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*“I never really thought I would
become a leader.”*

Art Leaders' Perceptions of Leadership Roles and
Competences in the Precarious Structures of
the Finnish Independent Arts Sector

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ABSTRACT

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TITLE OF THE WRITTEN COMPONENT/THESIS "I never really thought I would become a leader." Art Leaders' Perceptions of Leadership Roles and Competences in the Precarious Structures of Finnish Independent Arts Sector	NUMBER OF PAGES + APPENDICES 124 pages 3 appendices

Recent research on the Finnish arts and cultural field has highlighted the precarious, and hybrid work structures, and expanding competence demands among cultural and arts professionals. This thesis contributes to this body of research by examining leadership practices under the Finnish independent art sector's precarious structures. The study asks, how leaders emerge in their positions, and how these structural conditions shape and affect the leadership roles of the sector's leaders.

The study is based on six qualitative interviews conducted in the fall of 2025. The interviewees were individuals working in leadership positions in organisations operating outside the Finnish statutory state subsidy system. The analysis explores how these leaders define their leadership roles, assess their capabilities and competences to perform in them, and articulate the challenges and support needs associated with their work. In addition, the study evaluates the ways in which artistic, managerial, and organisational responsibilities are combined within individual roles.

The thesis addresses the following questions through thematic analysis: How do leaders in the independent arts sector perceive and construct their leadership roles, and what kinds of competences, challenges, and expectations are associated with these roles. These questions are examined within the broader Finnish cultural policy and labour market context.

The findings highlight the inherently hybrid and fluid nature of leadership in the independent arts sector. The study's leadership roles were

formed through unplanned career paths, either through founding an organisation or applying to a position with unclear expectations, often with no previous education or experience in leadership. The leadership roles were characterised by overlapping responsibilities, including artistic direction, organisational management, fundraising, and personnel supervision. The leaders systematically reported limited resources, insufficient time for supervisory tasks, and a lack of formal preparation for their responsibilities.

A central contradiction emerged from this notion. While leadership roles had expanded in scope and complexity, the structural conditions of the sector constrained leaders' ability to fully develop and perform their roles. As a result, leadership was shaped by continuous resourceless navigation between artistic values, organisational survival, and external expectations.

The study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of leadership in hybrid arts organisations and highlights the need for stronger structural support, and professional recognition for the Finnish independent art sector's leaders, and development of leadership education within the arts education.

KEYWORDS

Finnish independent art sector, leadership in arts, contemporary leadership models, cultural policy

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List of main concepts

Art and culture field of Finland: The art and culture field of Finland refers to the broad ecosystem of institutions, organisations, and individuals engaged in artistic production, cultural services, and creative work (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2026). The field encompasses publicly and privately

funded institutions and organisations, private sector actors, and independent artists and collectives. The field is shaped by a combination of cultural policy, funding structures, and labour market conditions. The Finnish art and culture field is characterised by a strong role of public funding alongside increasing diversification of organisational forms, employment models, and sources of income (Sokka & Johannisson, 2022; Jakonen, 2022; Statistics Finland, 2024).

Cultural policy: Cultural policy is understood in this study as public and societal decisions and forms of power related to culture that shape the conditions of cultural production, including funding systems, regulatory frameworks, and strategic priorities (Kangas, 2001; Pyykkönen, 2014; Jakonen, 2017; Häyrynen, 2018; Jakonen & Pyykkönen, 2023). In this study, cultural policy is relevant as a contextual factor shaping the structural conditions in which leadership in the independent arts sector operates.

Independent art sector: In this study, the independent arts sector refers to professional artistic and cultural activities taking place outside the Finnish statutory state subsidy system (VOS). It includes a heterogeneous field of organisations, working groups, and individual practitioners operating through project-based funding, short-term employment, and hybrid organisational forms. (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013; Korhonen, 2013; Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020; Ruusuvirta et al., 2022; Pekkarinen et al., 2025)

Leadership in arts: Leadership in the arts refers to the processes through which individuals guide artistic, organisational, and collaborative activities within cultural contexts. In this study, leadership is understood as a combination of artistic direction, organisational management, and interpersonal coordination. (Byrnes, 2015)

Managerial competence in arts: Managerial competence refers to the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform leadership and organisational tasks, including planning, coordination, decision-making, and resource management in arts organisations. (Byrnes, 2015)

1. Introduction

The contemporary art and culture field in Finland poses multiple demands for the field's leaders. The leaders work in an environment which faces constant uncertainty and change (Byrnes, 2015). Leaders are required to realise artistic vision while frequently balancing multiple simultaneous roles, and managing an increasing competition for audiences, funding and other crucial resources (Ellmeier, 2003; Byrnes, 2015; Rensujeff, 2015; Jakonen, Luonila, Renko & Kanerva, 2021; Ruusuvirta, Kanerva, Rensujeff & Leppänen, 2024; Lahtinen, Ruusuvirta, Kautio, Rensujeff & Leppänen, 2025). The conditions place pressure especially on the leaders working within the precarious and fragmented independent sector of arts in Finland (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013; Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2016; Pekkarinen, Siltanen & Virkkala, 2022; Pekkarinen, Hyle & Anttila, 2025).

The independent arts sector comprises a diverse range of professional artists and cultural practitioners across various disciplines and industry areas. A unifying factor among these actors is operating outside the state subsidy system, or the VOS system (in Finnish, *valtionosuusjärjestelmä*). This "*free field of arts*" (in Finnish, "*vapaa taidekenttä*"), or *independent sector of arts* - as used in this study - includes organisations and collectives, event organisers, working and production groups, freelance artists, art communities, informal groups etc., receiving their income through operational or project funding from private foundations, and public bodies, various forms of fundraising, and other generated income (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2011; Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013; Pekkarinen, et al., 2022). Leaders of the sector are often overseeing multiple teams and projects operating simultaneously in organisations that usually lack permanent or formal structures, an efficient workforce, comprehensive resources, predictable funding and long-term staffing (Ellmeier, 2003; Jakonen et al., 2021; Rensujeff, 2015; Ruusuvirta et al., 2024; Pekkarinen, et al. 2025). The leaders have been seen undertaking their roles without previous experience, or a formal leadership education, or the opportunities for continuous learning and

updating professional competences (Häkkinen & Heininen, 2025), making their managerial position and work highly demanding (e.g. Pekkarinen, et al., 2025).

In addition, the surrounding conditions are shifting the arts and culture field towards greater instability nationally (Ministry of the Interior, 2023) and globally (e.g., World Economic Forum, 2026). Several ongoing developments are further intensifying the need for expertise in leadership within the field, including the independent arts sector. In addition to these arising risks, the artistic work overall is expected to increasingly contribute to society's economic growth e.g. through increased entrepreneurship and fostering societal well-being, together with other instrumental values (Ansio, Houni & Piispa, 2018; Pyykkönen, Sokka & Kurlin Niiniaho, 2021; Pekkarinen & Uusi-Rauva, 2026), while opportunities for stable employment and income, as well as public funding for the arts, have become increasingly uncertain (Hirvi-Ijäs, Renko, Lahtinen., Sokka, Jakonen & Kurlin Niiniaho 2021; Ruusuvirta, et al, 2023; Lahtinen, et al., 2025).

The recent COVID-19 pandemic and the preceding global #MeToo campaign dramatically exposed long-standing and crucial structural challenges and vulnerabilities in arts and cultural work throughout the world (Paanetoja, 2018; Jakonen et al., 2021; Kaurinkoski, 2022; Pekkarinen et al., 2022; Marie Buscatto, Karttunen & Provansal, 2025). The pandemic placed unprecedented pressure on the field's leaders, tasked with sustaining operations in crisis conditions. Independent sector leaders had to adapt quickly to new quarantine policies, rapidly shifting audience restrictions, dramatic loss of ticket sales and declining engagement towards cultural activities (Pekkarinen, et al. 2022; Ruusuvirta, et al. 2023). #Metoo revealed an urgent need for finding ways to deconstruct the violent power dynamics and gender discrimination in the field's structures (Anttila, 2019; Hirvi-Ijäs, Kautio, Kurlin, Rensujeff & Sokka, 2020).

Today's evolving political shifts and historical budget cuts to arts and culture are creating further instability and generating widespread concern among the workers and leaders for the future viability of the arts (Manninen, Pyykkönen & Heikkilä, 2025; Sokka & Nokela, 2025; Pekkarinen, et al., 2025).

The decreases in generated income and reduced access to other funding are decreasing the survival possibilities of the smaller organisations and marginal art forms operating in the independent sector of arts and culture (Manninen, Pyykkönen & Heikkilä, 2025; Sokka & Nokela, 2025).

These challenges and problems are being dealt daily by the leaders of the independent sector. It's through their effort that the organisations stay relevant and keep functioning, which in turn keeps the sector alive and relevant, so that the sector continues carrying on its significant artistic, social, and cultural role in society.

For arts and culture organisations to persevere in this environment characterised by risks, challenging conditions and shaky structures, they need people who provide vision, and manage, and organise operations. This thesis investigates who these people are, how they have ended up in their current positions, and how they experience their possibilities and competence to operate in their roles surrounded by these conditions.

1.1. Background and context

Previous research on the arts and culture field's working life in Finland has documented the working conditions and well-being of artists and cultural workers, highlighting economic insecurity, fragmented career paths, hybrid professional identities, and increasing demands related to entrepreneurship, administration, and self-management (e.g. Pärnänen & Sutela, 2018; Santalahti, Vainio & Karppinen, 2021; Pekkarinen, et al., 2022; Pekkarinen, et al. 2025). The recently published reports by Ruusuvirta, et al (2023) and Lahtinen, et al. (2025) both demonstrate that artistic work in Finland today is frequently sustained through a combination of grants, short-term contracts, freelance assignments, unpaid work, and combining non-artistic and artistic labour in a precarious working environment and labour market (Pekkarinen, et al. 2022). The structural conditions have been further intensified by recent developments, including the COVID-19 pandemic, MeToo, cuts in cultural funding and budgeting, with broader political and economic pressures

affecting the overall arts field in Finland (Anttila, 2019; Pekkarinen, et al. 2022; Buscatto, et al. 2025; Manninen, Pyykkönen & Heikkilä, 2025; Sokka & Nokela, 2025). Within this context, the demands for leadership, and leaders' working conditions in the Finnish arts field - and thus in the independent sector - have become increasingly complex. So far, this aspect has been left unexamined in the academic literature.

In state subsidised arts and cultural institutions, the current complexities of structural challenges are managed through budget reallocations, personnel reductions, organisational adaptation, and the development of new practices in production, marketing, programming, and audience engagement (Manninen, et al. 2025). Although recent budget cuts have affected the entire Finnish arts field (Sokka & Nokela, 2025), the established VOS institutions generally retain specialised staff responsible for different dimensions of organisational management. In contrast, organisations operating outside the state subsidy system have long functioned with limited resources, requiring leaders to combine artistic, administrative, financial, and supervisory responsibilities within a single role (Menger, 2006; Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013; Byrnes, 2015; Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2016; Korhonen, Pekkala & Salomaa, 2018; Rhine, 2018). As funding becomes increasingly constrained, this concentration of responsibility is likely to intensify.

In the independent arts sector, the organisations have a few central artistic figures (e.g. a director or a founder) who assume administrative and supervisory responsibilities as their organisations grow, rather than entering leadership positions through formal management training (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013; Korhonen, 2013; Byrnes, 2015;). Research on artistic labour markets show that careers in the arts are project-based and non-linear, with responsibility and authority developing through reputation and practice. (Menger, 2006). Recent studies further indicate that many employers and supervisors in the Finnish independent art sector operate without formal management education, and report limited preparation for recruitment, orientation, and supervisory tasks (Hänninen & Heinonen 2025; Pekkarinen et al., 2025).

Despite the centrality of leadership work to organisational sustainability and the sector's vitality, it remains comparatively underexamined in the independent arts sector - particularly from the perspective of those who perform it.

1.2. Research problem and previous gaps

Existing research on leadership and management in arts and culture organisations has mainly focused on institutional settings with formal organisational hierarchies, and normative competency frameworks derived from business and public management literature (e.g. Byrnes, 2015; Rhine, 2018; Byrnes & Brkic, 2021). So far, the leaders of the Finnish art field have been evaluated by relatively few researchers. Research on arts management in Finland has been conducted, e.g. by Korhonen in *Theatre Management* (1986) and Häti-Korkeila in *Dramaturgy of Theatre Management* (2010), but these, amongst other publications, are situated strictly inside the Finnish city theatre context. In addition, several thesis-level studies have been published in recent years on leadership and management in the Finnish arts field (e.g. Suonperä, 2020; Perämäki, 2024; Häkkilä & Heininen, 2025). The approaches have functioned as important openings and produced valuable insights on management and leadership in the more established environments of arts and culture. Still, they are largely based on stable VOS organisational structures, clear role divisions, and access to institutional resources, which do not reflect the conditions of the independent arts sector. This study attempts to capture the realities of leaders in the independent arts sector, where the operational framework differs notably from that of VOS organisations.

At the same time, cultural policy and labour studies in the arts have primarily examined artists' labour conditions, income formation, and professional wellbeing (e.g. the Cupore Barometrics), with less attention given to leadership as a distinct form of work within the independent sector. Leadership in the arts is usually discussed in relation to themes such as entrepreneurship, self-management and working life and entrepreneurial

skills. After examining the previous research on the development needs and requirements for working life skills of the independent art sector (Pekkarinen, et al, 2025), an existing gap was noticed in understanding how leaders of the sector themselves perceive, interpret, and articulate their managerial competence within the sector's conditions.

According to the report's interviews with the field's employers, in the independent arts sector, managerial competence is rarely formalised, developed or externally validated. The interviewees stated that expertise in responsible roles tends to be shaped through experiences, necessities, and informal learning. Leaders are expected to cope with managerial demands rather than to explicitly claim expertise in management work. This raises critical questions about how the role of a leader and the competence to perform in this role is understood, assessed, and experienced in a sector where artistic values, collaborative practices, and precarity coexist with a capitalistic framework and increasing managerial expectations.

The overall goal of this study is to respond to a need for more situated, experiential knowledge of leadership in the independent arts sector by foregrounding leaders' own perspectives through interviews. Through these perspectives, the research aims to understand how competence in leadership is constructed and expressed by those operating in leadership positions within the sector's specific structural conditions. In addition, the study aims to answer what kind of challenges, skill gaps, and support needs the leaders identify in relation to their roles, and how to respond to them.

1.3. Purpose of the study and research questions

The overall research approach and research questions developed through a combination of theoretical engagement with prior empirical research, researcher's personal hands-on experience while working in the sector, and emerging observations in a timely research report on the independent sector's working life, conducted by the Working Life Studies and Services for the Independent Arts Sector – project (Pekkarinen, et. al, 2025). I have had the

opportunity to work in the independent sector myself in different responsible and leadership positions for the past 10 years, across different art forms. I have noticed that some of my past experiences resonate with the research materials on this matter, and many patterns and phenomena in managing and leading inside the independent sector seem to repeat in different conditions, groups and organisations. I have led and managed in many situations in the arts without a formal education or notable previous experience, trusting that I will learn the ropes on the way, by trial and error. I believe that this is a shared experience in the sector, and as a background provides me with a deep insight into the themes of my research, and the capability to understand and relate to the stories of other independent art sector leaders. These insights fed my initial interest to capture how leaders themselves understand and make sense of their roles within the specific structural conditions of the independent arts sector.

A strong influence on the formulation of my research questions was the opportunity to participate in the previously mentioned research conducted as part of Working Life Studies and Services for the Independent Arts Sector at the University of the Arts Helsinki Open Campus in 2025. The outcome of the research worked as the final report for the project, which focused on working life skill requirements faced by those working in the independent arts and culture sector in Finland (Pekkarinen et al., 2025). The report notes that leaders in the arts and culture sector sometimes enter managerial roles without formal training and learn the practice primarily through experience, and that there's a need for additional support and education. The gathered interview material suggested that the sector's personnel in responsible positions experience role overload, insufficient time, training, and resources for supervisory tasks, and feelings of inadequacy related to leaders' responsibilities, but they could not be examined in depth within the report's scope. These findings raised new questions about how individuals in responsible positions perceive their roles, assess their own competence, and consider what kinds of support they deem necessary.

The emerging questions raised a need for more focused examination of leaders within the independent arts sector. To begin to fill this research gap,

my study deliberately starts from the perceptions and articulations of the leaders, rather than approaching leadership and its themes through normative competence frameworks or external evaluations. As organisational roles in general in the independent arts sector are often informal, fluid, and shaped by organisational necessity rather than strategic planning or the ambition of the individual (Menger, 2006; Korhonen, 2013), this perspective forms a crucial starting point. I seek to understand how leaders themselves define their roles to shed light on how their roles are formed in practice and how competence, responsibility, and support needs are understood from within the sector by the professionals.

Based on this goal, the main research question and the sub-questions guiding the study are as follows:

Research question:

How do leaders in the independent arts sector perceive and articulate their managerial and leadership roles and capacities in their organisation?

Sub-questions:

How do leaders assess their ability to perform managerial and leadership roles within their organisations?

What challenges, skill gaps, and support needs do they identify in relation to these roles?

1.4. Significance of the study

As public funding for the arts decreases and permanent positions within state-subsidised institutions have become scarcer (Manninen, et al., 2025; Sokka & Nokela, 2025), and the number of entrepreneurs in the arts is increasing (Pekkarinen & Uusi-Rauva, 2026), an increasing amount of artistic and cultural work in Finland is likely to take place within the independent arts sector. This development suggests a growth in the number of independent arts

organisations and project-based initiatives, adding to the leadership and supervisory responsibilities carried by individuals operating in structurally fragile conditions. To ensuring the sustainability of the sector educational and support structures that correspond to this emerging reality are required. Studying the lived conditions, perceived competences, and support needs of current leaders in the independent arts sector is essential for developing responses that are grounded in the actual organisational environments.

This study contributes to arts management and cultural policy research in several ways. Theoretically, the study contributes to the understanding of leadership and managerial competence in non-institutional, often project-based cultural contexts, where the institutionalised frameworks of management do not usually apply. In more practical terms, these findings aim to offer relevant insights for the current and new leaders in the independent arts sector, as well as to organisations involved in higher and continuous education, professional development, funding, and sector support. Timely findings in understanding how leaders experience and conceptualise managerial competence can inform new perspectives in designing educational content and training programs to help educators prepare future professionals for the realities of the sector better. Material also provides insight for building peer-support structures and cultural policy interventions for the sector.

1.5. Scope and structure of the study

This study focuses on interviewing six leaders in the independent arts sector, including individuals in leadership, supervisory, and managerial roles within the sector's cooperatives, registered associations, companies, and project-based artistic groups, across various art fields. The study utilises a qualitative research approach through semi-structured interviews to generate empirical material grounded in the lived experiences of the participants. The gathered material is analysed through a thematic analysis process to form answers to the research questions in place.

The study is structured as follows. In the second chapter, the study lays out the outlines of the independent art sector in Finland, within which the study's material is situated. The chapter describes the current situational picture of the independent sector and its diverse actors in relation to the broader national creative field. The study moves on to explore the concepts of leadership and management through the lens of the art world, which ultimately informs the study's research perspective and raises questions on leadership and management in the independent arts sector. Following the theoretical section in chapter 3, the research and analysis methods are introduced and the materials used in the study are presented. The results of the analysis process are presented in chapter 4. Finally, the study compiles views on leadership in the independent art sector. It concludes with a discussion of the study's findings in relation to the research questions and existing knowledge. The study ends with researchers' reflections on possible implications of the findings and suggestions for further research in the chapter 5.

2. Theoretical Framework – The Finnish Independent Art Sector’s Structural Conditions for Leadership and Management

The following chapter will define the main concepts utilised in this study: the independent art sector in Finland and leadership in the arts. After establishing the main structural blocks of the study’s theory, the concepts are brought together to form the study’s research perspective on leadership and management in the independent arts and culture sector.

2.1. Independent Art Sector as a part of the Finnish Arts and Culture Field and Cultural Policy

The Finnish arts and culture field comprises a diverse set of actors, including statutory institutions, state and municipal bodies, civil society organisations, and independent artistic practitioners, across different art forms (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2026). The field addresses multiple domains, including performing arts, museums, audiovisual production, and creative digital industries. According to Statistics Finland (2024), the arts and culture field employed approximately 130 600 people in Finland in 2024, of whom around 110 500 worked primarily within the creative field. This accounts for about 3–5% of the nation’s employed population. The overall productivity of the cultural sector has increased by approximately three billion euros over the past decade (Statistics Finland, 2025), and today the sector generates a total of three billion euros annually in tax and fee revenues for the public sector (Holm, 2023; Luovat ry, 2024). Although the field’s productivity has increased over the past decade, its employment has decreased by 30 per cent over the same period (Holm, 2023). The share of the art and culture field of Finland’s GDP was 3.2% in the year 2025 (Statistics Finland, 2025). This indicates that the arts and culture field, in its entirety, has a significant impact on the national economy.

The Finnish arts and culture field operates within a policy framework shaped by Nordic welfare-state principles and public cultural policy (Sokka &

Johannisson, 2022). Finnish cultural policy has traditionally emphasised the autonomy of art, support for professional artists, and universal accessibility through regional equality and participation (Kangas, 2001; Häyrynen, 2018; Sokka, 2022; Jakonen, 2022). A core instrument of these ideals is state funding for art and culture, organised through statutory government subsidies (valtiosuus, VOS) administered by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Inclusion in the VOS framework provides relative funding continuity, enabling longer-term planning and more stable employment structures (Manninen, et al. 2025). This idea of public responsibility for maintaining cultural infrastructure has formed the ideological backbone of the system since the birth of the welfare state. (Jakonen & Pyykkönen, 2023). Since the 1990s, however, cultural policy has increasingly incorporated elements of globalisation, neo liberalized competitive society's governance, and New Public Management (Pyykkönen, 2014; Jakonen, 2017; Murtoniemi, 2024). Following the 2008 financial crisis, austerity measures, strategic steering, result-orientation, and instrumental policy goals have gained prominence (Jakonen, 2022; Jakonen & Pyykkönen, 2023). Arts and culture are increasingly justified by their economic impact, wellbeing effects, and contributions to competitiveness (Pekkarinen & Uusi-Rauva, 2026), even though it is questionable whether the measurement of arts and culture can provide meaningful data for, e.g., policy or funding justifications (Murtoniemi, 2024). Still, this dual logic of welfare-state support combined with market-oriented governance is currently well visible in the art and culture funding system.

Within the Finnish art and culture field, there lies an ecosystem of creative actors outside the VOS-system. These organisations, working groups, and individual professionals are commonly referred to as the independent or free sector of arts (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2026). They are embedded in the same cultural policy environment as institutional actors, but their structural position differs significantly (Pekkarinen et al. 2025). Without access to long-term statutory subsidies, they rely more heavily on project-based grants, municipal support, foundation funding, and self-generated income (Ruusuvirta et al., 2023; Lahtinen et al., 2025).

The independent sector occupies an integral position within the Finnish arts and culture field. The next sections will examine its contributions to artistic production, renewal, and diversity, while operating under structurally more unstable funding and precarious employment conditions than institutionally embedded actors. Understanding the sector's underlying nature and its positioning relative to the wider arts and culture field is essential for the later analysis of the leaders who emerge within it.

2.1.1. Defining the Independent Art Sector in Finland

The task of capturing the essence of the Finnish independent art sector has not been straightforward. Oinaala and Ruokolainen (2013) provided a comprehensive picture of the development of the sector's definition in Finnish research and policy in their article. They state that in research in the 1960' and 1970's, the independent sector and "free groups" mostly appeared in the realm of theatre research, through the "free theatre groups" of Finland. After some notable changes in the Finnish state subsidy system in the 1980's, the government introduced a new policy, the State Subsidy Law (VOS-laki), which created the regional and city theatre network of Finland. In the 1990s, in addition to Finland's city and regional theatres, many group and small theatres were included within the scope of this funding policy. Since then, it has been common to divide Finnish theatre operators into theatres operating under the VOS-law and the "outlawed" or "lawless" theatres, operating outside of the state subsidy system. (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013)

In Cupore's (2006) report, the independent sector is defined through the same economic lens. The authors also state that the economic framework is not the only way to define the non-VOS organisations. The names "lawless field/sector" or "free field/sector" can be understood to tie into the expressions and ways of operating that traditionally are not seen as a part of so-called institutional organisations, such as city theatres (Kanerva & Ruusuvirta 2006).

The definition's scope widened after studies began to include unregistered artist groups alongside non-VOS organisations (Stara, 2013). It was noted that these two forms of actors share similar operating conditions and do not receive government operating subsidies. Their activities were irregular, production-specific, or sometimes more or less continuous (Stara, 2013). Eventually, the research included individual artists in the mix (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013; Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2016).

One of the latest developments in defining the independent sector is to tie it to the research on the third sector, NGOs, and Nonprofit organisations. These are organisations that traditionally root their operations in at least some level of voluntarism, value-based goals, and non-profit activities (Malunga, 2010; Tschirhart & Bielefeld, 2012; Dann, 2022). Oinaala and Ruokolainen, in their article (2016), examine the Finnish independent performing arts sector as a part of the third (non-profit and voluntary) sector. According to the report, the independent sector uses many familiar third-sector features, such as forms of organisation and volunteering, resulting in unpaid work. The independent sector's actors also develop their own ways of operating and borrow methods from suitable sources. (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2016). One of these contemporary operating approaches was examined in a report by Martiskainen et al. (2017). So-called independent sector's "umbrella organisations" are bringing together several independent groups and individual artists, supporting and enabling the artistic work of their members in many ways. These umbrellas are emerging in the sector, and they show promise of becoming a crucial part of the sector's ecosystem in Finland. They partially compensate for the sector's lack of stable institutional structures through collaboration, sharing resources, and bringing small organisations and informal groups together (Halme, 2014; Martiskainen, et al., 2017).

The definition of the independent sector has widened due to the same continuous realisation from over 20 years ago, that was put in words in the 2002 report by Kokkonen: "*A key feature of the free field is its diversity that permeates all levels: the different forms of production, theatrical views and operating methods, work tasks and performances vary widely*" (Kokkonen, et al. 2002, p. 10). All these variables have led to the formation of actors

operating in various ways, which is why the independent sector is understood as a highly heterogeneous entity. Despite their differences the different art forms share broadly similar operating models and organisational structures, which allows for certain comparative perspectives, also in this study (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013). According to a report by the Ministry of Education and Culture's working group (2011), the actors of the independent sector are operating *"in the fields of theatre, dance, music, circus, performance and live art, this includes, among others, groups receiving discretionary state operating or project grants, individual working groups, production companies, and other actors organising various artistic events, as well as freelance artists"* (Ministry of Education and Culture 2011:14, 8).

Considering the evolution of the concept of the independent sector of arts, this research includes varying artistic practitioners, organisations in performing arts, and visual arts, festivals, production companies, and event organisers in its material. By independent sector, I refer to the field of professional artists and other cultural practitioners who operate outside the state subsidy system, not restricting it to specific types of art forms or cultural activities (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2011; Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013; Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2016; Pekkarinen et al., 2022; Pekkarinen et al., 2025). These professionals and organisations are characterised by sharing similar operation logics and ways of working with the third sector (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2016). The independent music sector differs markedly from the mentioned art forms in its practices, structures, and income models – thus being excluded from this study, following a similar approach to that taken in their report (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013). To further specify the independent sector, the study utilises two concepts in the fashion of Pekkarinen, et al. (2022): professionals in arts and culture and the field of art and culture. With professionals in art and culture, the study refers to individuals with education in arts and culture and/or those currently working in the field. When discussing the field of art and culture, the study encompasses the whole creative, producing, mediating, managing, funding, and developing group of actors that forms the ecosystem of arts and culture in Finland.

2.1.2. Independent Art Sector's Structural and Operational Characteristics

When examining the actors in the Finnish independent art sector, it is clear from the definition that they exist in an “independent”, “free”, or “lawless” state in many ways. Be it due to not being eligible for the state subsidy system or not wanting to participate in it, these actors are “free” from the guidelines and expectations of the state subsidy act and its policies that might restrict them (Kokkonen et al. 2002; Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013; Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2016; Martiskainen et al. 2017). The motivation for this can be that these actors want to organise themselves and their operations in a fashion that falls outside of the traditional, and in turn, opts them to function and create “freely” through distancing themselves from certain institutional structures. They might want to maintain the ability to react quickly to changing opportunities, their values encourage to keep their organisation un-hierarchical, or they are simply unable to meet the conditions for government subsidies, such as operating in a certain organisational form, or providing salaries in accordance with the wider field's norms. (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2016) Being an “outlaw” may represent freedom, but as Halonen (2009) states, the freedom of freelance actors is relative. Due to the structure of the independent sector, its groups and organisations are bound and restricted by limited resources and the limited availability of job opportunities.

Whatever the reason for being excluded from the VOS system, actors in the independent sector tend to find themselves in an underdog position, sometimes forced to operate with less than they need. As a result, what unites them is that the actors rarely have the resources to employ full-time employees or maintain their own operational location (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013). The groups operating in the independent sector tend to hire a large share of their personnel on a project-by-project basis, which makes it difficult to estimate total employment across the sector (TINFO, 2024). In their research on independent-sector performing arts groups, Oinaala and Ruokolainen (2013) found that the groups they studied commonly had one or two permanent full-time or part-time employees who essentially served as leaders, handling

administrative and production tasks. Most of these groups hired artists, artistic designers, and technicians on a production-by-production basis. This links to a notion by Ruokolainen (2012) that almost 100 % of the art and culture professionals move between labour market positions in this fashion, from fixed-term employment to gigs, working hourly paid contracts, performance compensations, project-based grant work, or as freelancers between organisations in various levels of the wider field. This is made possible by the special operational ecosystem described in Figure 1 by Oinaala & Ruokolainen (2013). Especially in the independent performing arts sector, most groups that are not eligible for central government transfers do not hire artistic staff on permanent employment contracts, because most employment relationships are fixed-term. Institutions that function under the state subsidy system also employ individual artists and groups from the independent sector. This has, in turn, increased the number of fixed-term positions and thus professionals jumping between different VOS institutions and organisations in the independent sector. (Ruokolainen, 2012) The reason for fixed-term employment relationships is usually a lack of resources, but also an increasing number of artists are forming grant-based production-specific collaborations with the aim of carrying out only one production (TINFO, 2024).

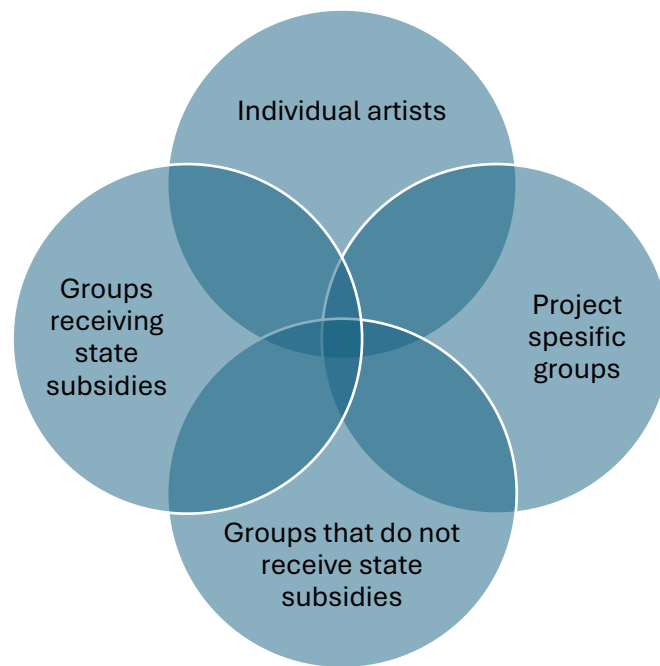


Figure 1. Operational environment of the independent art sector (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013)

2.1.3. Fragmented Employment and Project-Based Labour

The goal of individuals working in the Finnish art field is to secure steady employment in their profession in the arts (Ruusuvirta et al., 2022). However, employment in one's profession in the sector does not necessarily mean receiving a salary for one's work. According to studies (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013; Rensujeff, 2014; Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2016; Rensujeff & Kurlin, 2020; Hirvi-Ijäs, Kautio, Kurlin, Rensujeff & Sokka, 2020), artists often work in other - sometimes several - paid jobs and professions to finance the practice of their arts and culture profession. This picture was already described in the survey report by Pia Houni and Heli Ansio (2013). 89 per cent of the respondents found employment in ways other than a single full-time, permanent employment relationship. Studies have shown that independent actors strive to provide compensation in line with the wider field's salaries. Still, the professional's salary is often paid as project compensation rather

than by the hour. In this case, the amount of unpaid work can rise to a high level, from 20 per cent to 80 per cent (TINFO, 2024).

In the context of high levels of unpaid work in the arts field, professionalism in arts and culture cannot be defined by a single factor, such as education or livelihood (Karttunen, 2004). Being a professional involves other non-traditional factors found in the third sector (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2016) that are unfamiliar to traditional fields and labour market structures (e.g., Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020). These factors revolve around artistic goals and values, such as striving to create art for art's sake, make a personal living through making art, or the created art being separate from amateur or student activities. This was shown in the Rensujeff's study on the labour market situation of the Finnish artists (2010), where they state that less than half of artists fit into the commonly understood categories of employees or entrepreneurs. Ansio, Houni, & Piispa (2018) further reinforced this notion in their study on hybrid forms of work of Finnish artists. Nevertheless, the professionals of the sector create art, utilising innovatively the same working life skills and entrepreneurial competence seen in other labour and industry contexts (Pyykkönen, Sokka & Kurlin Niiniaho, 2021; Pekkarinen, et al., 2025; Pekkarinen & Uusi-Rauva, 2026).

The labour done inside the scope of the independent art sector happens in wildly varying contexts and conditions. Employment is predominantly fixed-term, freelance or grant-based and permanent full-time positions are rare (Hirvi-Ijäs, 2020). Artists frequently combine multiple income sources, including project contracts, personal grants, teaching, self-employment and work outside the arts field (Rensujeff, 2014; Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020; Ruusuvirta, et al., 2022). Through these factors the labour market position of arts professionals often falls outside conventional employee-entrepreneur binaries, leaving gaps in social protection systems (Hirvi-Ijäs, et al. 2020). The Finnish labour system structures are based on the presumption that a profession is practised as an employee or as an entrepreneur, preferably full-time. This binary approach does not correspond to the increasing diversity of income-generating practices in the wider arts and culture field and its independent sector, leaving individuals in an uncertain and precarious

situation. The artists are hoping that the social security and taxation systems would take into account these diverse sources, the irregularity of income, and the need to develop one's own work, even during periods when income is unknown. (Hirvi-Ijäs, et al., 2020) This kind of working environment is often referred to as precarious, and the work done in it as precarious work. These, often atypical forms of work, are characterised by uncertainty and temporality. Work is done in an environment where the working force – or proletariat – is working in a state of uncertainty or at the mercy of others. (Pyöriä & Ojala, 2012; Ylhäinen, 2015)

2.1.4. Operational Logics within the Independent Sector

Next, to avoid overgeneralising “the independent arts sector” as one uniform way of operating, the study will describe four ways to structure the different forms of organising operations through which art is created in the independent art sector. The study utilises a typology framework for independent sector’s operating logics developed by Oinaala and Ruokolainen (2013; 2016). The typology was constructed through qualitative case analysis of independent sector’s theatre, dance, circus and performance art groups, which leaves out many art forms in the sector. The study’s goal is to utilise the model a step further and find its touching points to e.g. festivals and visual arts organisations of the sector as well. These four types of operational logics are Established Employers, Driven by Conviction, Agile Internationals, and Productions. The typology highlights certain differences within the independent sector, that are embedded in the organisational structure, funding stability, employment practices, and economic logic – factors and conditions under which work and leadership is practiced.

The first type Established Employers consists of relatively established organisations, typically structured as associations or cooperative, that receive state operational subsidies or/and other steady funding. These organisations often aim to employ their members systematically through productions and related activities, commonly producing one to three premieres annually, while

maintaining a repertoire of previously produced works and hosting guest performances. A defining characteristic of the Established Employers type is the possession of their own venue, which enables additional revenue streams. When this income is combined with operational subsidies and other recurring funding sources, it allows for a more stable financial base for development and employment. In addition to employing artists production-by-production, these organisations usually have one or two permanent administrative or production staff members, who often work part-time. Oinaala and Ruokolainen (2013) state that while the amount of unpaid and paid labour remains difficult to quantify, this type of organisations has comparatively higher structural capacity for regular employment and long-term planning. The operating logic can be characterised as semi-institutionalised stability within the independent sector.

The second type of organisations, named Driven by Conviction, also consists mainly of association-based groups but differs from the first type in its funding structure. These groups do not receive state operational subsidies and instead finance their activities through project-based grants and subsidies. The activity may be continuous and artistically ambitious, but its economic foundation is highly fragile, unpredictable, and fragmented – sometimes work is done at the expense of professionals' compensation. Their livelihoods are typically supplemented by other employment or income sources. These organisations have no permanent staff, and the annual number of paid wages remains low relative to the scale of activity. Formal employment contracts may not always be used, and remuneration may depend on residual funds after production costs are covered.

The third type, called Agile Internationals, includes both groups that receive operational subsidies and those that don't. These groups typically revolve around one or a few key artistic leaders, with other core members participating regularly across productions. While these groups usually don't have their own venue, premieres are commonly co-produced with the varying theatre spaces or production houses. A defining feature of this type is the amount of international touring and collaboration. Performance fees from festivals and events form a central revenue source, often more important than

direct ticket sales. Personnel costs may account for up to 75 per cent of expenditures, partly due to lower fixed venue costs and a deliberate focus on employing group members. Some groups employ one or two part-time artistic leaders or producers, while others operate entirely on a project basis. Salaries may follow collective agreements or take the form of lump-sum payments. The operating logic here can be described as mobility-based sustainability, relying on artistic brand, touring networks, and external partnerships.

The fourth type, Productions, consists of project-based groups or communities without a formal organisational structure. These may be temporary working groups assembled by a choreographer, producer or director, informal collectives producing one or more works, or one-off collaborations without the intention of long-term continuation. The Production group's activities are funded through personal working grants, project subsidies and income from ticket sales. Total budgets are typically modest, and most expenses consist of personnel costs. Formal employment may be short-term or compensated through lump-sum fees, and the amount of unpaid labour is significant. The absence of a background organisation exposes the group to structural risks and reflects both the temporary nature of activity and the feasibility of operating as individuals within existing funding structures. Since many artists derive most of their income from outside these productions, formal organisational structures are not always deemed necessary. The operating logic Productions is characterised by high flexibility and minimal institutionalisation.

This framework by Oinaala and Ruokolainen (2013) provides an important structural lens for the purposes of my thesis. In addition to efficient categorisation of the research data, through it I can begin to formulate how leadership in the independent arts sector can be analysed in relation to the underlying operating logic of the organisation. The pressures, possibilities, and support structures available to leaders vary by funding stability, organisational form, and economic model.

2.1.5. Created values of the Independent Art Sector

As pointed out in the study's previous sections, there are plenty of activities in the Finnish independent art sector that are often carried out unorganised, without a formal organisation, association, foundation or non-profit company in the background (e.g. Martiskainen, 2017). A notable share of this work is done with only a small compensation or even for free (e.g. Ansio & Houni, 2013). If the independent arts sector is economically fragile, structurally unstable, and often reliant on unpaid labour, why does it persist? Why do people remain in the sector against some better judgment? What value is being pursued?

Part of the explanation lies in the sector's structural positioning within civil society and nonprofit logics (Malunga, 2010; Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2016). The independent arts sector operates largely outside both state-institutional hierarchies and profit-driven market structures. Even where entrepreneurial forms of work are adopted, these often function as administrative tools for enabling artistic creation, not capital accumulation (Pyykkönen et al., 2023; Pekkarinen, et al, 2025; Pekkarinen & Uusi-Rauva, 2026). In this sense, the economy is in service to the art, not the other way around (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020; Ruusuvirta et al., 2024; Lahtinen et al., 2025). This places the sector close to civil society and nonprofit organisations, oriented towards value-based operations.

The operating logic of the independent sector is characterised by the prevalence of unpaid labour (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013; Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2016; Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020; Ruusuvirta et al., 2024; Lahtinen et al., 2025). Project-based production cycles, unstable funding streams, and limited organisational resources result in work that is only partially compensated or compensated retrospectively – or in some cases, not compensated at all. This phenomenon exposes a structural risk in the sector's sustainability and raises questions regarding the relationship between unpaid labour and ideologically driven or mission-oriented work in arts and culture (Ruusuvirta, et al., 2023). In some contexts, unpaid effort is framed as a feature of the profession, or as a voluntary commitment to artistic values and

collective goals, which blurs the boundary between professional labour and e.g. civic engagement (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013; Hirvi-Ijäs, et al. 2020). Still, unlike traditional volunteer work, unpaid labour in the independent arts sector often occurs within professionalised environments where artistic expertise and training are required from the participating individuals, further contributing to a central structural paradox of the sector (Hirvi-Ijäs et al. 2020).

The commitment of individuals to work under independent sector's precarious conditions point toward a strongly value-based operating logic (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013; Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2016). In contrast to private businesses - whose primary objective is to generate profit and customer satisfaction - and to governments - whose logic is frequently tied to electoral cycles and political mandates -, the organisations and the actors of the independent sector are fundamentally oriented toward social transformation through arts (Malunga, 2010; Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013; Murtoniemi, 2024). Their purpose is to pursue change in values, cultural expression, societal structures, and people's lives. Within this framework, the independent arts sector can be understood as part of a broader civil society domain whose activities are guided by mission, ideology, and collective meaning (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2016; Murtoniemi, 2024).

To sum, the independent arts sector brings artistic and production diversity to the Finnish art and culture field. The sector can influence wide change in arts, culture and society with its contemporary and third sector nature, and regenerate and introduce new content and voices in arts (Malunga, 2010; Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013; Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2016; Sokka, 2022; Pekkarinen, et al, 2022; Ruusuvirta, et al, 2022; Ruusuvirta, et al. 2023). The sector's traits enable unique modes of artistic creation and future-oriented imagination that may be less accessible within state funded institutional structures (Evers & Laville, 2004; Häti-Korkeila 2010; Anheier, 2014). The sector and its professionals move quickly, allowing independent actors to respond rapidly to emerging themes, develop new inclusive forms of collaboration, and test alternative, innovative ways of organising artistic work.

2.1.6. Current Developments Affecting the Independent Arts Sector

The operating environment of the Finnish arts and culture field has undergone rapid and overlapping transformations over the past decade. These major developments affect the field broadly, but their consequences are particularly visible in the structurally vulnerable independent arts sector. This section examines the current situation and latest developments shaping the independent arts sector, and the demands for its leaders in Finland.

Funding Cuts and Fiscal Tightening

The current Finnish government's fiscal tightening has reduced overall funding levels of the public sector. The Ministry of Education and Culture's total budget for 2026 is approximately €9 billion, of which culture accounts for roughly €0.5 billion (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2026). Current budget adjustments of approximately €60 million disproportionately affects the cultural sector (Manninen, et al. 2025; Sokka & Nokela, 2025). In 2025, central government transfers to culture amounted to approximately €257 million.

Organisations outside the system are particularly exposed to these changes, as the independent sector's actors rely heavily on discretionary project grants, municipal subsidies, and foundation funding (Hirvi-Ijäs, 2020). In 2024, private foundations distributed approximately €99 million to arts and culture (Association of Finnish Foundations, 2025), underscoring the growing role of private support as public funding tightens. Arts professionals identify current economic policy as a major concern (Pekkarinen et al., 2025). Historical cuts to public funding have reduced organisational budgets and restricted operational capacity (Manninen et al., 2025), contributing to declining employment levels (Sokka & Nokela, 2025). Both state and municipal cultural budgets have been reduced, affecting statutory VOS funding and discretionary grants alike (Manninen et al., 2025; Sokka & Nokela, 2025).

Although cuts target both institutional and non-institutional actors, their effects cascade into the independent sector through reduced project-

based funding and smaller grant allocations. Some independent organisations have been forced to suspend or close operations due to funding shortages (Artists Association of Finland, 2025; Manninen et al., 2025). For actors operating without long-term funding continuity, these reductions directly threaten organisational sustainability.

Precarious Labour and Increasing Entrepreneurialism

Employment in Finland's arts and culture sector declined sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic (Holm, 2023) and continues to display structural uncertainty (Ruusuvirta et al., 2023; Statistics Finland, 2023; 2024; TINFO, 2024; Lahtinen et al., 2025). While fluctuations affect the entire field, their impact is amplified in the independent sector, where employment has traditionally been project-based and less institutionally secured (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020).

Independent actors rely heavily on fixed-term contracts, grants, and freelance arrangements (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020; Ruusuvirta et al., 2022; 2024). As Jakonen and Pyykkönen (2023) note, arts professionals increasingly enter self-employed and hybrid working arrangements rather than institutional employment. Entrepreneurial forms of work are more common in arts and culture than in other sectors (Pyykkönen et al., 2023). Approximately 25% of art professionals work as entrepreneurs, compared to 12% in other sectors (Statistics Finland, 2024).

Recent data show that 550 newly graduated arts and culture professionals were unemployed in January 2025 (Akava Works, 2025), reflecting growing difficulty in securing permanent employment. For many young professionals, operating as freelancers or entrepreneurs within the independent sector becomes a structural necessity rather than a voluntary choice (Ruusuvirta et al., 2023; Pekkarinen & Uusi-Rauva, 2026). In addition, the young professionals of the art field in general report low grades for their well-being at work, and they have the most work-related stress and concerns for their mental well-being, compared to older age groups (Ruusuvirta, et al. 2023).

Post-Pandemic Recovery and Ongoing Instability

The COVID-19 pandemic functioned as a structural stress test for the global cultural field (Pekkarinen et al., 2022, Holm, 2023). Across Europe, cultural and creative sectors lost 31% of turnover in 2020 compared to 2019 (EY, 2021). In Finland, the arts, entertainment, and recreation sector lost approximately €950 million in revenue (Saari, 2021), and the employment level in arts and culture decreased 6 % in 2020 (Holm, 2023). Independent actors were particularly exposed due to their reliance on ticket sales, touring, and project funding (Pekkarinen et al., 2022), all of which decreased during the societal lockdown. Audience levels have not fully returned to pre-pandemic levels (TINFO, 2024), and the long-term consequences of crisis-era policies and emergency funding instruments are still being assessed. It has been estimated that the culture field of Finland suffered the most from the crisis-time legislation (e.g. Oskarinen, 2026). The recovery remains uneven for independent organisations with limited resources.

Ethical Accountability and Shifting Norms

Alongside economic pressures, the #MeToo movement has challenged established power relations and professional norms in the arts (Anttila, 2019). Issues of sexual harassment, discrimination, and unsafe working cultures have prompted sector-wide reflection and reform efforts (Buscatto et al., 2025). These developments have brought forward questions of responsibility, care, and accountability, placing additional ethical expectations on those in leadership and supervisory roles within independent organisations (Anttila, 2019).

Geopolitical, Technological and Ecological Pressures

Broader geopolitical instability, including Russia's war of aggression in Europe, rising living costs, and shifting priorities in public spending, further contribute to uncertainty (Lim & Whoo, 2021; Statistics Finland, 2024). Cultural polarisation and "culture wars" influence public discourse and audience behaviour. Simultaneously, digitalisation, artificial intelligence, and the ecological crisis reshape production models, professional practices, and

societal expectations. Taken together, these overlapping economic, political, technological, and social changes create a highly complex operational environment for the independent arts sector. The sector currently operates both amid crisis, and as an actor engaging with and responding to said crisis through artistic practice (OKM, 2025).

Organisational Hybridity and Expanding Competence Demands

A key concept for understanding these developments is organisational hybridity. Building on institutional theory by Greenwood and Hinings (1993) Korhonen (2013) describes cultural organisations as guided by “interpretive schemes” or archetypes. Within the cultural field, limited resources often stabilise certain archetypes, making structural transformation difficult. Korhonen (2013) applies this perspective to independent theatre organisations, introducing the concept of hybrid organisations in arts management.

Hybrid organisations combine multiple operational logics within the same structure: artistic mission and service provision; long-term aspirations and short-term project funding; professional employment and entrepreneurial self-management; public subsidy and market-based revenue generation. This hybridity is conceptualised through a two-dimensional framework seen in figure 2, where organisations are positioned along axes of funding stability and operational diversity. Independent organisations frequently operate toward the lower end of funding stability while simultaneously diversifying their activities, and they may move across quadrants over time as funding conditions shift.

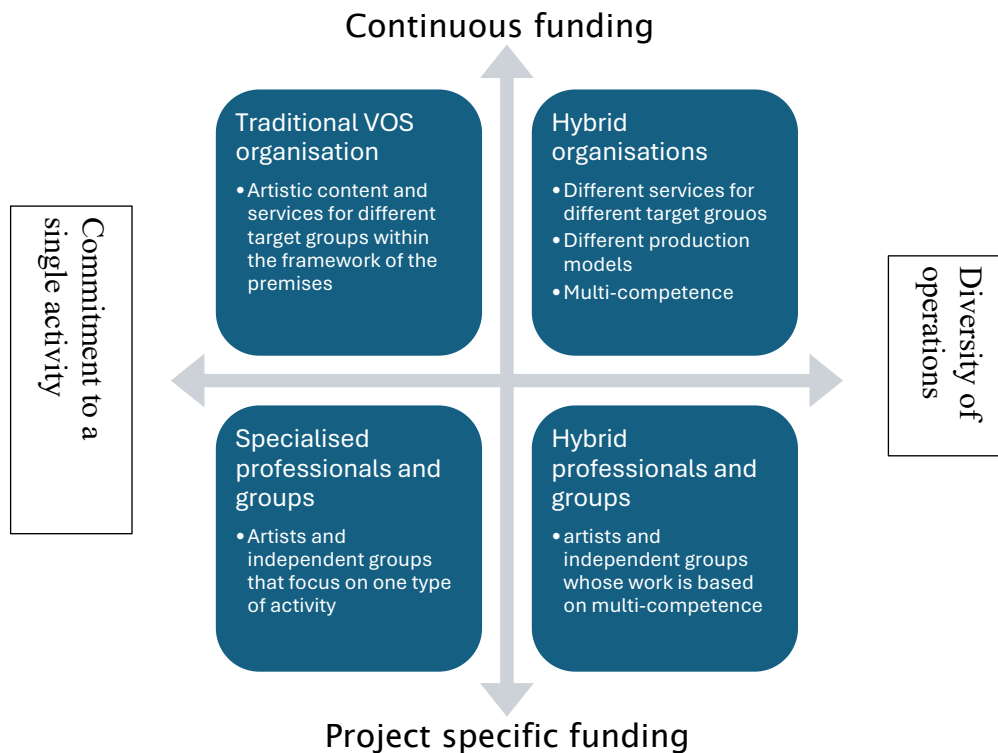


Figure 2, Hybrid art organisations framework (Korhonen, 2013).

This hybridity in overall multiplies roles and responsibilities. Artistic production, fundraising, administrative compliance, audience development, partnerships, and strategic positioning are often managed within the same small team, or due to restricted resources, by a single individual. As previously stated, the recent research confirms that artists increasingly face complex and unstable employment and income situations (Lahtinen et al., 2025). Artistic work has become more fragmented, diverse, and irregular (Santalahti et al., 2021). Self-employment continues to increase (Pärnänen & Sutela, 2018), although hybrid working arrangements have long characterised the sector (Ansio & Houni, 2013; Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020). The competence demands of individuals working in the independent sector have expanded accordingly. In addition to artistic expertise, professionals of the sector require skills in project management, grant writing, pricing, marketing, legal matters, and communication (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2023; Ruusuvirta et al., 2023; Pekkarinen et al., 2025). Artists express a need for better access to support structures and practical guidance in navigating the operating environment. Proposals include enhanced entrepreneurship education and advisory services. However,

strengthening individual skills alone cannot resolve structural constraints. Pekkarinen et al. (2025) emphasise the importance of peer support, mentoring, strategic cooperation, and active political advocacy for the independent sector.

2.1.7. Implications for Leadership in the Independent Sector

The described pressures, and the overall structures, and operational logics of the independent sector directly affect the demands for the leaders of the sector's organisations. The thinned resources (Manninen, et al. 2025), precarious environment (Pekkarinen, et al. 2022; Pekkarinen, et al. 2025) and a lack of support structures (Hirvi-Ijäs, et al., 2020) pose a great need for ingenuity, resilience and versatile skills for the leaders. The difficulty and unsustainability of the situation can be already seen in how the employers and supervisors in the independent arts sector report insufficient time and resources for recruitment, orientation, and supervisory tasks (Pekkarinen et al., 2025). In addition, the 2021 Arts and Culture Barometer (Ruusuvirta et al., 2022) indicates that more than half of young arts professionals have considered changing careers due to the field's structural situation's effects on the profession's sustainability and the lack of employment opportunities.

The sustainability of an organisation becomes closely tied to the competence and resilience of the individual leaders in addition to its environmental conditions (Byrnes, 2015). An important question is, how well-equipped are the sector's leaders to navigate their roles, and how professionals in the sector can be better prepared for leadership within structurally hybrid and precarious conditions? Which theories and models can be utilised to form a picture of the leadership in the sector?

2.2. Leadership and management in the arts

2.2.1. Theories on Leadership and Management

Theories of management and leadership began to emerge in the early twentieth century alongside industrialisation and the rise of modern organisations (Byrnes, 2015). Since then, definitions and interpretations of leadership have evolved in response to shifting economic structures, political ideologies, and changing forms of labour. Despite extensive research, there is no single, universally accepted definition of management or leadership (Huuhka, 2010). Traditionally, a conceptual distinction has developed between *management* and *leadership*. Management is commonly associated with the coordination of organisational structures, processes, resources, and performance (Katz, 1955), whereas leadership refers to the capacity to influence and guide people toward shared goals or directions (Bennis, et al., 1986; Jibreal, 2021). In practice, however, the distinction is not always clear-cut, and the concepts are frequently used interchangeably (Kotterman, 2006). In this study, both concepts are employed side by side to capture the breadth of responsibilities carried by individuals in positions of authority within arts organisations.

Early management theory was strongly shaped by Frederick W. Taylor's scientific management, which emphasised efficiency, control, and the optimisation of production systems (Byrnes, 2015). Taylorism positioned managers as planners and supervisors responsible for determining the most efficient methods of work, while employees were expected to execute predefined tasks (Huuhka, 2010; Trivedi, 2020). Although criticised for neglecting human and social dimensions, elements of Taylorist logic remain visible in contemporary performance measurement and efficiency-driven organisational practices (Huuhka, 2010). By the mid-twentieth century, the Human Relations Movement shifted attention toward the psychological and social aspects of work. Research associated with the Hawthorne studies demonstrated that employee motivation, social interaction, and informal

group dynamics influence performance (Byrnes, 2015). Subsequent behavioural and motivational theories, including McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y and Maslow's hierarchy of needs, repositioned managers as facilitators of the worker's motivation and engagement (Galani & Galanakis, 2022).

From the 1960s onward, Systems Theory and Contingency Theory introduced the idea that organisations are open systems embedded in dynamic environments (Katz & Kahn, 1966). Management effectiveness was no longer understood as universally applicable, but as context-dependent. This perspective remains central to contemporary organisational thinking: leadership and management must adapt to environmental conditions, structural complexity, and situational variables (Byrnes, 2015). Late twentieth-century developments, including globalisation and the rise of neoliberal governance, reinforced strategic management, performance monitoring, and competitive logic. (Huuhka, 2010; Byrnes, 2015). At the same time, symbolic and cultural perspectives on organisations gained popularity, emphasising leadership as sensemaking, vision-building, and the shaping of organisational culture (Byrnes, 2015; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018; Dann, 2022).

Contemporary leadership theories stress aspects of leading such as human-centredness, participation, relational competence, and sustainability (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Dann, 2022; Hilvo & Rubanovitsch, 2023; Görmezoğlu, 2024). These theories highlight distributed responsibility's effects on power dynamics, psychological safety's importance in organisational culture, and ethical accountability of the organisation and its personnel (Huuhka, 2010; Hilvo & Rubanovitsch, 2023; Kallio, 2023). In today's complex, hybrid and digital environments, effective leadership is understood as the ability to navigate uncertainty, balance multiple logics, and mobilise collective engagement (Obolensky, 2014; Byrnes, 2015; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018). This historical evolution from efficiency-oriented control to adaptive and relational leadership provides the conceptual backdrop for examining leadership in the independent arts sector.

2.2.2. What is management and leadership in the arts?

As the understanding around leadership and management has gradually increased during the last hundred years, distinctions have formed between different responsibilities, roles and tasks in the overseeing processes in different industries (Byrnes, 2015). Distinctions have emerged between supervisory leadership, administrative management, strategic direction, and operational coordination. In most sectors and industries, the organisations separate responsibilities between those who lead people and those who manage processes, finances, and structures. Arts organisations, in many ways, are not fundamentally different in this respect. A good example of this is organisations with dual leadership, common in institutions such as city theatres, where one director is responsible for the organisation's administrative leadership, the other for the artistic side. These specific meanings and emphases, operational logics and roles of leadership and management shift when placed within the arts and cultural context.

What Is Management in the Arts? In the light of the general management theory, management refers to the coordination of organisational processes, resources, and performance. According to Byrnes (2015), management in arts and cultural organisations fundamentally concerns responsibility for the work performance of one or more individuals. At a concrete level, arts and culture organisations' management typically includes tasks such as financial planning and budgeting of the organisation, fundraising and grant writing, contracting and other employer responsibilities, production coordination, marketing and audience development and administrative compliance. In institutional settings, these responsibilities are often distributed across various administrative departments, but in smaller organisations and in the independent sector, these roles and tasks frequently accumulate under one or two people (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013; Byrnes, 2015).

Then, what is leadership in the arts? In contrast to management, leadership is more closely linked to themes of influence, vision, culture, and direction. Byrnes (2015) and Dann (2022) define leadership as the ability to lead, influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute to organisational

functions and its artistic product. The aim is to support the artistic and collective creative processes through creating opportunities for individuals. Leadership in the arts includes responsibilities such as creating organisational culture, articulating artistic vision, and building shared commitment towards shared goals through motivating the creative professionals (Byrnes, 2015). This means mediating between the organisation's artistic and administrative goals on different levels and through varying time spans. Again, in established cultural institutions, leadership roles are typically distributed across multiple hierarchical levels.

The multi-layered organisational structures allow responsibilities to be distributed and specialised. Leadership is embedded within a broader administrative system, spreading the workload. As Rhine (2018) states, leadership approaches in the arts must consider the specific characteristics of each art form. Just as performers in different disciplines study field-specific techniques, managers should understand the distinct operational needs of their chosen field. In institutional settings, this often translates into formally defined leadership positions with clearer role boundaries and support systems (Byrnes, 2015). Within the independent arts sector, such hierarchical distribution of responsibilities is frequently impossible. Resource constraints and project-based funding structures often lead to the concentration of leadership, administrative, and supervisory responsibilities in the hands of a single individual or a small core group (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013; Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2016).

2.3. Leading the Independent Arts Sector

Despite the structural significance of the independent arts sector within the Finnish arts and culture field, there is very limited research that explicitly examines leadership or management in the sector's context. This study has presented previous research addressing artists' working conditions, funding structures, and sectoral precarity, but leadership as a situated practice within the independent arts sector remains underexplored. However, a closely

related body of research exists within the theory of leadership in the third sector (Tschirhart & Bielefeld, 2012; Anheier, 2014; Dann, 2022). In accordance with Oinaala and Ruokolainen (2013; 2016), the independent arts sector shares several structural and operational characteristics with the third sector's NGO, nonprofits, and civil society organisations. These factors make third sector leadership research a relevant conceptual touchpoint when discussing the leaders of the independent sector.

Theoretical literature on arts management has largely developed through the adaptation of classical business management theories to cultural organisations (e.g. Byrnes, 2015; Rhine, 2018; McDonnell, 2018). The goals for leadership revolve around the question of more efficient leadership (e.g., Byrnes, 2021; Lambert, 2021) in the arts. This approach has been particularly influential in contexts such as the United States, where arts organisations often rely heavily on earned income and private philanthropy (Byrnes, 2015; Buijze, 2021). Within this framework, leadership is commonly focused in aspects such as organisational efficiency, competitive positioning, and financial sustainability. These goals do not fully align with the operational logics of the Finnish independent arts sector, where the organisations are usually organised as non-profit associations, mostly guided by value-driven goals such as artistic exploration, cultural expression, and social engagement (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2016). In this respect, leadership in the independent arts sector shares similarities with leadership in nonprofit and third-sector organisations, where mission-driven objectives and social value creation take importance over financial growth.

2.3.1. Convergence with Third-Sector Leadership

This study argues that leadership in the independent arts sector resembles leadership in the third sector, nonprofit, or NGO contexts more than leadership in profit-oriented businesses and enterprises. As discussed in third-sector research (e.g. Malunga, 2010; Tschirhart & Bielefeld, 2012; Anheier, 2014; Dann, 2022), nonprofit organisations are oriented through value-based

operations and toward social transformation rather than economic gain. An NGO's purpose is to generate value in people's lives and communities rather than to produce financial surplus. These organisations exist because the public and the government expect them to contribute to the public good (Tschirhart & Bielefeld, 2012) – and in the context of the independent art sector – to the good of arts and culture. Leaders in the independent arts sector operate within organisations where artistic autonomy, collective identity, and long-term cultural value can outweigh economic rationality. Leadership in such contexts requires balancing mission integrity with financial survival, managing hybrid funding structures and multiple stakeholders, motivating highly committed yet often precariously positioned professionals, and navigating ethical tensions between value commitment and resource scarcity (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013).

At the same time, independent arts organisations operate within a legally regulated, and economically structured society, and under strict ethical expectations. In addition, the third sector organisations are subject to many of the same laws that restrict businesses and have additional rules that address their charitable, tax-related, and lobbying activities (Finnish Associations Act, 2016). Leadership competence therefore directly affects working-life sustainability, employee wellbeing, legal responsibility, and organisational continuity, particularly under conditions of fiscal tightening and increasing uncertainty of the sector. Given these conditions, the central question forms: *“What kind of leadership methods, modes, or styles are required in the independent arts sector's environment?”*

2.3.2. Leadership Models

Based on prior examination, the leadership models drawn directly from traditional business management may be insufficient (DiMaggio, 1987), and a purely idealistic or anti-managerial stance is unsustainable (Chong, 2009; Byrnes, 2015). Leadership in the independent arts sector must be understood as operating within a value-led hybrid environment (Korhonen, 2013; Oinaala

& Ruokolainen, 2013) and practiced accordingly. The conceptual framework of this study combines two analytical perspectives. To understand how leaders in the independent sector perceive and articulate their role, this study draws on the typology of the independent sector's operational logics (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013), which highlights structural differences within the independent arts sector. In addition, the framework includes four complementary leadership theories traditionally seen in the research context of third sector leadership: Transformational Leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006), Adaptive Leadership (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009; London, 2022), Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 2002; Dann, 2022), and Socially Sustainable Leadership (Tschirhart & Bielefeld, 2012). According to Byrnes (2021), these frameworks, in various ways, address the global art field's timely characteristics, e.g., strong value-based operations, constant change, increasing complexity, moral commitment, and long-term responsibility – and their demands for leadership.

By combining these two perspectives into a single framework, the study's analysis sections can examine sector leaders' perceptions of leadership as a structurally situated practice shaped by resource constraints, project-based work structures, and mission-driven organisational goals, amongst other sector characteristics. The following section examines the four contemporary leadership models as conceptual tools for analysing how leadership can take shape within the described context.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership emphasises leaders' ability to inspire, motivate, and develop followers beyond immediate organisational goals. This leadership style seeks to cultivate commitment, personal growth, and a shared vision within organisations (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Leaders operating within the transformational scope encourage employees' development and capacity to take on greater responsibilities by communicating a compelling vision for the organisation and aligning individual motivation with the broader organisational purpose (Dann, 2022). They use effective communication to foster inspiration and provide individualised support, aiming to guide

individuals and organisations towards higher levels of performance and collective development.

Within nonprofit and mission-driven organisations, transformational leadership can be particularly important. As Tschirhart and Bielefeld (2012) note, transformational leaders often play a key role when organisations face major transitions, redefine their mission and operational direction, and mobilise people to rethink practices and pursue new possibilities. This resonates with cultural independent sector's organisations operating in shifting environments. Transformational leadership offers a useful lens for understanding how leaders mobilise collective motivation and sustain commitment to artistic and cultural goals under uncertainty and limited resources.

Adaptive Leadership

Adaptive leadership is defined in this study as leaders' ability to maintain a timely overview of their organisation and to make rapid decisions and take action in response to unexpected situations through carefully planned interactions (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009; London, 2022). The theory's framework is designed to help leaders navigate complex challenges and foster resilience within their organisation. It emphasises leaders' flexibility and their capabilities for innovation and collaboration to address evolving issues (Kaiser, 2020). Leaders' overall intelligence, previous training, and experience affect their ability to adapt successfully to rapid change. Openness to feedback, a proactive orientation, and self-efficacy in dealing with uncertainty are important traits for an adaptive leader (Heifetz et al., 2009; London, 2022). Organisational conditions, such as resource availability, structural flexibility, and the mutual trust felt by members of the organisation towards each other and the leader, shape whether leaders' adaptive responses can be implemented successfully (London, 2022).

These characteristics resonate with the structural conditions of the independent arts sector. Organisations operating within, for example, project-based funding structures and with limited resources are vulnerable to sudden

changes in uncertain, rapidly changing environments (Manninen et al., 2025). When a funding source disappears, a production is cancelled, or a key person leaves the working group, leaders must respond and adapt. After the initial assessment of the situation and its challenges, the leader's responsibility is to facilitate guidance and behaviour that help the organisation adapt and learn. This can involve continuous adjustment of organisational strategies, values, beliefs, working methods, collaboration structures, and artistic production models, making the theory a relevant perspective for analysing leadership practices within the independent arts sector. Changes occur constantly in hybrid, complex environments such as arts and culture organisations (Northouse, 2019). The key to successful adaptation lies in leaders and followers being aware of the change and its elements, which in turn increases the organisation's capacity to adapt to the change (Eichholz, 2017).

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership, as conceptualised by Greenleaf (2002) and Dann (2022), challenges the traditional assumption that leadership is primarily based on authority and control. The theory's core is the idea that effective leadership begins with a motivation to serve others, and that the leader should prioritise the needs, development opportunities, and wellbeing of their followers. By shifting the leader away from the centre of organisational power, it becomes possible to empower others and support the collective growth of the organisation (Greenleaf, 2002; Dann, 2022; Görmezoğlu, 2024).

The key characteristics of a servant leader include the skills to listen and convey empathy, awareness of self and others, and a tendency towards stewardship. Through these features and a commitment to people's development, the leader can foster strong community building in various environments. The servant leadership approach emphasises the relational, ethical, and value-based dimensions of leadership, integrating the rational, emotional, and moral aspects of organisational life. (Görmezoğlu, 2024)

Leaders who lead through the servant model have been linked to positive organisational outcomes, including increased job satisfaction,

organisational commitment, trust, and team performance (Bambale et al., 2012; Kool & Van Dierendonck, 2012; Harwiki, 2016; Görmezoğlu, 2024). As such, the servant leadership model is relevant in mission-driven and value-oriented organisations, including the non-profit and cultural sectors.

Sustainable Leadership

Sustainable leadership is an umbrella concept for leadership approaches that aim to ensure the long-term well-being and viability of an organisation's individuals, their surrounding communities, and the environment. The leadership model is connected to the broader Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) framework for sustainable development. The ESG framework emphasises the balanced consideration of ecological, economic, cultural, and social dimensions of sustainability (UN, 2015; UN-association of Finland, 2024). This study examines sustainable leadership theory from the perspective of social sustainability: human well-being, participation, equality, and the conditions that enable individuals and communities to flourish.

In organisational contexts, socially sustainable leadership is associated with human-centred leadership practices. Research highlights that socially sustainable leadership is grounded in the understanding that people are an organisation's most important resource and that employees perform better when they experience meaningful work, appropriate challenges, and overall wellbeing (Huuhka, 2010; Hakanen, 2011; Hilvo & Rubanovitsch, 2023). The theory also emphasises the role of organisational culture. Leaders shape organisational values and working environments through everyday practices, influencing whether organisational values are genuinely reflected in daily work and interactions (Mäki, 2017; Huuhka, 2010).

Within the cultural and creative sectors, the need for socially sustainable leadership has attracted growing attention. Preliminary research on leadership culture in the cultural and event sector suggests that socially sustainable leadership is hindered by fragmented work structures, excessive workloads, limited resources, and a lack of formal leadership training among leaders. Strengthening leadership competences and developing organisational support

structures have been identified as key steps towards improving working conditions and leadership practices in the field (Heininen & Hakkila, 2025). These concerns align with the structural realities of the independent arts sector (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013). Leaders play a crucial role in supporting collaborators' wellbeing, maintaining sustainable working practices, and ensuring the long-term continuity of artistic organisations and communities.

3. Research Design and Methods

3.1. Research Design and Methodological Framework

This study adopts a qualitative, exploratory research design situated within an interpretive, phenomenological–hermeneutic framework. The study’s overall purpose is to examine how leaders working in the Finnish independent arts sector perceive and articulate their roles within their organisations. The unit of analysis is leaders’ meaning-making and role construction in relation to leadership, competence, responsibility, and the individual support needs.

According to Myers (2013), a qualitative approach is appropriate when the aim is to explore how individuals interpret their experiences and construct meaning within specific organisational and social contexts. The qualitative tradition enables a deep examination of subjective perspectives and situated understandings, in this case through interview data. Eskola and Suoranta (1998) state that qualitative inquiry emphasises the richness and contextuality of data, prioritising depth of insight over the material’s numerical volume. In the context of this study, the focus on leaders’ own perceptions of their roles calls for a methodological approach capable of capturing reflective accounts and contextual complexity. The study is exploratory, as leadership practices within the independent arts sector have received relatively limited attention from a leadership perspective. Qualitative research is particularly suitable in such contexts, where the aim is to generate nuanced understanding rather than statistically generalisable conclusions (Myers, 2013).

The study’s epistemology is grounded in an interpretive paradigm which assumes social reality being constructed through interaction, language, and meaning-making processes instead existing as an objective entity, independent of human interpretation (Myers, 2013). Leadership is understood as a socially and discursively constructed phenomenon shaped by organisational structures, resource conditions, and professional identities.

The lived experiences and interpretations of the study’s themes are emphasised by the phenomenological–hermeneutic orientation. From a phenomenological perspective, the study seeks to attend to how leaders

experience and describe their roles in their own terms. Hermeneutically, these accounts are understood as interpretations of experience that require further interpretation by the researcher (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). The analytical process involves a dialogical movement between participants' accounts, existing theoretical concepts, and the researcher's own pre-understandings. Reflexivity and is an integral component of the methodological framework and the ethics of the study.

The research questions guide the methodological design of the study. They informed the selection of using semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method and thematic analysis as the analytical strategy. It allows interviewees to articulate their experiences in their own words and to define what they consider meaningful in relation to the research themes (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998). Compared to structured interviews or survey questionnaires, semi-structured interviews enable richer and more nuanced data production (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara, 2009). Fully structured formats, in contrast, tend to limit insight into how respondents interpret questions or construct their answers (Leinonen, Otonkorpi-Lehtoranta & Heiskanen, 2017).

Semi-structured interviews were formed through a predefined set of themes and guiding questions. The method allows flexibility in the order, phrasing, and depth of discussion during the interview situation (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2001; Eskola & Suoranta, 2000). In this study, each participant was asked largely the same thematic questions, but the sequence and emphasis varied according to the flow of the ongoing conversation. This ensured that all core research themes were addressed while allowing participants to foreground their own interpretations and lived experiences in the discussion. The interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom and recorded with participants' consent. Recording the interviews enabled the formation of detailed transcriptions of the discussions and later analysis of longer, reflective responses. Brief notes were taken during each interview to accompany the recordings. Preparation for the interviews included familiarisation with the research themes and the participants' professional contexts, which supported the formulation of follow-up questions and adaptive probing during the conversations.

3.2. Data Collection and Sampling Strategy

The empirical material of the study consists of six semi-structured interviews conducted in autumn 2025 with professionals working in responsible positions within the Finnish independent arts sector. The sampling strategy was purposive, with participants selected based on predefined criteria derived from the study's research questions.

The first selection criterion was organisational. The participants had to be working in organisations operating outside the Finnish statutory state subsidy system (VOS). Due to the sector's structural diversity (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013), no restrictions were imposed on the organisational model or the field of art. An exception was made for the independent music sector due to its structural and operational characteristics (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013).

The second criterion concerned the interviewee's role. The participants were required to hold positions in their organisations that involved formal or informal responsibility for leadership and/or management. This inclusive approach was based on the structural realities of the independent arts sector, where leadership responsibilities may pile up to one person, be distributed across roles, and may not correspond to conventional hierarchical titles (Pekkala & Salomaa, 2012).

Recruitment of interviewees was conducted via an email list and a registration form. The list was acquired from the Sustainable future for the cultural sector – Study and service module for continuous learning – project by the Open Campus of the University of the Arts. The list included multiple independent art sector artists and professionals that were likely to fit the research criteria. As the individuals responded to the recruitment call to participate in the interview, a preliminary examination was done on the person's current role and position in their organisation to make sure they fitted the set criteria. After confirming that they were suitable for the study, an information package containing the study's objectives and themes, the interview questions, and a proposal for an interview time was sent to

candidates. Through this process the number of interviewees was narrowed down from ten interested individuals to six. This final group of interviewees consisted of individuals working as Artistic Directors, Executive Directors, and Executive Producers, amongst other responsible roles, described in more detail in the Table 1.

The study's intention was to capture the diversity of leadership positions within structurally varied independent organisations. The independent arts sector is characterised by interdisciplinary collaboration, overlapping professional roles, and hybrid organisational forms (Kokkonen, et al. 2002; Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013; Korhonen, 2013; Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2016). Distinct disciplinary categorisation would therefore not have accurately reflected the sector's operational realities. The interviewed organisations represented performing arts, dance, visual arts, and festival production. Five out of six organisations operated actively across disciplinary boundaries.

In the beginning of each interview, I introduced myself, the goals of this research, its research questions, and the main themes under examination. In addition, I made sure I had their full consent to participate in the study and to record the interview. The interviewees were also given the possibility to end the interview at any time if they wished to do. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, with a maximum duration of one and a half hours. The interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom due to the geographical dispersion of participants across Finland and the time-constrained working conditions. Remote interviewing provided logistical flexibility and enabled audio recording for accurate transcription and analysis. The number of interviews was limited to six in accordance with the scope of the thesis study and the aims of the research questions.

Table 1 summarises the organisational characteristics and details of the six interviewees' cases included in the study. All interviewees were working in leading roles. The organisations represented in the sample were primarily registered associations, a common organisational form within the independent arts sector. One organisation was organised as a cooperative. Two organisations focused mainly on theatre arts, one on visual arts, one on

an art film festival and two on a wider range of performing arts. The organisations ranged from small organisations with around five people to larger organisations with more than twenty people. The interviewees themselves held a range of overlapping titles, including artistic directors, executive directors, producers, and board-level roles. In all the cases, the individuals simultaneously occupied multiple leadership positions.

	Art form	Organisation type	Size of the organisation	Interviewee's role
Interviewee 1	Theatre	Cooperative	>10 people	Artistic Director, Chair of the board, Director, Producer
Interviewee 2	Theatre	Registered association	>20 people	Artistic Director, Executive Director, Director, Producer
Interviewee 3	Visual arts	Registered association	>5 people	Executive Director, Producer
Interviewee 4	Festivals	Registered association	>10 people	Executive Director, Producer
Interviewee 5	Dance	Registered association	>20 people	Artistic Director, Choreographer, Producer, Chair of the board
Interviewee 6	Performing arts	Registered association	>20 people	Artistic Director, Director, Chair of the board

Table 1. An overview of the interviewee's roles and organisations

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed utilising transcription software alongside more traditional methods. Transcription was conducted using locally operating transcription software to ensure data security. The generated transcripts were reviewed multiple times while listening to the original recordings, and any transcription inaccuracies were manually corrected. In addition, any identifying details of the person and the

organisation they represent were removed to anonymise the material during this phase. Minor linguistic adjustments were also made to all transcriptions to enhance the interview's readability without altering their meaning. The transcriptions were sent to the interviewees for confirmation. The interviewees were given the opportunity to propose edits or redactions to the transcripts if they felt it necessary. One interviewee wished that a part of the text would be redacted, which might reveal their identity and organisation. No other participants requested edits to the transcriptions.

3.3 Thematic Analysis

The interview material was analysed using thematic analysis. The method was selected due to its flexibility and suitability for identifying patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis allows systematic examination of participants' interpretations and remains compatible with an interpretive research framework. The analysis followed the six-phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. familiarisation with the data
2. initial coding
3. searching for themes
4. reviewing themes
5. defining and naming themes
6. producing the report

Familiarisation and Transcription

Following the transcription, the material was read multiple times to gain an overall understanding of the content. Initial notes were made regarding recurring topics, patterns of expression, and preliminary analytical observations.

Initial Coding

The first stage of the analysis involved systematic coding of the interview material. Coding was conducted manually by first highlighting segments of text that were relevant to the main and sub research questions. These codes captured meaningful units of data related to leadership roles, responsibilities, competence, challenges, support structures, and contextual conditions of the independent arts sector.

The coding process was primarily data-driven, or inductive, meaning that codes were generated from the material rather than imposed through a predefined theoretical framework (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018; Vilkkä, 2021). However, the research questions provided structure that guided attention toward leadership-related meanings in the transcriptions.

Theme Development

Codes that related to the research aims and questions were grouped into broader candidate themes. These themes were reviewed against the full interview material to ensure internal coherence and conceptual distinctiveness (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this phase, some codes were merged, refined, or reorganised through an iterative process between the previous stages to strengthen analytical clarity.

The final themes represent patterned meanings across the material concerning how leaders construct their roles, evaluate their competence, describe structural constraints, and articulate support needs within the independent arts sector.

The analysis resulted in four main themes that structure the findings of this study. The first theme, pathways to leadership, examines how interviewees entered leadership roles, often through unplanned or necessity-driven processes. The second theme, roles, positions, and responsibilities, explores the hybrid and overlapping nature of leadership tasks within independent arts organisations. The third theme, leadership competences, focuses on the skills and capabilities required to navigate these roles,

including relational, adaptive, and organisational competences. The fourth theme, support needs, addresses the gaps in training, peer support, and structural conditions that shape leaders' capacity to perform their roles. These overarching themes form the structure and basis of the findings chapter.

Interpretive Orientation

The analysis process moved between individual accounts, emerging themes, the previous analysis stages, and the broader theoretical framework to ensure that the research process stayed consistent with the study's phenomenological-hermeneutic orientation. Participants' descriptions were treated as interpretations of their lived experiences, while the researcher's role involved further interpretive engagement with the given accounts (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). Research's reflexivity was maintained throughout the analytical process to critically assess the possible effects of any prior knowledge, experiences, theoretical orientation, bias, and professional background and how they may influence the interpretation. Direct quotations from the interviews are used in the findings chapter, as they help to illustrate, specify, and clarify the themes that emerged through the analytical process.

3.4 Ethical Considerations and Researcher Positionality

Ethical considerations were addressed throughout all stages of the research process, from participant recruitment to data storage, analysis process, and reporting. The study follows the general principles of research ethics, including informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and responsible data management.

Prior to the interviews, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the intended use of the gathered interview material. They were informed that the interviews would be recorded and transcribed for research purposes and that they could withdraw from the study at any point without providing a reason. All

participants gave their informed consent to participate to the research before the interviews were conducted.

To protect participants' anonymity, any identifying details were removed during the transcription process. Names of the participating individuals, their organisations, and specific contextual references that could reveal identities were retracted or generalised. Due to the relatively small size and the high level of possible networking of the independent arts sector in Finland, particular attention was paid to ensuring that descriptions of detailed organisational size, artistic contents, or funding sources could not be directly traced back to specific actors. However, analytically relevant contextual information, such as organisational type, the rough number of employees, and the interviewee's leadership role, was retained to preserve the interpretive integrity of the findings.

All audio recordings and transcripts were stored on a separate external hard drive accessible only to the researcher. Transcription was conducted using locally operating software that did not transmit data to external servers to support data protection and confidentiality.

In the study, I as a researcher, tried to acknowledge my positionality and possible biases towards the research topic. During the writing process of this thesis, I actively operated within the broader arts and cultural field in Finland, and thus a complete detachment from the research context was not possible or even desirable within an interpretive framework. Instead, the goal was to maintain reflexivity throughout the research and writing process of this thesis. This involved continuous reflection on how my prior professional knowledge, personal experiences, and theoretical commitments may shape both the framing of interview questions and my interpretation of the interview material. The author's own background within the arts field has likely influenced both the interpretation of the material and sensitivity to the challenges described by the interviewees. This positionality enabled a nuanced understanding of the sector's leader's experiences but also required critical reflection to avoid over-identification with participants' perspectives. The phenomenological-hermeneutic orientation of the study recognises that analysis is inherently

interpretive and that meaning is co-constructed between participant accounts and researcher interpretation (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018).

Power relations were also considered in the interview situation. Although participants held leadership positions within their organisations, the research context positioned the researcher as a user of power through being the one defining the research agenda and analytical framing. The goal was to create an easy going, conversational and respectful interview atmosphere, allowing the participants to articulate their experiences openly and without evaluative judgement. The opportunity to review and approve the transcripts supported the study's transparency and participant agency.

Generative AI tools (OpenAI, 2026) were utilised in the research process to support language editing, structuring of text, and refinement of academic phrasing. The use of AI was restricted to technical and linguistic assistance, sparring of ideas, and translating. AI tools did not contribute to the formulation of research questions, data collection, analysis, or interpretation of findings. The analytical decisions, interpretations, and conclusions are the author's own and the outputs generated by AI tools were critically reviewed and edited by the author before use in this study.

3.5 Limitations of the Study

Like all qualitative research, this study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. These limitations relate primarily to the size and scope of the empirical material, the contextual specificity of the research setting and interview material, and the interpretive nature of qualitative analysis.

First, the number of interviews conducted for the study is relatively small. The empirical material consists of six interviews with leaders working in organisations within the Finnish independent arts sector. This limited sample size does not allow broad generalisations about the sector. Still, it enables analytical depth and contextual understanding through qualitative research methods (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998). The research on this topic is still at a very early stage. For this reason, it is important to gather initial insights

and perspectives from the practitioners of the sectors to be beginning forming a preliminary understanding of the subject.

Second, the interview material represents only part of the broader and highly diverse independent arts sector. The interviewed organisations were primarily active in theatre, performing arts, visual arts, dance, and festival production. Other artistic fields, such as music, literature, film, design, circus, or digital creative industries, are not directly represented in the material. However, the independent arts sector is characterised by interdisciplinary collaboration, as many organisations operate across multiple artistic domains. In addition, according to Oinaala & Ruokolainen (2013) the different art forms of the sector share broadly similar operating models and organisational structures, which allows for certain comparative perspectives, also in this study. The findings should still be understood more as illustrative of leadership experiences within a segment of the sector, not as a comprehensive overview.

The interpretive nature of the research design introduces limitations as well. The use of qualitative analysis inevitably involves the researcher's own interpretations of participants' accounts. To address this possibility, it was important to maintain reflexivity and methodological transparency throughout the research and writing process. Different researchers might emphasise different aspects of the material or construct alternative thematic interpretations. This does not necessarily weaken the validity of the study but reflects the epistemological foundations of interpretive qualitative research process (Myers, 2013).

Finally, the study focuses on leaders' own perceptions of their roles and competences, which can pose a problem regarding the generalisation of the study's results. The findings represent subjective interpretations of leadership performance. Future research could complement this perspective by examining leadership practices through additional, wider and complementary data sources that approach the subject from multiple perspectives.

4. Empirical findings and analysis

This study is based on six semi-structured interviews that were conducted with leaders of organisations operating in the Finnish independent arts sector. This interview material provides qualitative insights into the organisational conditions, leadership roles, and everyday experiences of the leaders within the sector. In this chapter, the study's empirical findings are presented. First chapter outlines the profiles of the organisations and interviewees and is followed by an analysis of leadership experiences and perceptions emerging from the data.

4.1. The Organisations

The interviewees' organisations varied in terms of structure, size, location, funding, field of art, and number of paid employees. All organisations operated locally and on a non-profit basis, and were primarily organised as registered associations, one being a co-operative. All organisations had a value-based operation logic and limited, or too little resources to practice their core functions.

Three of the organisations were recently established and actively shaping their operations. The other three were more established and had operated for over a decade. They represented five different art forms within the field: visual arts (1), performing arts (1), theatre (2), dance (1), and festivals (1). All but one of the organisations had done or is actively engaging in multidisciplinary collaboration with different art forms. The organisations operated in both urban and regional contexts across Finland. Two are situated in the wider capital region, one on the southern coast of the Uusimaa region, one in the region of Central Finland, and one in the region of North Karelia.

Four out of six organisations operated through hybrid funding structures combining public grants, project-based funding, donations, self-generated income, and significant amounts of unpaid labour. The utilised funding instruments included Finnish state arts funding bodies (e.g. Taike),

private foundations (e.g. KONE, Finnish Culture Fund, Svenska Kulturfonden), and municipal or regional cultural funding. Two of the organisations had received funding through project-based initiatives, including Creative Europe and multi-year operational private and public funding. Three out of four organisations had faced decreases in the received public funding during the past two years, which forced them to adapt their operations and find alternative sources of income. One of the organisations would have had to close its operations due to the cuts, but it managed to secure multi-year EU funding, which secured its operations. The other organisation was forced to downsize their operations through change negotiations and decreasing yearly productions. Two of the organisations operated only through self-generated income, donations, and unpaid labour.

Four of the organisations operated with one to two full-time employees. They also employed a varying group of periodically paid part-time freelance artists or other art and culture professionals for their productions. The festival organisation's team temporarily expanded to 10–15 members annually, including paid personnel and volunteers. The two organisations that had no external funding consisted of around 20 active professional-level members engaging in their activities on a production-by-production basis as volunteers.

The organisations emphasised value-driven operations, created experimental art content, and had a goal for artist-led, sustainable, and inclusive practices. All interviewees underlined the importance of developing alternative and sustainable working cultures, promoting collaborative and inclusive practices, and a need for maintaining artistic autonomy. Three of the organisations engaged actively in social and political activities, creating spaces for community-based work, advocating for arts and culture, and supporting participation in public discourse and activism.

The organisations reflect the structural diversity of the independent arts sector and illustrate its hybrid conditions, effects of resource constraints, and value-driven operations.

4.1.2. Operational Logics of the Organisations

The organisations of the study fit the framework of the independent art sector's organisational operational logic types (Established Employers, Driven by Conviction, Agile Internationals, and Productions) by Oinaala and Ruokolainen (2013). The framework divides independent sector organisations into four types of operational logic based on their organisational structure, funding stability, employment practices, and economics. They functioned outside the Finnish statutory state subsidy system as value-driven, non-profit registered associations or co-operatives. The differences begin to appear when examining operational stability, administration, funding, and employment.

Four out of six organisations in total received outside funding and thus were able to employ 1 to 2 full-time employees working in administrative or production tasks. Additionally, they employed a varying number of part-time freelancer artists and culture workers. Still, the employees reported having to frequently work more hours than what was being compensated. Especially one of the theatres reported a disproportionately large number of overtime hours, and the festival relied heavily on volunteer work in addition to hired employees. These four organisations had their own venue or other place of operations in use.

Three out of these four organisations had operated relatively steadily for over a decade and were characterised as established and well-known actors in their local area. They had continuous programming throughout the year, and to keep the program running, they aimed to employ their members systematically through productions and related activities. Two of the organisations operated as theatres, produced one to four premieres annually, maintained a repertoire of previously produced pieces, and hosted guest performances. One of them had had their own venue for five years through a collaboration with a local cultural centre. The other theatre had operated as a nomad organisation until recently receiving a grant for opening their own venue, which was not yet operational at the time of the interviews. One of the four organisations receiving funding operated in their own gallery space where they created and showcased their art, the works of others, and held events.

These three organisations received varying levels of external, continuous funding from their municipality, city, the EU, and/or private foundations to maintain their activities. The organisations showed operational logics that aligned closely with the Established Employer logic (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013). They had - or had started to form - their operations in their own venue, their programming and operations were continuous, and the organisations were able to hire employees.

The fourth organisation receiving external funding differed in terms of organisational maturity and amount of volunteer work. It had been operational for two years but had developed a locally recognised festival concept and successfully produced two iterations of the event. The organisation had received numerous grants and built a wide range of partnerships and collaborations that supported the festival's operations. Still, the festival recruited multiple volunteers to help organise the annual event. The festival's background organisation had their own office, but the event area had to be rented from a partner. The organisation represented operational logics fitting the Established Employer type, but due to its early stage, lack of own venue, and reliance towards partnerships, and the amount of volunteer work, it also resembled the Agile Internationals -without the touring aspect - and the Driven by Conviction type logics (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013).

The two organisations that had not received any external funding at the time of the interviews were most closely aligned with the operational logics of Driven by Conviction and Production (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013). The organisations had been operating for approximately three years without securing funding and, as a result, had no capacity to employ staff. Both organisations revolved around a few key artistic leaders, with other core members participating regularly across productions. The organisations had a strong conviction and a strategy to build up continuous activities and had established formal structures as associations. Still, their practices remained dependent on short-term project cycles and informal arrangements. Financial precarity strongly shaped their operational conditions. Artistic work was rarely compensated or only paid if there were any residual funds after production

costs. Similarly, they lacked access to permanent spaces, requiring reliance on temporary venues, partnerships, and ad hoc solutions.

4.1.3. Categorising the organisations

These findings show that operational logics in the independent arts sector are not mutually exclusive, and they can overlap and combine in practice. Even the material's relatively well-resourced organisations depended on characteristics of Driven by Conviction and Project types. Based on the analysis, all four operational logics identified by Oinaala and Ruokolainen (2013) were present across the organisations. Five out of six organisations operated through hybrid combinations of logics, which shifted depending on available funding, organisational maturity, and production conditions.

The three more established organisations - the theatres and the visual arts gallery - aligned primarily with the Established Employer logic. The theatre's operational logic also showed elements of other logics, such as project-based work and unpaid labour, and one of them had only shortly begun a process for acquiring their own venue. According to Oinaala and Ruokolainen (2013) state the amount of unpaid and paid labour of Established Employer types can be difficult to quantify, but the organisations have comparatively higher structural capacity for regular employment and long-term planning. There was still great variation due to shifts in funding and operational priorities, and only the visual arts gallery showed clear Established Employer operational logic type.

The festival exhibited characteristics of the Established Employer model through its ability to secure funding, hire two full-time employees and organise large-scale productions. At the same time its operations had aspects of the Driven by Conviction and Agile Internationals logics through reliance on partnerships, volunteer labour, and flexible production structures.

The two organisations operating without external funding most closely resembled the Driven by Conviction and Production-based logics, due to

strong artistic commitment, voluntary labour, and project-based activity aspects.

All interviewee organisations can be categorised through their primary and secondary operational logics as seen in table 2. The hybridity in operational logics questions a linear understanding of organisational development, where organisations would move from less stable to more stable forms. The different operational logics coexisted in the organisations regardless of their level of institutionalisation.

Interviewee organisation	Primary Logic	Secondary & Overlapping Logics
I1, theatre	Established Employer	Driven by Conviction
I2, theatre	Established Employer	Production & Agile Internationals
I3, visual arts	Established Employer	-
I4, festival	Established Employer	Driven by Conviction & Agile Internationals
I5, dance	Driven by Conviction	Production
I6, performing arts	Driven by Conviction	Production

Table 2. Operational logics across the interviewee organisations

4.2. Leadership practices under conditions of precarity

During the time of the interviews, all six interviewees held leadership roles in organisations operating outside the Finnish statutory state subsidy system. Due to the small number of interviewee participants, the leaders are presented in this study using anonymised identifiers (I1–I6), alongside references to their respective artistic fields.

4.2.1. Educational background

The interviewees' educational backgrounds varied, but a clear pattern emerged: none of the interviewees had initially obtained a degree specifically focused on leadership or management in general or in the arts prior to entering leadership positions within the field. Four interviewees held master's degrees: I1, I2 & I3 in arts-related professions, and I4 in economics. I5 and I6 had completed an arts education degree at a folk high school level¹.

“When I started studying, I had no idea I would end up in this kind of role, or that I would need leadership skills at all.”

- I1

“I never actually received any formal leadership training before.”

- I2

I1 and I2, with a master's degree in arts, worked in theatre organisations, and I3 worked in a visual arts gallery. They experienced that their education gave them expertise in their art profession, but it did not prepare them for their current positions. Only I4 working for the festival organisation stated that their master's degree in economics provided a base of skills and understanding in management and administration.

The I1, I2, and I3 with arts master's degrees had addressed their need for more education after assuming their leadership roles and had engaged in additional studies.

¹ Folk high schools (kansanopisto in Finnish) are liberal adult education institutions that provide both general and vocational education as a part of the Nordic adult education system (Laki vapaasta sivistystyöstä 632/1998). The folk high schools operate outside the formal degree system but may offer accredited study modules.

“...and after that (initial art degree), I took the Pyörre training program², because I felt that in my own profession, no one really prepares you for leadership roles.”

- 13

These continuous studies included shorter training programmes focusing in areas of business management, administration, and leadership in the arts. The motivation for applying to these additional studies was to better understand organisational processes, manage complex structures, lead personnel, and have tools to make decisions within organisational hierarchies.

I4, with their background in economics, had also applied to pursue a master's degree in arts management with the intention of further strengthening their leadership skills in the arts.

I2, I5 & I6 were positive about the idea on educating themselves further but experienced that there were not enough time or resources to begin a time-consuming study process while acting in their roles. I3, working in the visual arts, had to eventually drop their studies in Leadership and project management for independent art professionals due to these same reasons.

“I would like to study more, but the past couple of years have been so busy that I simply haven't had the time.”

- 13

I5 and I6, who had a folk high school educational background prior to their leadership roles, shared leader competences that had developed primarily through practice. Their leadership was based on hands-on experience, peer learning, and self-reflection within their organisations. Both interviewees described their approach to leadership grounded in learning through growing.

² A study module by the University of the Arts Helsinki on Leadership and project management for independent art professionals.

“I’ve approached this with the idea that I’m learning as I go... reflecting on what I do, what I’m learning from my experiences, and the feedback from my community, colleagues, and collaborators.”

- 15

Both I5 and I6 demonstrated a strong awareness of their own skill gaps in areas such as networking, financial management, and organisational planning.

Overall, the findings reveal a gap among interviewees between their formal arts education, the hybrid roles they occupy within the independent arts sector, and the sector's structure. Most of the interviewees had been educated initially as artists but still found themselves in leading positions and responsible for their organisations. The leaders entered their positions without the necessary managerial tools and were required to develop these competences retrospectively, in challenging conditions. Their leadership capacity was developed unsystematically through practice, necessity, and on the individual's own responsibility.

4.2.2. Pathways to leadership

Two distinct thematic pathways into leadership emerged from the interview material. The first – themed as the unexpected path – involved entering leadership roles from outside organisations through open recruitment or informal networks without fully knowing the scope of the position. The second pathway – themed as the from founders to leaders path – developed through founding organisations or collectives, where leadership responsibilities emerged gradually as part of building and sustaining artistic activity.

The Unexpected Path

Interviewees who entered leadership positions through recruitment processes described their transition into their roles as largely unplanned. I2 – leader in a theatre organisation – and I3 – leader in visual arts gallery – shared the experience of applying for an open leadership position in an arts organisation

with no previous experience or education in similar tasks. They applied for these positions primarily to secure more stable working conditions while continuing their artistic practices, not out of an explicit interest in leadership. In both cases, the full scope of the role became apparent quickly after entering the position.

“Before taking on the role of gallery director, I didn’t really have any experience in leadership roles.”

- 13

“...it was actually a condition for me when applying for the job that I would be able to continue doing artistic work alongside it.”

- 12

12 thought that they had applied for a position as an artistic director but suddenly found themselves signing a contract for starting as the theatre’s director.

“When I saw the job announcement, I actually thought I was applying only for the position of artistic director. It was only at the contract stage that I realised the role was actually that of theatre director, meaning that about half of the work was artistic direction and the other half was executive management. And I have no experience in executive management.”

- 12

“They had mentioned the position to me, so I called them - they were working in PR at the time - and told them I was interested. What appealed to me was the idea that I could combine the job with my own creative work, so that I wouldn’t have to work 37.5 hours a week but could work less and have more time for my own projects.”

- 13

At the time of I3's application for the position, the scope of the role was not clearly defined, and the position was initially presented under a different title due to ongoing organisational and legal complications. They described their transition into the position as challenging due to the lack of onboarding, unclear expectations, and organisational instability.

The lack of efficient onboarding for their position was a shared experience between I2 and I3 as well. As they tried to take on their new tasks they noticed how the role included much more responsibilities than what the initial working hours and salary level suggested.

I2 highlighted the challenges of combining theatre's artistic and managerial responsibilities within the same role, particularly due to conflicting demands for flexibility and focus.

"The executive management work requires constant responsiveness, whereas artistic work requires concentration and time. That combination is not really functional, and I have been quite overloaded."

- I2

Regardless of their beginnings, both I2 and I3 had remained in their roles and developed themselves and their positions over time. Both described how they had adapted to their demanding roles through sometimes unsustainable amounts of hard work and trial and error. They both had also recognised certain rewarding aspects of the work, such as collaboration with different actors of the field, networking, and the ability to support other artists. Still, their path as leaders was accompanied by the feeling of constant inadequacy from ending up in an unnecessarily challenging position without the intent to do so. Their path shows an example of an unplanned entry into leadership roles. This unprepared beginning had led to situations where the individual was left responsible for acquiring the needed skills alone, and negotiating between unclear expectations in an unfamiliar environment, without strong previous competence in leadership.

From Founders to leaders

“I don’t really see myself as a very good leader. I never really even thought that I would become a leader.”

- 14

The second pathway into leadership emerged through 11, 14, 15 and 16, founding their own organisations or collectives. They described establishing these structures primarily to enable their artistic work. In their cases, founding an organisation was perceived as the only available way to create employment or bring an idea to life within the field. None of them strived to end up in their current positions and had not prepared for the demands of the role. This meant learning the ropes as the organisations grew.

“I created the organisation, and at the same time, I was learning how to run it.”

- 15

Leadership responsibilities developed gradually as organisational activities expanded, and founders assumed increasingly demanding tasks: e.g. coordinating productions, securing funding, and managing collaborative work. Over time, these responsibilities extended to include managerial, administrative, and strategic tasks, increasing the complexity of the role. Still, the initial artistic work did not fade, and their roles began to become more hybrid.

The early stages of this pathway were characterised by uncertainty and lack of preparedness. Without prior training or experience, leadership was initially approached through trial and error. Interviewees described experiencing pressure to meet perceived expectations of leadership, which at times led to overcompensation and difficulty in managing responsibilities.

“I thought a leader has to know everything and never show uncertainty... I was overwhelmed and sometimes didn’t behave very well because I was just panicking.”

- 11

Leadership was described as an iterative process of learning, navigating uncertainty, reflecting on one’s own practice, delegating responsibilities, and adopting more collaborative and adaptive approaches.

“The more experience I get, the more I can say to people that I don’t know - and that we can figure it out together with the team.”

- 15

If possible, they developed their skill set through additional education. Interacting and learning with and from peers was also brought up as an important method in growing into their roles.

The founding members carried the burden of starting an organisation and sustaining it without really knowing how to do it. As a result, their leadership became a necessary role so that the artistic activity could be maintained. Their pathway shows how leadership in the independent arts sector can emerge from artistic initiatives that try to answer the question of unemployment in the field.

Crossing paths

Both thematic pathways shared a common pattern despite their different entry points to their roles: leadership was assumed without formal preparation or explicit intention, with the primary motivation across all interviewees being artistic work. The leadership responsibilities and demands emerged because of organisational needs for their positions.

All leaders described having learned leadership by doing, often through a long struggle. Their leadership in the independent arts sector was shaped by initial insecurities and feelings of inadequacy in the face of shifting and

unclear organisational conditions and necessity. In both groups, the interviewees were required to assume laborious hybrid combinations of artistic and managerial responsibilities without sufficient training and clearly defined role expectations.

These cases give an example of how leadership in the independent arts sector might emerge unexpectedly. The leadership was characterised by hybridity, uncertainty, insufficient competence and a need for continuous learning and support. The interviewee's pathways to leadership positions form the basis for their leadership experiences regarding their skills, faced challenges, and further needs for education and support in the following sections.

4.2.3. Leadership roles

When asked to describe their formal positions, interviewees outlined combinations of overlapping titles instead of clearly defined roles. In all but one of the cases, these titles did not correspond to specialised or bounded responsibilities. All leader positions encompassed a wide range of tasks, including artistic work, organisational management, and everyday operational duties.

Interviewees consistently described their roles as hybrid, combining artistic, managerial, and leadership responsibilities without clear boundaries within a single position. The distribution of tasks shifted in response to project demands, available resources, and changing organisational conditions.

Although the interviewees held differing formal titles, their accounts suggested that their leadership roles in the independent arts sector clustered around three broader configurations: hybrid leadership, collaborative leadership, and volunteer leadership. These configurations varied in how artistic, managerial, and operational responsibilities were distributed. All were shaped by limited resources, broad task demands, and the need to balance artistic aims with organisational sustainability. These thematic roles should not be understood as fully separate or fixed categories. They have emerged

from recurring patterns through which leadership roles were organised and experienced in the interview material.

Hybrid leadership role

Hybrid leadership roles were characterised by the concentration of artistic, managerial, and operational responsibilities within a single individual. I1, I2 and I3 carried the responsibilities for the organisation's artistic direction, management, and day-to-day production work simultaneously.

"I do everything... from keeping the space clean to installing exhibitions."

- I3

I1 held an official title as the theatre's artistic director, but when asked about the position in their own words, this title encompassed multiple artistic and managerial responsibilities. In practice, their role combined artistic direction and programme planning with varied responsibilities such as strategic development, funding acquisition, personnel management, and organisational coordination. Alongside these tasks, they were actively involved in hands-on production work, including communication, graphic design, and artistic creation.

"At the moment, my title in our theatre is artistic director, which includes writing and directing most of our productions. I also perform as an actor... In addition, I work as our graphic designer. We handle producing together with our producer."

- I1

Similar to this, I2 - titled as a theatre director - described their role combining artistic direction, executive management, and artistic practice within a single position. In addition to administrative and organisational responsibilities, they were involved in writing and directing productions, communication, and production work. The role also included project management responsibilities related to a large-scale development project, as

well as strategic work aimed at redefining the organisation's identity, audience base, and long-term positioning.

I3 worked as the only full-time employee in their arts gallery and was responsible for all aspects of the organisation's activities, including artistic, curatorial, managerial, administrative, and operational tasks. They did installation, project leadership, financial planning, strategy development, marketing, communication, and collaboration with the gallery's partners. The role was characterised by what the interviewee described as "necessity-driven multitasking", where a wide range of responsibilities were concentrated within a single position. A significant part of the work involved financial management and maintaining the organisation's economic sustainability, which was experienced as essential and challenging.

"I became an artist so I wouldn't have to do this kind of bookkeeping, but it feels like most of my time goes into managing budgets."

- I3

I3 described their job as "necessity-driven multitasking". Their focus was on developing the organisation's long-term sustainability after drastic cuts to the gallery's funding. This involved navigating between the organisation's and the director's artistic values and economic realities. The same tension was reflected in the gallery's need to align its artistic programming with audience expectations.

Across the cases, hybrid leadership roles were experienced as difficult to sustain due to the breadth and competing nature of responsibilities. The concentration of artistic and managerial duties in a single person created ongoing pressure and challenges in maintaining balance across tasks. While artistic processes required time and continuity, organisational responsibilities demanded constant responsiveness. This led to fragmented work processes for I1 and I2, where immediate operational demands interrupted longer-term creative work. I3 experienced that these organisational responsibilities took all their time from artistic work.

The hybrid leadership cases illustrate how leadership roles expand as organisations develop, even with limited resources. Founders and artistic leaders gradually assumed greater responsibility for management, funding, and organisational sustainability, often without corresponding increases in resources or support structures. In the most extreme case, I3, this resulted in a situation where a single individual was responsible for the organisation's daily operations in their entirety.

Although I1 and I3 described their roles currently as manageable in the short term, they also emphasised concerns about long-term sustainability. The combination of expanding responsibilities, limited resources, and increasing sectoral precarity raised doubts about their ability to continue in these roles without structural changes. There was already a need for clearer role division or additional leadership support.

“I think this kind of overly broad role is the problem, and I completely understand why organisations usually have separate executive and artistic directors, because that makes it possible to actually do both jobs properly and with sufficient quality, without people burning out.”

- I2

I2 stated that to make their role sustainable to begin with, they wished for another director to take care of the organisation's managerial side. All in all, the hybrid leadership role prevented the I1, I2, and I3 from focusing on the artistic side of their roles. These findings suggest that the hybrid role in the independent arts sector can be structurally unsustainable without any possibilities of redistribution of responsibilities.

Collaborative leadership role

I4's leadership role differed from the hybrid model through the distribution of responsibilities between two leadership roles. Leadership was shared between an executive director and an artistic director, which allowed a clearer division

of responsibilities. This leadership structure was linked to the organisation's volunteer-based model and emphasis on collaborative working practices.

"We both have our own responsibility areas and teams, but we work very closely together... decisions and outcomes are developed collaboratively."

- 14

Leadership in their context was un-hierarchical and facilitative in nature. The role involved coordinating teams, supporting participants, and enabling collaboration. At the same time, the position combined strategic and operational responsibilities, including planning, budgeting, and organising the festival's production.

"In practice, I do a bit of everything that's on the task list."

- 14

The directors had formed an organisational model which emphasised employee participation through collective contribution, with the aim of enabling members to engage in different stages of the production process. This way they hoped to evoke a sense of ownership and commitment for the festival amongst the volunteers.

The executive director was particularly focused on planning and developing the organisation's future activities: budgeting, strategic planning, and designing the structure of the upcoming festival production. They described how they also had the capacity to begin developing the organisation's internal structures and the volunteer team dynamics.

"At the moment, my leadership is mainly focused on finding ways to develop collaboration within the teams, improving interaction inside the teams, and building a sense of psychological safety between myself and the teams, as well as supporting the development of those skills."

- 14

The festival director's collaborative leadership role was grounded in distributed responsibility, collaboration, and facilitation. It was defined by the values and goals tied to the organisation's reliance on voluntarism and collective working methods. The use of volunteering, in turn, allowed the organisation to afford hiring two directors rather than a single director with a hybrid role, increasing the role's sustainability and effectiveness. This indicated a shift in leadership from task execution towards enabling others to contribute effectively. Compared with hybrid leadership, where responsibilities accumulated within a single role, the collaborative model redistributed leadership tasks and allowed for more focused role development.

Volunteer leadership role

I5 and I6 operated in volunteer leadership roles within collectively organised, volunteer-based art organisations. They combined broad artistic, organisational, and governance responsibilities within organisations operating without stable funding or paid staff. As founders and core members, both leaders assumed central responsibility for coordinating activities, guiding artistic work, and sustaining the organisation's operations, while participating directly in artistic production.

"I've been involved in everything from planning activities and building budgets to overseeing artistic content and directing."

- I6

Similar to hybrid leadership, responsibilities were concentrated within a small number of individuals. However, in this case, leadership was exercised without financial compensation and within a structure fully dependent on voluntary participation. As a result, a central aspect of leadership was motivating and sustaining engagement among participants, in the same fashion as in the festival leader's leadership model.

A central aspect of their leadership involved motivating, supporting, and sustaining engagement among participants. As the organisations relied on voluntary labour, leadership was closely tied to creating meaningful, enjoyable, and sustainable working conditions for others.

“A big part of it is really about inspiring people... and keeping people involved and motivated as artists within this structure.”

- 15

At the same time, both interviewees described ongoing tensions between their artistic ambitions and the structural limitations of operating without stable resources. These included challenges related to compensation, time constraints, and maintaining professional standards within a voluntary framework.

“I often have to compromise on things that are important to me because we simply don’t have the time, money, or resources... Issues like paying fair wages are not really in our hands.”

- 15

“It’s a challenge to keep things enjoyable and relaxed, while still making sure the work gets done professionally.”

- 16

These tensions reveal how their leadership involved continuous negotiation between maintaining motivation, ensuring professional quality, and adapting to resource constraints. Unlike collaborative leadership, where responsibilities could be distributed, or hybrid leadership, where roles were overloaded but paid, the volunteer leadership roles were characterised by a structural reliance on commitment and unpaid labour. They emphasised that many of these challenges stemmed from the structural conditions of operating within the independent arts sector.

“In our organisation, and in the independent arts field more generally, you constantly have to come up with solutions and find ways to navigate creatively with very limited resources. It’s about achieving as much as possible with very little.”

- 15

4.2.4. Leadership skills and competences

This section examines how the study’s interviewees perceived and articulated the skills and competences they required in their roles as leaders. Their perceptions are analysed through the lens of the leadership models introduced in the theoretical framework. The described skills and competences fall under the four leadership models as hybrid combinations of transformational, adaptive, servant, and socially sustainable leadership practices, and are emphasised according to different leadership roles of the interviewees.

Leadership Models and the Independent Arts Sector

According to the interview material, the four contemporary leadership models addressed key structural characteristics of the independent arts sector, as illustrated in table 2. This study argues that each model responds to the specific leadership challenges emerging from the sector’s organisational and working-life conditions. The models do not exclude one another, and as seen in this study’s material, the leader may combine and borrow parts from different models in their profession simultaneously (Byrnes, 2015; London, 2022; Dann, 2022)

Sector's Structural characteristic	Leadership demands	Leadership perspective
Strong artistic vision, and value-driven work and mission	Mobilising commitment around shared artistic goals, values and initiating change	Transformational leadership
Project-based work, unstable funding, and organisational uncertainty	Navigating change, solving emerging problems, and adapting organisational practices	Adaptive leadership
Collaborative creative processes and temporary working groups	Supporting personnel, enabling participation, creating opportunities, and fostering trust	Servant leadership
Precarious working conditions and sustainability concerns	Maintaining wellbeing, ethical responsibility, and long-term organisational continuity	Sustainable leadership

Table 2. Contemporary leadership models' correspondence with the independent art sector's structural demands for leadership

The next section brings the examined leadership models together with the interviewees' perceived competence needs in their leadership roles, and the sector's operational logics (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013). The aim of this framework is to use the perspectives as complementary lenses for analysing the interview material. The analysis explores how leaders working in the Finnish independent arts sector perceive and articulate their roles in relation to the framework's dimensions - the different leadership models and operational contexts - and how they intersect in practice. Through this approach, the study seeks to construct an understanding of how leadership is shaped within the independent arts sector from the perspective of those working in leadership positions.

Adaptive competences

Adaptive competences emerged as central across all leadership configurations and were closely linked to the sector's structural conditions described in the previous section. The leaders emphasised the need to manage complexity, prioritise tasks, and respond to constant change, particularly in hybrid and volunteer leadership roles, where responsibilities were concentrated and resources limited.

“Decision-making ability, delegation, being able to clearly express what is needed and on what schedule. Scheduling is also really important. And the ability to grasp larger entities.”

- 11

“The ability to see the bigger picture, to understand what things look like as a whole, and to make decisions based on that, and take responsibility for them.”

- 16

These identified competences aligned with the adaptive leadership model which focuses on leaders' ability to execute rapid decisions and actions in response to unexpected situations (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009; London, 2022). This ties to leadership in un-structured and dynamic environments, such as the independent sector (Oinaala & Ruokolainen, 2013), where leaders must be aware of changing conditions and enable coordinated action under uncertainty (Obolensky, 2014; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018). The skills allowed them to prepare for further unexpected developments in their organisation or sector. Relying on adaptive skills helped them to cope with the complexity of their roles.

“At the same time, you have to keep carrying out the plans as if everything is moving forward, as if we will get the funding. You just have to proceed

normally, open up the open calls as usual, and continue with all the plans as if the money were there, even when it isn't."

- 13

Boundary-setting emerged as another key adaptive skill. Given the mismatch between available resources and organisational demands, leaders had to actively limit activities, prioritise tasks, and define roles to maintain continuity.

"When you're a small organisation with limited resources, you can't say yes to everything. We don't need to have all kinds of activities here. We are not some kind of a multipurpose space."

- 12

These competences supported the leaders acting in hybrid roles, where they shifted continuously between artistic, strategic, and administrative tasks. The competences were also present in collaborative and volunteer contexts, where coordination and responsiveness remained essential skills. The need for adaptive competence was increased by the leader's lack of know-how in doing certain tasks. On the other hand, the interviewees stated that adaptive competence alone cannot resolve the pressures created by these roles. Beyond a certain point, the issues with leading were not traced back to a lack of skills, but a lack of time, resources, and the structural instability of their working environment. I1 described how steady funding and conditions can have a major role in their capacity to work as a leader in their organisation.

"But right now, I feel like I don't necessarily need any new skills. I need some peace to actually do this work, which is so strongly tied to funding. As if there could be a situation where funding would be secured for several years. Because so much depends on broader societal fluctuations. Like whether there's a war or not. And then also just staying healthy and well yourself, but that's not something you can really achieve only through education either."

- 11

Servant leadership competences

Servant leadership competences emerged mostly in collaborative and volunteer leadership roles, where successful leadership depended on maintaining relationships, motivation, and collective engagement.

“Empathy is probably the most important thing for me. Especially in how you communicate and build relationships, particularly with volunteers.”

- 14

“Interaction and collaboration with people, motivating and inspiring others.”

- 15

Leadership was consistently described as highly relational, requiring the ability to communicate clearly, collaborate and build collaboration, and support others in their work, as well as in creating art. Some of the leaders had founded their organisations to enable their employment in the arts. Now their role had grown to enable others to contribute, grow, and engage meaningfully in the organisation’s activities.

“Social skills are important. Sensing people’s emotions and working with and according to them.”

- 16

“I think understanding others is my strongest skill, that I’m able to put myself in someone else’s position and see things from their perspective.”

- 14

By using honest and sincere communication and participation, leaders aimed to balance their personal vision with the ability to support autonomy

and a sense of belonging within the organisation. This is tied to I4, I5 and I6, emphasising the importance of listening, creating dialogue, and forming space for others' expertise and perspectives in volunteer-based organisations. Their leadership focused on maintaining high motivation and strong commitment in the employees, when financial compensation was not possible. They tried to actively foster a sense of shared purpose.

At the same time, the material shows that this relational approach introduced tensions as well. Leaders needed to balance openness, equality, and informality with responsibility for decision-making and organisational direction. Maintaining a non-hierarchical approach did not remove the need for leadership authority but required it to be exercised carefully and sometimes implicitly.

Sustainable leadership competences

Sustainable leadership competences were closely linked to the ability to maintain long-term organisational viability while safeguarding the well-being of both the organisation's leaders and participants. This was emphasised in collaborative and volunteer leadership contexts by I4, I5 and I6 where responsibility for others' wellbeing was central and not supported by stable resources. It was crucial to strive for maintaining a pace and a workload in which individuals could continue to work without exhaustion or harm. This was often in conflict with the sector's structural realities.

"Tolerance for pressure and tolerance for incompleteness are important."

- I1

"I feel a strong sense of responsibility for how people in our organisation are doing. And I hope that the work isn't causing anyone to feel unwell."

- I6

Leaders described the need to regulate their own stress, manage uncertainty, and sustain organisational continuity under unstable conditions.

This included recognising personal limits, setting boundaries, and maintaining a pace of work that would not lead to exhaustion.

“The most important thing would be learning how to take care of myself before I can take care of others.”

- 14

In this context, socially sustainable leadership was closely tied to boundary-setting and self-management skills, together with the adaptive and servant leadership models. Leaders described the need to recognise their own limits and prevent asking excessive demands from themselves, when expectations and personal commitment pushed them beyond their sustainable capacity.

However, the data reveal a persistent tension between these sustainability goals and the structural realities of the independent arts sector. Leaders aimed to create fair and supportive working conditions but lacked the resources to fully realise these ideals. This had led to situations where leaders balanced between care for others and themselves, with the demands of maintaining organisational activity and being forced to choose the organisation’s continuity over well-being. The goal for socially sustainable working conditions conflicted with the reality of the leader’s own multifaceted roles as well.

Transformational leadership competences

Transformational leadership competences were expressed in the ability to articulate vision, create meaning, and mobilise others around shared artistic and organisational goals. These competences were central in all the roles, but especially the I5 and I6, representing the volunteer leadership role, emphasised the need for them.

In contrast to adaptive or servant competences, which focused on managing uncertainty or maintaining relationships, transformational competences were most clearly expressed in moments where leaders defined far-reaching direction and gave purpose to organisational activity. In the

independent arts sector's conditions, transformational competences become essential for organisational continuity.

"I'd say that a big part of it is really about inspiring people, especially in the beginning, it was about sharing the 'message' of the group and getting people excited about it."

- 15

For example, after a sudden change and the resulting adaptive phase was over, this motivation had to be sustained. Leaders' actions determined whether the volunteer-based organisations could keep their participants engaged and whether the more established actors could face uncertain situations without losing employees.

At the same time, transformational competences were closely linked to the ability to sustain motivation over time. Interviewees described a shift from initial inspiration toward maintaining long-term engagement within the organisation.

Synthesis of the leadership roles, models, and operational logics

Taken together, the interviewee's leadership competences emerge as hybrid model combinations to answer the different situations and challenges of the sector's structural conditions and the hybridity of the leadership roles. Across all cases, leaders were required to integrate multiple forms of competence simultaneously.

Adaptive competences enabled the leaders to navigate uncertainty and manage complex, shifting responsibilities. This was present in hybrid leadership roles where responsibilities were concentrated. Servant leadership competences were central in collaborative and volunteer contexts, where sustaining relationships, motivation, and participation were essential in the absence of financial incentives. Sustainable leadership competences were expressed in efforts to maintain well-being and long-term continuity, especially in resource-constrained, volunteering environments, while

transformational competences provided direction, meaning, and shared purpose across all configurations.

Leadership Role and operational logic	Structural Conditions	Competence Emphasis	Leadership Orientations
Hybrid leadership Established Employers 11-13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource-constrained institution-like structures • Concentration of responsibility • Competing artistic and administrative demands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritisation and coordination • Boundary-setting • Managing complexity and time pressure 	Adaptive managing complexity Sustainable continuity, self-management Transformational direction, artistic vision
Collaborative & volunteer leadership Driven by Conviction 14-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer-based structures • Non-hierarchical or flat organisations • Limited or no financial compensation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication and relational skills • Motivation and engagement • Building shared purpose 	Servant care, collaboration Transformational inspiration, meaning Sustainable wellbeing awareness
Project-based leadership across cases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary structures • Short funding cycles • Fluid teams and shifting roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rapid decision-making • Flexibility and responsiveness • Coordination under uncertainty 	Adaptive responsiveness, crisis handling Transformational short-term vision-setting
Cross-cutting condition: resource scarcity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited funding • Time constraints • Structural instability • Value driven operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boundary-setting • Self-management • Coping with overload 	Adaptive, sustainable, servant, transformational

Table 3. The emphasis on different leadership competences according to leadership role and the organisation's operational logic

The emphasis placed on different leadership competences varied according to both leadership role and the organisation's operational logic. In hybrid leadership roles, the adaptive competences were particularly pronounced, as leaders operated within Established Employer structures that nevertheless remained resource-constrained and unstable due to the sector's precarious structures. In these contexts, effective leadership involved coordinating multiple domains of work under time constraints, making rapid decisions, and ensuring organisational continuity during periods of uncertainty.

In contrast, collaborative and volunteer leadership aligned more closely with Driven by Conviction operational logics, in which organisational activity was sustained through shared values and voluntary engagement. In these settings, servant and transformational leadership competences were central, as leadership relied on fostering motivation, enabling participation, and constructing a shared sense of purpose without strong hierarchical structures or financial incentives.

Simultaneously, sustainable leadership competences were evident across all configurations, reflecting a common concern for maintaining well-being and long-term viability under the sector's constrained conditions. These competences were particularly emphasised in volunteer-based and developing organisations, where leaders needed to balance organisational continuity with responsibility for participants' wellbeing. All of these contemporary leadership models have been associated with the third sector and found their touchpoints in the independent sector organisations of this study. By combining the perspectives of the approaches, the framework allows leadership to be analysed as a structurally situated practice, which is shaped by resource constraints, operational logics and environmental conditions, and organisational goals and values.

Outside of these itemised highlights, the traits of all leadership models were present throughout the interviews, regardless of the organisation's situation or the leadership role. The interviewees' accounts suggest that leadership in the independent arts sector can be fluid and relatively context-dependent at the same time. According to the material, the interviewees

experienced that their leadership competences had been shaped through the interaction between organisational and sectoral structures, available resources, and the organisation's values guiding artistic work. The competences and roles were also restricted by the sector's conditions. The leaders had ended up in their positions and tried to manage with their initial understanding and skills as leaders. The realities of the position forced them to find ways for gathering more skills, knowledge and strategies for coping with their demanding roles through hands-on experience and education, if possible. Their leadership in the independent art sector had developed as an integrative and practice-based phenomenon, where multiple leadership orientations were combined in response to operational demands.

4.3. Support needs of leaders in the conditions of the independent arts sector

The interview material indicated that the leaders' support needs were tightly connected to the structural conditions of the independent sector. The support needs centred on wishes for better educational opportunities for artists graduating into the field's conditions and for the professionals currently working in the sector. In addition, there was a need for more routes for peer support to help with the various sector's challenges. Almost all the interviewees pointed out that the sector should also organise itself in a new way, so that more forms of support could be built through political decision-making and by practitioners and organisations coming together.

4.3.1. Educational support

The most consistently expressed need for support concerned educational opportunities and leadership competence development. The interviewees identified gaps in practical leadership-related skills, particularly in financial administration, legal knowledge, and organisational processes. However,

these gaps were not experienced as individual deficiencies, but because of how leaders enter and operate within the sector.

“I’d like to develop basic legal knowledge... so I’d be better equipped to respond to problematic situations.”

- 12

“There are definitely gaps in things like financial management... there’s still a lot to learn.”

- 16

At the same time, the leaders emphasised that their roles left little room for systematic learning. The hybrid nature of their positions, combined with limited time and resources, constrained their ability to develop these competences alongside their work.

“If I had the time... I might become an average administrator... but there just hasn’t been time for that either.”

- 12

This indicates that competence gaps in the independent arts sector are structurally produced. Leaders are required to manage complex organisational responsibilities without having had access to the necessary training, while the conditions of their work limit opportunities to acquire it afterwards.

In this context, the interviewees highlighted the need to reform arts education to better reflect the realities of the sector. This could be fixed by having the educational programs include working life skills, such as budgeting, employment practices, and organisational management, into the art studies.

“I find it quite absurd that even though I completed a master’s degree at Theatre Academy, we had no teaching on working life skills, such as

budgeting. People have had to learn these things the hard way, through trial and error.

- 12

“These kinds of basic leadership skills should definitely be included in all arts education.”

- 11

In addition to changes in formal education, there was a clear demand for accessible and flexible forms of continuous learning. Short, practice-oriented, and affordable training formats were seen as particularly valuable, as they would allow leaders to develop competences without withdrawing from their artistic work.

“If education were available and easily accessible and affordable, it would always be very welcome.”

- 16

Overall, these findings suggest that supporting leadership development in the independent arts sector requires structural changes in both education and working conditions, rather than relying solely on individual skill development.

4.3.2. Peer-based support

Another central need was to have more peer-based support in the sector. The ability to receive support from other professionals working in similar responsible positions within the sector could counter the sector's and its organisations' lack of structures and leadership support in a low-threshold way. I4 and I5 envisioned that peer networks would enable the exchange of experience-based knowledge, which is not easily transferred from other sectors, and could serve as a potential source of needed guidance and knowledge exchange.

“The ability to network is so important, so you can get support from others and reflect your own work in relation to others.”

- 11

I3 described their peer group of other gallery directors as a primary source of support.

“The peer support I’ve needed, I get from other gallery directors. They are in the same situation. They understand the structure and how things work.”

- 13

In addition, interviewees expressed a desire for more opportunities for collective reflection and discussion. These included informal gatherings, workshops, and events where leaders could openly share challenges, ask questions, form collaborations, and develop solutions together. These forms of interaction were described as low-threshold and practice-oriented. Peer support was tied to the value-oriented views of the interviewees, who saw it as a possibility for reflection, validation, and shared understanding.

Together, the findings indicate an evident need for peer support and accessible education among the interviewees. If organised in a thought-out manner, peer support could function as a critical support mechanism for the independent arts sector leaders in the absence of formal leadership development and training structures. These peer-networks could also supplement for the lack of resources and provide new possibilities for collaborations between individuals, groups and associations in a similar way as the sector’s umbrella organisations (Halme, 2014; Martiskainen, et al., 2017). At the same time, according to I4, I5 and I6, the access to these networks remains uneven for independent sector’s professionals and organisations, pointing to broader structural dynamics within the Finnish arts and culture field.

I think it would be great if the arts field were a bit more open for itself. At times, I've felt like it's not always possible to get involved or to contribute to developing things.

- 14

4.3.3. Political and sectoral support

During the discussions on the possible ways to gain support from peers, the peer networks were also associated with collective advocacy and strengthening the overall position of the independent arts sector in Finnish politics. All the interviewees of this study were all politically aware and brought up the current government's actions as a part of the reason for the needed support in the sector. I1 brought up how a peer group could also be powerful in the field of political influence.

"It's much easier to advocate for the independent field together than alone."

- 11

This suggests that peer support extends beyond individual leadership needs to encompass shared efforts to influence the broader conditions of the sector.

Several interviewees described how developments in Finnish society and cultural policy directly shape leadership work in the arts and the sector's future. The recent funding cuts, national security discussion shifting political priorities, and the experience of declining public valuation of the arts were seen as factors that create uncertainty and limit organisational possibilities.

"Public discourse and political actions keep sending the message that art is not valued, even though you see in your work how important it is to people."

- 11

“Cuts in culture funding have caused anxiety and made it harder to create art, people are questioning whether they can afford to continue.”

- 13

These conditions were linked to increasing pressure on individual leaders, which some of the interviewees had already experienced in their work. As resources have decreased, the leaders’ responsibilities have accumulated, requiring them to take on even broader roles to manage the growing workloads.

“As resources decrease, individuals become more burdened, because they have to manage and know more.”

- 12

At the same time, interviewees highlighted that economic and societal instability had affected audiences as well, causing difficulties with ticket sales.

“People have less money, so they consume less and that also affects participation in art.”

- 15

In this context, leadership in the independent arts sector was described as inherently political. The interviewees felt that the sector’s leaders are required to engage with broader societal debates and advocate for the value of art and culture.

“Leaders in the arts are inevitably political actors right now. They need the willingness and ability to try to change the situation we’re in.”

- 16

The interviewees wished for tools to understand and engage with cultural policy, ways to participate in public discourse, and platforms to raise awareness of the sector’s situation. These leaders served as the face of their

organisation and thus felt they had the opportunity to contribute to conversations about the role of art in society.

Overall, the findings show that these leaders extend their actions beyond organisational boundaries into the political and societal sphere. Their needs for support also included strengthening the sector's collective voice, visibility, and influence, which could be achieved by bringing the sector's actors together.

"I think one of the most important skills for leaders of the art field right now is to be socially aware and part of the broader societal conversation. And to actively try to make the world a better place."

- 15

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study has examined how six leaders in the Finnish independent arts sector perceived and articulated their leadership roles, leadership competences, and support needs within the sector's structurally precarious and resource-constrained environment. It also described the leaders' experiences of various challenges and demands regarding their leadership roles. Tied to these challenges, the study sheds light on leaders' views on their needs for support, new tools, and possibilities for developing their skills to manage and perform better in their positions.

5.1. Interpretation of the findings

5.1.1. Leadership under precarious structures

The findings showed that, among the interviewees, leadership was not a clearly defined managerial function. Instead, the roles were hybrid and structurally conditioned practices that emerged from necessity. Leaders entered their positions either through founding organisations or responding to organisational needs, rather than through education or intentional career paths. As a result, leadership identities were constructed through practice. The findings showed that the interviewee's leadership in the Finnish independent arts sector was fundamentally constrained by its context and resulted in hybrid, reactive, and unsustainable practices.

In five out of six cases, leadership roles combined artistic, managerial, and administrative responsibilities within a single individual. This created role overload and was experienced as unsustainable by the interviewees. Leaders operated simultaneously as artistic directors, producers, administrators, and creators, under conditions of financial precarity and limited resources. In contrast, the only organisation with a dual-leadership model demonstrated a more sustainable distribution of responsibilities, suggesting that organisational structure shapes leadership capacity.

A central finding concerns the constrained relationship between leadership models and practice. While leaders demonstrated competences associated with adaptive, servant, sustainable, and transformational leadership models, the structural conditions of their work limited the full practice of these approaches. Leadership is formed as an incoherent, partial and situational combination of different competence models. These combinations emerged as three different thematic leadership roles from the material, based on the leader's organisation's characteristics. These themes were identified as hybrid leadership role, collaborative leadership role and volunteer leadership model.

The tension between the leadership roles and the conditions for the leadership was particularly visible in relation to adaptive leadership. The model assumes that leaders can step back from immediate action to gain a strategic overview. However, the interviewees rarely had this possibility, and leadership was characterised by continuous responsiveness, where overlapping responsibilities and urgent demands kept leaders "on the dance floor." This limited their ability to engage in long-term planning, strategic reflection, or organisational development, even when such competences were recognised as necessary.

The ability to practice different leadership approaches was shaped by organisational form. In hybrid roles, the concentration of responsibilities restricted reflective and strategic work. In collaborative leadership, shared responsibility created more space for coordination and long-term thinking. In volunteer-based organisations, leadership emphasised relational and motivational work, which further embedded leaders in an ongoing interaction and reduced opportunities for analytical distance.

The study's interviewees' leadership in the independent arts sector was a contextually negotiated practice, shaped by resource constraints, organisational structures, and the sector's operational logics. This finding shifts the analytical focus from identifying supporting and effective leadership competences toward examining the structural conditions under which such competences can be realised.

Despite these constraints, the leadership models utilised in this study provided a more accurate framework for understanding leadership in the independent arts sector than traditional hierarchical leadership models. Conventional frameworks assume stable structures, clear roles, and formal authority -conditions that were largely absent. Contemporary models acknowledged the uncertainty, relational dynamics, and value-driven work, which were central to the interviewees' experiences. The findings, therefore, suggest a need to adapt the models to contexts defined by hybridity, instability, and limited resources.

5.1.2. Competences and capacity for leadership

In response to the first sub-research question of the study, the findings indicated that leaders assessed their ability to perform managerial and leadership roles primarily through experience-based and situational understanding. Leadership capabilities were commonly described as something developed through practice. A key finding tied to this notion was that all the interviewees' pathways into leadership were unplanned, and they had not initially aimed or prepared for leadership positions. They had entered the roles through two thematic pathways recognised in the study: either founding an organisation (from founders to leaders) or through recruitment (the unexpected path). When the leaders rose to their positions through unplanned paths, and without formal education in the profession or previous experience from similar positions, their leadership competences were formed through mostly hands-on practice. In some cases, the leaders were able to gain more competence through the help of continuing education.

At the same time, leaders' self-assessments were characterised by ambivalence. The interviewees identified strengths in leadership areas such as artistic vision, adaptability, and interpersonal skills. They also expressed uncertainty and perceived gaps in more formal aspects of leadership, including financial management, legal knowledge, and organisational processes. This resulted in a fragmented sense of competence. They showed motivation to develop these, and other leadership competences but

experienced a lack of access or time for structured education that could be carried out alongside work. Leaders assessed themselves operating under conditions that limited their ability to perform effectively. They were constrained by inadequate structural conditions such as time, resources, and organisational capacity, which restricted sustained and strategic leadership.

5.1.3. Challenges and support needs

In response to the second sub-research question, the findings revealed that leaders in the independent arts sector identified a combination of structural challenges, skill gaps, and significant support needs. The challenges related to role overload, time scarcity, and the absence of clearly defined responsibilities. In addition, they navigated ongoing tensions between artistic goals and organisational survival, as well as emotional responsibility for the well-being and motivation of collaborators, particularly in volunteer-based contexts.

The identified gaps in the leadership skills were primarily located in areas of financial management, legal knowledge, and organisational processes. While there was a clear demand for more accessible and practice-oriented leadership education, the findings also highlighted the importance of peer support, mentoring, and collaborative learning environments. The interview material points to the need for structural changes, with more stable funding conditions, improved organisational support, and stronger sector-level cooperation. This indicates that addressing leadership challenges in the independent arts sector requires a combination of individual, collective, and structural interventions.

5.2. Theoretical contribution

The theoretical contributions of this study support existing research on the structural pressures of the independent arts sector and its impact on the sector's professionals (Manninen et al., 2025; Pekkarinen et al., 2022;

Pekkarinen et al., 2025; Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020). Consistent with previous studies, the interviewees operated in environments, where limited funding, unstable organisational structures, and lack of support systems increased the demands placed on leaders significantly. The sector's conditions required leaders to demonstrate adaptability, resilience, and versatility across multiple domains without prior experience or formal training.

However, this study extends previous research by illustrating how these structural pressures are experienced at the level of leadership practice. The findings show that resource scarcity and organisational instability fundamentally shaped how leadership was practised. As a result, leadership became fragmented, reactive, and difficult to sustain over time.

These findings also help explain broader concerns regarding the sustainability of careers in the independent arts sector (Ruusuvirta et al., 2022). This suggests that the challenges identified in previous research are structural and actively reproduced and negotiated through leadership practices within the study's organisations.

In addition, the findings strongly aligned with existing research on leadership in the third sector and nonprofit organisations. Similar to NGO contexts, leadership in the independent arts sector was found to be value-driven, oriented toward artistic and social goals (Malunga, 2010; Tschirhart & Bielefeld, 2012; Anheier, 2014; Dann, 2022). The material also highlights persistent ethical tensions between artistic values and resource constraints, particularly regarding compensation, sustainability, and organisational continuity.

At the same time, this study extends prior research by demonstrating how these structural characteristics are experienced by individual leaders. Hybridity, precarity, and value-based tensions become embodied in leadership roles, where individuals were required to continuously negotiate between competing demands. Earlier studies have described the multiplication of tasks and competence demands within the Finnish art field (Pekkarinen et al. 2025). This study shows how the leadership responsibilities become concentrated in individual leaders, who simultaneously navigate an increasingly complex combination of artistic, managerial, and operational demands. This supports

earlier observations on the hybrid organisational nature of the independent arts sector (Korhonen, 2013) and the increasingly complex and unstable working conditions of artists and cultural professionals (Lahtinen et al., 2025). The findings suggest that leadership in the independent arts sector resembles third-sector leadership, thereby intensifying its core challenges by concentrating them within hybrid, resource-constrained roles. The cases of the study's interviewees demonstrate that the sector's structural conditions do influence leadership in the independent arts sector, and actively shape it into a fragmented, reactive, and difficult-to-sustain practice.

The findings of the study align with recent research emphasising the importance of peer support, mentoring, strategic cooperation, and political advocacy in the independent arts sector (Pekkarinen et al., 2025). The interviewees highlighted the need for shared learning environments, accessible support structures, and opportunities for collaboration. These forms of support were seen as necessary for sustaining leadership under precarious conditions. Leaders saw that leadership extended beyond organisational boundaries into collective and political dimensions, where leaders were required to navigate funding systems, respond to policy changes, and advocate for the conditions of their work. This indicates that leadership in the independent arts sector was or should be practised through engagement with the broader field.

5.3. Implications

The findings of this study offer several practical suggestions for implications for the development of leadership and its surrounding structures in the independent arts sector. These implications extend beyond individual skill development to structural, educational, and sector-wide considerations.

Policy implications

A central statement of this study's material is that strengthening individual leadership competences alone can be helpful, but only to a certain point. The interviewees described their leadership in the independent arts sector as being structurally conditioned and having accumulated responsibilities. As a result, leadership challenges require systemic policy-level interventions in addition to education, as they are rooted in structural conditions such as funding instability and organisational fragmentation.

The findings highlight the need to improve the structural conditions under which leadership is practised through increasing the predictability of their operations. This can be done by ensuring the continuity of efficient funding, enabling more sustainable organisational models that support the distribution of responsibilities within organisations.

The interviewees repeatedly described the lack of formal and informal support structures. The importance of informal networks for knowledge exchange, reflection, and coping was also emphasised. Strengthening these networks through targeted funding, facilitation, and institutional recognition could significantly enhance leadership capacity in the sector.

Educational implications

The study identified a clear gap between the demands of leadership in the independent arts sector and the content of formal arts education. Interviewees consistently reported a lack of training in key areas, including financial management, legal frameworks, organisational practices, and personnel management. These competences were instead developed through trial and error, often under significant pressure. It is important to note that none of the leaders had thought of ending up in their current positions during their studies, yet they did. The interviewees stated that leadership and working-life competences in arts education would have offered essential components for professional practice in their working life.

This suggests a need to systematically integrate more work-life and managerial skills into arts education. Instead of positioning these skills as optional or supplementary, they could be recognised as core competences for professionals likely to operate in hybrid roles. The same skills are relevant in entrepreneurial career paths and offer tools for navigating in the independent sector.

In addition, the findings highlight a need for accessible and flexible forms of continuous professional development for the sector's leaders. Given the project-based, time-constrained, and precarious nature of work in the independent sector, traditional forms of education are not easily accessible. Training opportunities should be modular, practice-oriented, and adaptable to irregular working conditions – and cheap enough to be accessible for everyone. Developing these educational models would support the emerging and established leaders in building the competences they require to navigate the sector's structural complexity.

5.4. Limitations and Future Research

5.4.1. Limitations

This study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. The study included six interviewees, a sufficient sample size for a thesis. Still, the empirical material primarily comprises performing and visual arts contexts. The results cannot be generalised to the wider independent arts sector. The study also focuses only on leaders' self-perceptions, which may differ from how leadership is experienced by other organisational members or stakeholders.

The reliability of the study could have been further strengthened by including more participants and additional sources of information. The interviewees represented organisations of varying sizes and came from varying areas of art.

When inspecting the validity of the study, one must examine the appropriateness of the research methods and whether they effectively capture

the phenomenon under investigation. In this study, it is important to acknowledge that leading is a social and collective phenomenon constructed through interactions among organisational actors, surrounding structures, culture, and other contextual factors. Therefore, the perspective adopted in this study was informed by the interviewees' personal experiences. This perspective was intentionally chosen because the study approached leadership in the context of the independent art sector, focusing on how leaders perceive and experience it. From this perspective, the selected group of participants was appropriate for the research problem. By examining leaders' perceptions of leadership, the study provides insights into how it is experienced in working life contexts. A deeper exploration of leadership roles, such as through case studies or ethnographic methods, might have produced a richer understanding.

The author's own background and experiences in the independent arts sector might have influenced the research process. At the same time, this background provided access and sensitivity to the phenomena under study. This may have influenced the interpretation of the material, but it also enabled a deeper understanding of the aspects of leadership practice described by the interviewees.

According to Hirsjärvi et al. (2001), a key factor in answering the potential effects of researchers' bias is the transparency of reporting. In this study, particular attention was paid to the transparent reporting of methods and findings. The results were grounded in the interviewees' perceptions of leadership, which provided meaningful insights from the empirical material.

5.4.2. Further research

The study's findings raise questions regarding the intentionality of leadership practices in the independent arts sector. Elements of different leadership models were identifiable in the interview material, but it is unclear to what extent these were consciously practised. This observation points to a potential gap between leadership theory and practice. Existing literature on leadership models often assumes that their effective application requires a degree of

intentionality, reflection, and conceptual understanding, typically developed through formal education and training (Byrnes, 2015; Byrnes, 2021). Most interviewees in this study lacked formal leadership education, and even those with some training reported a need for further development. At the same time, leaders did not necessarily express a need for new competences, but for more stable conditions - such as time, predictability, and resources - that would enable more informed and deliberate decision-making. It would be valuable to investigate whether a more conscious understanding of leadership frameworks translates into different leadership behaviours or outcomes in structurally constrained environments such as the independent arts sector.

Further research is also needed to examine how current leadership development initiatives and educational programmes in the arts reflect the sector's reality.

Future research could also expand the scope by including a broader range of artistic areas, such as music and audiovisual production, and by incorporating multiple perspectives within organisations. Comparative studies between independent and institutional contexts could also further clarify the specific characteristics of leadership in different organisational environments. These aspects could be interesting to examine in the form of group interviews with multiple representatives from different art areas. The data could also be enriched by systematic comparisons between different-sized art organisations.

In the future, it would be fruitful to include the art organisation's other members in the research through interviews or questionnaires to gain a broader understanding of the effectiveness and success of the leaders' practices.

Continuing to gather and share the stories of the sector's leaders in future research will deepen our understanding of how to better support the diverse ways leadership is practised and experienced.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Additional information about the interview for the interviewees

Appendix 2: Consent form for participation in the study

Appendix 3: Guide and questions for the research interviews

Appendix 1: Additional information about the interview for the interviewees

Lisätietoa haastattelusta

Hei,

Tässä hieman taustatietoja haastatteluun liittyen. Tutkimus ei edellytä haastateltavalta erillistä perehtymistä tutkimuksen teemoihin tai sen aiheeseen.

Tutkimus koostuu haastatteluaineistosta, jota analysoidaan temaattisen analyysin keinoin. Tavoitteenani on tarkastella vapaalla taidekentällä vastuullisissa ja johtajatehtävissä toimivien henkilöiden näkemyksiä ja käsityksiä johtamis- ja esihenkilötaidoista taiteen vapaalla kentällä. Haastateltavan työnimikkeen ei tarvitse olla esim. taiteellinen johtaja, vaan hänen tulee olla taidekentällä työllistynyt, ammatikseen esihenkilön, projektinjohtamisen, hallinnonin tms., johtajatasen vastuullisia tehtäviä toimittava henkilö edustamassaan organisaatiossa.

Haastattelussa kysytään lisäksi tietoja haastateltavan työnkuvasta ja organisaatiosta haastateltavan toimintaympäristön hahmottamiseksi. Haastateltavat tai haastateltavien edustamat organisaatiot eivät tule olemaan tunnistettavissa tutkimuksen raportissa. Haastateltavien identiteettiä, tai edustamia organisaatioita ei tulla erittelemään raportissa. Haastatteluissa kerättyä aineistoa säilytetään tietoturvalisesti tutkijan kiinteissä tietokannoissa eikä niitä ladata pilvipalveluihin. Valmis tutkimusraportti julkaistaan Taideyliopiston tietokantaan julkisesti saataville. Haastateltavalla on oikeus jättää vastaamatta esitettyihin kysymyksiin tai keskeyttää haastattelu näin halutessaan.

Haastattelu toteutetaan teemahaastatteluna, eli haastateltava saa tietoonsa ennalta määritetyt tematiikat, joiden pohjalta haastattelu tullaan toteuttamaan. Aineistoa analysoidaan laadullisilla menetelmillä.

Additional Information About the Interview

Here is some additional background information regarding the interview. The study does not require the interviewee to familiarise themselves in advance with the research themes or topic.

The study is based on interview data, which will be analysed using thematic analysis. The aim is to examine the perspectives and perceptions of individuals working in responsible and leadership positions within the independent arts sector, particularly in relation to leadership and supervisory skills. The interviewee's official job title does not need to be, for example, Artistic Director; rather, the participant should be professionally active in the arts sector and hold responsibilities related to leadership, supervision, project management, administration, or similar managerial-level tasks within their organisation.

During the interview, questions will also be asked about the interviewee's role and organisation in order to better understand the professional context in which they operate. Neither the interviewees nor the organisations they represent will be identifiable in the research report. The identities of participants and their organisations will not be disclosed.

All interview data will be stored securely on the researcher's local storage systems and will not be uploaded to cloud-based services. The completed research report will be published in the database of the University of the Arts Helsinki and will be publicly accessible.

Participation in the interview is voluntary. The interviewee has the right to decline to answer any question and may interrupt or withdraw from the interview at any time.

The interview will be conducted as a semi-structured thematic interview. This means that the interviewee will be informed in advance of the main themes guiding the discussion, while the conversation itself will remain flexible. The collected material will be analysed using qualitative research methods.

Appendix 2: Consent form for participation in the study

Suostumus osallistua tutkimukseen

Tutkimus taiteen vapaan kentän johtajien johtamistaidoista

Opinnäytetutkimus pureutuu vapaan kentän taiteellisten ryhmien ja yhteisöjen vastuullisissa tehtävissä toimivien ammattilaisten käsityksiin heidän työtehtävistään, roolistaan sekä johtamisen taidoistaan ja osaamisestaan. Lisäksi tutkitaan, miten he kokevat pärjäävänsä työtehtävässään, sekä mitä haasteita, kehitystarpeita ja mahdollisuuksia he nostavat vapaan kentän johtajamisosaamisessa. Tutkimuksen toteuttaa maisteriopiskelija Oula Hyle osana Arts Management -maisteriohjelman opintoja.

Tutkimukseen osallistuva täyttää:

Tutkimukseen osallistuminen on vapaaehtoista. Voin milloin tahansa syytä ilmoittamatta keskeyttää osallistumiseni tutkimukseen. Keskeyttämisestä ei aiheudu minulle mitään seurauksia, mutta siihen asti kerättyjä tietojani voidaan kuitenkin hyödyntää tutkimuksessa.

Olen tutustunut tietosuojailmoitukseen ja henkilötietojen käsittelyperusteisiin tietosuojailmoituksessa.

Kyllä

Ei

Etänä tai kasvotusten toteutettava tutkimushaastattelu voidaan nauhoittaa tutkimuskäyttöä varten. Nauhoite tulee ainoastaan tutkimuksen tekijöiden käyttöön ja tietosuojailmoituksessa mainittuja tarkoituksia varten. Nauhoitetta ei julkaista selvityksen yhteydessä.

Kyllä

Ei

Allekirjoittamalla suostumuslomakkeen ilmaisen haluni osallistua tutkimukseen ja hyväksyn tietojeni käytön tiedotteessa kuvattuun tutkimukseen sekä annan suostumukseni tarkoituksiin, joihin olen merkinnyt "kyllä". Jos olen merkinnyt "ei", se tarkoittaa, että en anna lupaa tietojeni käyttämiseen kyseiseen tarkoitukseen. Osallistun silti tutkimukseen.

Tutkimukseen osallistuvan allekirjoitus

Nimenselvennys

Tutkijan yhteystiedot:

Oula Hyle, maisteriopiskelija, Taideyliopisto, oula.hyle@uniarts.fi

Appendix 3: Guide and questions for the research interviews

Liite: , Tutkimushaastattelukysymykset

Tutkimus puretuu vapaan kentän taiteellisten ryhmien ja yhteisöjen vastuullisissa tehtävissä toimivien ammattilaisten käsityksiin heidän työtehtävistään, roolistaan sekä johtamisen taidoistaan ja osaamisestaan. Lisäksi tutkitaan, miten he kokevat pärjäävänsä työtehtävässään, sekä mitä haasteita, kehitystarpeita ja mahdollisuuksia he nostavat vapaan kentän johtamisosaamisessa.

Tutkimuksesta julkaistaan avoimesti saatavilla oleva tutkimusraportti.

Haastateltava saa vastata kysymyksiin sillä laajudella, mitä kokee hyväksi tai jättää vastaamatta. Haastattelu voidaan keskeyttää tarvittaessa. Haastattelu nauhoitetaan.

Ennen kuin aloitetaan, onko jotain kysyttävää?

Aloitetaan taustatiedoista.

Taustatiedot:

- Koulustausta
- Työpaikka ja tehtävä, jonka pohjalta keskustelua käydään.
 - o Organisaation malli?
 - o Organisaation koko?
 - o Organisaation tehtävä
 - o Oma tehtävä organisaatiossa
- Miten päädyit toimimaan nykyisessä työtehtävässäsä?
 - o Toteutettiinko kohdallasi rekrytointiprosessi? Jos kyllä, millainen rekrytointiprosessi kohdallasi oli ja mitkä asiat ratkaisevat sen, että tulit valituksi tehtävään?
 - o Oliko sinulla tavoitteena päätyä nykyiseen työtehtävääsi?

Tehtävät ja vastuut:

- Minkälaisia tehtäviä työhösi sisältyy tällä hetkellä?
- Mitä vastuualueita työhösi sisältyy tällä hetkellä?
- Mihin johtamistyösi keskittyy erityisesti tällä hetkellä?

Johtamisen taidot, osaamiset ja haasteet:

- Mitä johtamistaitoja tarvitset erityisesti omassa työssäsi?
- Mitkä johtamisen taidot hallitset mielestäsi parhaiten?
- Oletko havainnut luontaisia vahvuuksia johtamistaidoissasi? Minkälaisia?
- Oletko kohdannut haasteita johtamistyön tehtävissä? Minkälaisia?
- Oletko kehittänyt johtamisen taitojasi jotenkin?
- Mitkä johtamistyön taitosi vaativat mielestäsi eniten kehittämistä?
 - o Mitä johtamistyön taitoja haluaisit vielä kehittää?
 - o Mitä osaamista erityisesti olet hakenut koulutuksista?
 - o Tarvitsisitko itse lisää osaamista liittyen esim. työllistämiseen, työn tukemiseen, johtamiseen ja esihenkilönä toimimiseen? Jos, niin millaista?

Työn tuki

- Saatko tukea tukea työsi tekemiseen? Minkälaista?
- Millaista tukea kaipaisit johtamisen työssäsi?

Vapaa kenttä

- Mitkä ovat mielestäsi tärkeimpiä johtamistaitoja vapaalla taidekentällä yleisesti ottaen?
- Minkälaiset taide- ja kulttuurialan työelämän muutokset mielestäsi vaikuttavat johtamistaitoihin liittyviin tarpeisiin ja vaatimuksiin taiteen vapaalla kentällä?
- Onko jotain muuta, mitä haluat lisätä näihin teemoihin liittyen?

Appendix: Interview Guide

Interview Questions

This study examines how professionals working in responsible positions within artistic groups and organisations in the independent arts sector perceive their work tasks, roles, and leadership skills and competences. The study also explores how they assess their ability to perform in their roles, as well as the challenges, development needs, and opportunities they identify in relation to leadership in the independent arts sector.

The findings of the study will be published in an openly accessible research report.

Interviewees may respond to the questions to the extent they consider appropriate or may decline to answer specific questions. The interview may be interrupted if necessary. The interview will be recorded.

Before we begin, do you have any questions?

Background Information

- Educational background
- Current workplace and position (the context for this interview)
- Organisational model or form
- Size of the organisation
- Purpose or mission of the organisation
- Your role within the organisation

Entry into the Role

- How did you come to hold your current position?
- Was there a formal recruitment process in your case? If yes, what was the process like, and what factors do you believe influenced your selection?
- Was it your goal to end up in your current role?

Tasks and Responsibilities

- What kinds of tasks are currently included in your work?
- What areas of responsibility do you currently have?
- What does your leadership work particularly focus on at the moment?

Skills, Competence, and Challenges

- What skills are particularly necessary in your work as a leader?
- Which skills do you consider your strongest?
- Have you identified any natural strengths in your abilities? If so, what kind?
- Have you encountered challenges in your tasks as a leader? What kind of challenges?
- Have you developed your skills in any way?
- Which of your skills do you believe require the most further development?
- What skills would you like to develop further?
- What specific competences have you sought through education or training?

Support

- Do you receive support in carrying out your work? If so, what kind of support?
- What kind of support would you need in your work as a leader?

The Independent Arts Sector

-
- In your view, what are the most important skills as a leader in the independent arts sector in general?
 - What changes in the working life of the arts and cultural sector do you think are influencing the skill requirements and expectations of leaders within the independent arts field?

Closing Questions

- Is there anything else you would like to add regarding these themes?

REFERENCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgement of use of AI

Type of AI used and description:

AI tools were utilised in writing this thesis in three different task categories. OpenAI ChatGPT, a large language model, was used to brainstorm the overall structure of this research during its planning phase. The same AI was also utilised to search for relevant academic sources for the theory section of this study. In addition, the AI was used to edit and proofread the overall academic text for grammar and phrasing.

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