages 470-510. Sociocultural Codes of Contemporary Development. Collection of Scientific Reports VI International Scientific-Practical Competition. ASKONI-IZDAT Sofia. ISBN 978-954-383-148-7.
4. Hinova-McNamee, E. (2023). *Why Real Team Coaching Can Positively Impact Business Results Using the Power of Collaboration.* Economic Thought Journal, 68(5), 521-553.