Handelshøyskolen BI

GRA 19703 Master Thesis

Thesis Master of Science 100% - W

Predefinert informasjon

Startdato:	16-01-2022 09:00	**Termin:**	202210
Sluttdato:	01-07-2022 12:00	**Vurderingsform:**	Norsk 6-trinns skala (A-F)
Eksamensform:	T		
Flowkode:	202210||10936||IN00||W||T		
Intern sensor:	(Anonymisert)		

Deltaker

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Informasjon fra deltaker

Tittel *:	The Effect of Psychological Safety in Accelerators
Navn på veileder *:	Øystein D. Fjeldstad

Inneholder besvarelsen konfidensielt materiale?:	Nei	**Kan besvarelsen offentliggjøres?:**	Ja

Gruppe

Gruppenavn:	(Anonymisert)
Gruppenummer:	207
Andre medlemmer i gruppen:	

Master Thesis

The Effect of Psychological Safety in Accelerators

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MSc Entrepreneurship & Innovation

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1st July, 2022

Abstract

This master thesis aims to understand how psychological safety affects teaming in accelerator programmes. We outline that accelerators represent the current paradigm shift of building teams while building businesses, coined as teaming. Collaborating members in accelerator programmes are confronted with not only business but personal opportunities and risks. Psychological safety in a team increases members' feeling of security to speak up. Despite the associated benefits, little is known on the effect of psychological safety in accelerators.

We conducted a qualitative exploratory study of two independent accelerator programmes with semi-structured interviews of members of each programme's cohort. Our findings reinforce the perspective of psychological safety being an intermediate link between the collaborative work environment characteristics, and individual behaviour, such as motivation, and team learning. The accelerator programme structure affects teaming and psychological safety, directly affecting perceived programme value. We identify two structural elements of significant influence: investments in participants, and the appointment of a point of contact for founders. In interpreting our findings, we sharpen the understanding of power structures and inclusive leadership behaviour in accelerators, and their influence on the establishment of psychological safety. Based on our serendipitous finding that teaming is a goal in itself in accelerator programmes, we argue that the research stream of teaming complements the existing research on accelerators and their structure. We emphasise the essential role of psychological safety in accomplishing the goal of accelerating entrepreneurial ventures. Understanding psychological safety's effects on teaming in accelerators may bring us closer to understanding the importance of establishing a safe work environment among temporary, collaborative individuals.

Keywords: *Psychological Safety; Teaming; Accelerator; Accelerator Programme; Team Learning; Learning Behaviour; Temporary Collaboration; Intensity; Work Environment; Founders; Mentors; Programme Managers; Inclusive Leadership; Power Structures; Entrepreneurial Ventures*

Acknowledgements

As we learned in our studies of Entrepreneurship & Innovation, the road to success is never straight. Throughout this thesis, we stumbled upon new challenges and underwent rounds of iterations. We experienced the importance of a team in solving challenging problems. We were fortunate enough to not only rely on each other but several contributors.

First, we would like to thank our thesis supervisor, Professor Øystein D. Fjeldstad, who has acted as our rock throughout our study, and whom we would be lost without. Professor Fjeldstad has gone above and beyond his role to support and guide us. We are forever grateful for the many coaching sessions and encouraging and challenging words of wisdom. As Michelangelo would say, every block of stone has a statue inside it, and it is the sculptor's task to discover it. Professor Fjeldstad helped us increase our perseverance to uncover this sculpture of a thesis.

Second, we would like to extend a warm thank you to the main contributors to our thesis. The two studied accelerators opened their doors and allowed us to get to know them, their founders and their mentors. Their insights were invaluable. Through their experiences and openness, this research has greatly inspired us for our future endeavours. We feel fortunate to have met such knowledgeable people, and we hope we can contribute in return.

Third, we would like to thank BI Norwegian Business School, particularly Susanna Pinnock, for introducing us to the concepts of psychological safety and teaming. We hope to contribute to the understanding of this concept for fellow students and encourage further research on such an important topic.

Fourth, we extend a warm thank you to our supportive families and friends, especially Michaele Ramberg.

Last, we thank each other for the laughs, the learnings, and the lifelong friendship.

Katharina Sophie Wilke *Martine Elisabeth Klock*

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List of Abbreviations

A1	Accelerator 1
A2	Accelerator 2
F	Founder
M	Mentor
PM	Programme Manager
POC	Point of Contact

1. Introduction

In recent years, interest from different research streams has shifted towards accelerators as new organisational systems that stimulate entrepreneurial activities (Drori & Wright, 2018; Younger & Fisher, 2020). Accelerators operate in a model where members of the accelerator programmes form temporary cohorts to ensure learning, experimentation and knowledge sharing (Cohen, 2013; Cohen & Hochberg, 2014; Frimodig & Torkkeli, 2013; Hoffman & Radojevich-Kelley, 2012; Mahmoud-Jouini et al., 2018; Ovchinnikova & Topoleva, 2021), resulting in either fast growth or fast failure for the entrepreneurial ventures (Mahmoud-Jouini et al., 2018). The accelerator's organic organisation (Vandeweghe et al., 2019) serves as a structural shell that unites founders, mentors and accelerator's programme managers. Hereby, it represents the current paradigm shift of building teams while building businesses, coined as teaming. Teaming is an active process, unlike the static entity of a team (Edmondson, 2012a).

In an accelerator programme, individuals are confronted with opportunities and risks which range from business to personal. The first may be openly discussed in an accelerator cohort between members, but tacit interpersonal risks among team members can cause personal anxiety and fear of speaking up (Edmondson, 2002a; Edmondson & Mogelof, 2005).

What if members in an accelerator programme do not speak their minds or are comfortable sharing their struggles? How does this discomfort affect their teaming activities? A work environment which encourages a feeling of security among members, where they feel comfortable and free to speak their minds, is a psychologically safe environment (Edmondson, 1999). The context of accelerators provides the opportunity for this exploratory study to contribute to the understanding of the concept of psychological safety.

1.1 Background

Psychological safety fundamentally characterises a work environment and influences the team members' feeling of security and freedom to speak their minds (Edmondson, 1999). As such, it influences the capability of learning, innovation and engagement in extra-role activities (Edmondson, 2004). It "allow[s] team members to relax their guard and engage openly in the behaviours that underlie learning and innovation." (Edmondson & Mogelof, 2005, p. 786). Other factors, such as intrinsic motivation of team members, leadership style or team cohesiveness and trust influence learning and innovative behaviour in the team. Psychological safety was found to have a unique mediating role.

Available research indicated the beneficial influence of psychological safety on outcomes at work, such as increased creativity, experimentation abilities and more open and efficient collaboration (Bradley et al., 2012; Carmeli et al., 2010, 2014; Edmondson, 2018, 2018; Edmondson & Mogelof, 2005; Javed et al., 2019; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006, 2011; Ortega et al., 2010; Raub & Robert, 2010; Schippers et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2010). Research on fluid, temporary forms of team design, however, such as in an accelerator, remains nascent (Lei et al., 2019; Tannenbaum et al., 2012). Empirical research is needed to understand how members collaborate in an accelerator and how psychological safety affects their teaming activities.

1.2 Research Question

This exploratory study aims to understand *how psychological safety affects teaming in accelerator programmes*. The organic organisational form of accelerators represents an opportunity for us to study how psychological safety affects teaming. Our research aims to identify potential structural properties of the studied accelerator programmes which influence relationships and teaming among mentors, founders, and programme managers. Our study will contribute to academic research and provide managerial recommendations to facilitate a psychological safety work environment among members in accelerator programmes.

1.3 Thesis Structure

This thesis consists of seven chapters. After introducing our motivation and background for this exploratory study, we will review the relevant theoretical constructs: accelerators, teaming and psychological safety. In the third chapter, we present our chosen methodology. We point out further considerations with the choice of our study design and data analysis. The fourth chapter presents our findings on the effect of psychological safety on teaming in accelerator programmes. We followed an inductive coding process; hence, after introducing our inductive model, we present key findings based on the identified themes. In the fifth chapter, we discuss our findings and identify particular properties of the phenomenon of psychological safety that affect teaming in an accelerator. Based on our discussion, we present theoretical and managerial implications of our exploratory study in the sixth chapter. Last, we conclude with limitations and encouragement for future research to enhance our provided insights.

2. Literature Review

To design our study and answer the research question, a thorough review of relevant theory is needed. Our literature review draws on the main concepts of accelerators, teaming and psychological safety.

2.1 Accelerators

In recent years, interest from different research streams has shifted towards accelerators as a new organisational system that stimulates entrepreneurial activities (Drori & Wright, 2018; Younger & Fisher, 2020). Accelerators aim "to support and accelerate the creation of successful entrepreneurial companies" (Pauwels et al., 2016, p. 13). The first accelerator, Y-combinator, was founded by Paul Graham in 2005 in Cambridge, Massachusetts and is seen as the first successful privately funded accelerator (Goldstein et al., 2015). Since then, hundreds of accelerators have been created worldwide, though no two accelerator programmes are the same (Cohen, 2013; TechStars, n.d.). Generic accelerators do not set a focus, while other programmes specialise within different industries and their participation requirements vary on start-up size or maturity (Cohen & Hochberg, 2014a). Originally most accelerator programmes were non-corporate or public (Kanbach & Stubner, 2016) and originated as incubators of specific universities. Corporations have realised they need to keep up with external innovation and, as a result, started to create their own corporate-funded accelerators focusing on outside-in open innovation initiatives (Mahmoud-Jouini et al., 2018).

2.1.1 Accelerator Organisation

Accelerators represent an organic organisational form that enables fast decision-making and informal interactions. We do note that as an emerging organisational form, elaborations of accelerators are not coherent (Vandeweghe et al., 2019). According to Cohen & Hochberg (2014), an accelerator is "a fixed-term, cohort based program, including mentorship and educational components" (p. 4). Other scholars attribute the accelerator to bringing different competencies together where individuals collaborate and network (Frimodig & Torkkeli, 2013; Hoffman & Radojevich-Kelley, 2012; Mahmoud-Jouini et al., 2018; Miller & Bound, 2011;

Ovchinnikova & Topoleva, 2021). Accelerators are organised for founders or entrepreneurial teams to accelerate the development or creation of new ventures (Crișan et al., 2021) over a fixed time period, usually three months (Cohen, 2013); it enables early and mid-stage companies to either grow fast or fail fast (Mahmoud-Jouini et al., 2018) at a rapid speed. The accelerator supports the start-up by offering financial and human resources (Goldstein et al., 2015), as well as creating both a peer-to-peer and an entrepreneurial environment to support networking (Christiansen, 2009; Vandeweghe et al., 2019) and business opportunities (Lans et al., 2008). Accelerators help start-ups mature to become investor ready (Frimodig & Torkkeli, 2013) and prepare for market entry (Mahmoud-Jouini et al., 2018). Participating members of an accelerator are individual start-up founders or entrepreneurial teams.

2.1.2 Motivations and Objectives

The entrepreneurs' and entrepreneurial teams' motivation to apply and join an accelerator programme is in the belief that the programme initiates the acceleration of their start-up by providing provisions of resources and capabilities to compete in the market (Battistella et al., 2017; Frimodig & Torkkeli, 2013; Lange & Johnston, 2020). Gathering and allocating resources affect a business's performance (Kohler, 2016). As start-ups usually have scarce resources, joining an accelerator can improve their chances of survival. Critical resources such as knowledge, network, funding, infrastructure, technology, market and culture become available through the programme (Cohen, 2013; Cohen & Hochberg, 2014a; Kanbach & Stubner, 2016; Lange & Johnston, 2020).

The accelerators' objectives to run the accelerator programme can differ from the programme's purpose. Corporate, venture funds and non-profit accelerators have strategic or financial objectives (Kanbach & Stubner, 2016). Non-corporate accelerators are often derived from founders' needs in the early stages of their entrepreneurial journey. The founders of TechStars explained their motivation to "give back" to the entrepreneurial community and fill learning and knowledge-sharing gaps (Hoffman & Radojevich-Kelley, 2012; TechStars, n.d.). Corporate accelerators can follow the monetary rationale that start-ups increase their value through the programme, which benefits the corporation. Accelerators with strategic objectives find more than financial benefits from running a programme.

Inviting start-ups to collaborate and partner may open to mutual learning, which grants the accelerator insights and methods that would not have been in reach without the accelerator's participants (Kanbach & Stubner, 2016).

2.1.2 Programme Structure

The programme operates cohort-based and includes mentorship and educational components that culminate in a public pitch event or demo day in front of investors (Cohen & Hochberg, 2014a). Understanding the different components of an accelerator programme is fundamental. Goldstein et al. (2015) argue that there are five components of an accelerator programme: the selection process, the deal, the actual accelerator programme, the completion and lastly, the alumni programme.

The selection process defines the methods of identifying and selecting the start-ups, entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial teams. Every accelerator's process varies to accommodate the objectives conveyed by selecting participants (Frimodig & Torkkeli, 2013). In certain accelerators, the entrepreneurial team is the main attribute in the accelerator's selection process (Pauwels et al., 2016). Programme managers critically review team dynamics, skills and performance, and the business idea's potential (Cohen, 2013; Frimodig & Torkkeli, 2013).

The deal secures a start-up's programme participation. Contractual ties between the parties document predefined requirements for the relationship, for example, potential funding (Goldstein et al., 2015; Kanbach & Stubner, 2016). Some accelerators require a stake in the participating start-ups before the accelerator programme (Battistella et al., 2017), while others may place a prerequisite that the start-ups get an investment post programme (Christiansen, 2009; Pauwels et al., 2016). Other accelerators may not necessarily have a fund of their own but can connect the start-up to a pool of potential investors, for example, during the demo day (Frimodig & Torkkeli, 2013; Hoffman & Radojevich-Kelley, 2012; Ovchinnikova & Topoleva, 2021).

The acceleration programme offers different modules with various themes focused on developing the start-up towards investment readiness (Mason & Kwok, 2010). Modules include knowledge sharing and entrepreneurial learning activities such as mentor sessions, coaching meetings, and lectures.

Exclusive events complement those with workshops and networking opportunities together with experts, alumni and potential investors (Cohen, 2013; Cohen & Hochberg, 2014; Kanbach & Stubner, 2016). The accelerators select expert mentors based on their primary vision and goals (Frimodig & Torkkeli, 2013). Mentors are often serial entrepreneurs or accelerator alumni who provide expertise, extensive knowledge and wisdom in new venture developments (Cohen, 2013; Cohen & Hochberg, 2014; Frimodig & Torkkeli, 2013; Hoffman & Radojevich-Kelley, 2012; Ovchinnikova & Topoleva, 2021). Accelerators may find the entrepreneurial team missing a certain skill or competence (Harding, 2002; Rasila, 2004) and will try to match a mentor to the entrepreneurial team or founder for exclusive follow-up (Pauwels et al., 2016) to close this competency gap (Frimodig & Torkkeli, 2013). As start-ups operate in dynamic, fast-changing environments (Casson, 2005), different competencies are needed in the various stages of venture development. Similarly, due to the dynamic environment in the accelerator programme, the entrepreneurial team may require diverse expertise at different periods of their programme participation. During the programme, mentors may change and be on call for ad hoc advice (Cohen & Hochberg, 2014).

A “demo day” often marks the completion of the accelerator programme where founders pitch or demonstrate their work completed in the programme to cohort members, friends and potential investors (Cohen, 2013; Cohen & Hochberg, 2014; Kanbach & Stubner, 2016). After the programme, participating start-ups become alumni. Start-ups continue their venture either with the accelerator as a partner or individually, independent of the accelerator. At this stage, the start-up's valuation may increase, and new funding rounds are initiated (Lange & Johnston, 2020).

The accelerator programme managers and participating founders must cooperate and interact as a team to achieve their objectives (Ovchinnikova & Topoleva, 2021; Pauwels et al., 2016). The accelerator's organic organisational form allows for flexibility in working methods, different types of decision-making (distributed or decentralised) and communication (Burns & Stalker, 1994; Slevin & Covin, 1990). The necessity of collaboration is recognised in an environment characterised by the uncertainty of new venture-, product- or service development (Audretsch et al., 2011).

While entrepreneurial ventures are still in development, their teams are not stable and organically organised around the entrepreneurial venture itself. Individuals frequently adapt to form, manage and disband teams (Mortensen, 2014; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2011). The following chapter introduces teaming as a phenomenon of study that we see as particularly relevant in this context.

2.2 Teaming

Within a modern organisation, the primary unit for learning, innovation and knowledge-creation is the team (Edmondson, 2002b; Edmondson & Nembhard, 2009; Lovelace et al., 2001). Attributes of teams are their project complexity, cross-functionality, temporary membership and fluid team boundaries which hold and hinder potential for performance (Edmondson & Nembhard, 2009). Recently, these highly temporary arrangements of collaboration between individuals, team-alike, have gained research interest (Edmondson, 2012a; Mortensen, 2014; Valentine & Edmondson, 2015). Instead of analysing the unit of the team characterised by fluid design and changing members, the term teaming evolved as a phenomenon to be studied.

Teaming is the dynamic activity to build and develop teams while the project or business itself is being developed (Edmondson, 2012a). An organisation of any maturity level should aim to build teaming capabilities rather than just building effective teams (Edmondson & Nembhard, 2009). This aim especially accounts for teams in the exploratory phase of their business. Teaming enables identifying relevant collaborators to speed up knowing what competencies are required to achieve a common goal (Edmondson, 2013).

Complex problem-solving calls for gathering different experts in temporary groups that might collaborate for the first and probably last time. Edmondson (2012b) refers to this as “Teaming is teamwork on the fly: a pickup basketball game rather than plays run by a team that has trained as a unit for years” (p. 72). Characteristics of teaming are significant for organisational learning and innovation. Teaming allows for more flexibility than traditional teams to approach increasing interdependencies that have to be managed (Edmondson, 2013). Teaming activities emphasise inclusive leadership, engaging members in discussions, and establishing mutual tools and goals to facilitate further knowledge sharing.

By performing these activities, individuals can develop broader knowledge and increase their interpersonal skills and network for their company's benefit (Edmondson, 2012b).

Within and across organisations, cross-boundary teaming becomes essential for innovation (Edmondson & Harvey, 2018). Edmondson (2012a) defined those boundaries being physical distance, status or competence in diverse expertise. In a study of a geographically distributed product development team, Edmondson (2012b) found that individuals who worked in groups characterised by greater task novelty, product complexity, colleague diversity, and more boundary spanning learned more than those on teams that faced fewer of these challenges. Yet, teaming is difficult across organisational boundaries and structures, and goals towards innovation or improvement are not realised (Seidel & O'Mahony, 2014).

This study will address teaming activities concerning the acceleration of entrepreneurial ventures as members in an accelerator cohort may change during the programme. Members include the start-up teams, members of the accelerator programmes and the mentor network. Interpersonal relationships and the work environment in which individuals team up play an important role in influencing teaming (Edmondson, 2012a). Establishing an environment of psychological safety is hence of great importance in uncertain and high-intensity work environments, such as in accelerators.

2.3 Psychological Safety

The phenomenon of psychological safety was examined on an individual, organisational or team level in academic research. The following chapters will introduce the literature published in those streams and further follow the understanding of psychological safety on a team level.

2.3.1 Definition

Kahn (1990) refers to psychological safety as the first one from an individual perspective as the "sense of being able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career" (p. 708). This sense increases when individuals are trusted and supported by interpersonal relationships with their colleagues. Kahn (1990) listed dimensions of the work climate which are indicators for a psychologically safe work environment: a) supportive and flexible management, which encourages employees to have control over their own work and methods used, b) clear roles and known norms, and c) self-expressions and true feeling can be revealed in work roles. Subsequent research in this decade investigated how this perception of an organisational environment is related to an employee's job involvement, efforts and performance. According to Pfeffer (1994), employees engage more when they know their psychological needs are met in the work environment. Building on the dimensions of a work climate by Kahn (1990), Brown & Leigh (1996) investigated the relation of job involvement, effort, and employee performance to the individual perception of the organisational psychological climate. A motivating and involving climate was positively related to job involvement and work performance.

In the same decade, the researcher Amy C. Edmondson advocates that psychological safety is better treated on a team level and defines it as "the shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking" (Edmondson, 1999, p. 350). In her first study on psychological safety, Edmondson (1996) tried to explain errors in patients' drug medication by focusing on the level of group work of interdisciplinary teams in hospitals. Her research showed that teams could compensate for errors caused by individuals when they are well-established. When members share a common perception about the consequences of making a mistake, the willingness to share mistakes openly increases the reporting

rates of errors within the team. Edmondson (1999) became the advocate of psychological safety and the establishment of work environments characterised by reducing the fear of failure and increasing learning as a team. Studies so far have primarily been conducted in healthcare work environments, as psychological safety plays an important role in reducing employee errors and enhancing patient safety (Leroy et al., 2012; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Newman et al., 2017).

Psychological safety can be categorised as an intermediate link between the organisational and work environment characteristics and employee behaviour, such as perception, motivation, and work performance (Edmondson, 2003). In a psychologically safe work environment, employees have the confidence to express their true selves and voice their opinions without the fear of being rejected or seen as incompetent (Edmondson, 1999; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). When in doubt and gaining this confidence, employees weigh the immediate, personal costs and organisational, as well as future benefits of speaking up (Detert & Edmondson, 2007). They need to feel safe enough to contribute. In an environment with high psychological safety, individuals collaborate and provide honest feedback to facilitate mutual learning and constructive conflict resolution (Lei et al., 2019).

They feel safe and encouraged to take risks and experiment. People perform activities like asking a question, seeking feedback, reporting a mistake, or proposing a new idea which is not seen as putting oneself at risk (Edmondson, 2003). If such a climate does not hold in a work environment, employees would be reluctant to take such risks, as they fear, consciously or unconsciously, an interpersonal risk of not their external image and perception by others (Edmondson, 2002a). Psychological safety can be categorised "as a critical driver of high-quality decision-making, healthy group dynamics and interpersonal relationships, greater innovation, and more effective execution in organizations" (Edmondson & Mortensen, 2021). If teaming is characterised by psychological safety among the individuals, they can embrace challenges and put the conflict to work (Edmondson, 2012b).

2.3.2 Trust, Group Cohesiveness, Team Efficacy

Trust has mostly been researched as individual beliefs or organisational level in the form of inter-organisational relationships (Kramer, 1999). In contrast, psychological safety is "an intrapsychic state that is especially salient at the group level" (Edmondson, 2004, p. 239). Trust does not capture the value of comfort an employee can feel in a work environment, which can be seen as a dimension of an interpersonal experience (Edmondson, 2004). When teams are smaller, psychological safety at this team level is particularly salient, similar to trust in a relationship between two individuals (Edmondson, 2004). In an accelerator, the start-ups (mainly up to five members) organise in temporary cohorts which are of smaller size, including their teams and their mentors (Cohen & Hochberg, 2014).

It is necessary to highlight that psychological safety in a team does not mean that every action is acceptable or agreed upon by the team members (Edmondson, 2018). Group cohesiveness reduces disagreement and challenges colleagues' perspectives (Janis, 1972) and needs to be distinguished from psychological safety, increasing the candour of each team member. It does not reduce conflicts between team members but allows for a constructive resolution and more effective collaboration if existent on a team level (Bradley et al., 2012). Team efficacy is a member's perception that the team owns the competencies required to successfully take a task (Bandura, 2000; Walumbwa et al., 2004). In contrast, psychological safety is the belief that taking action as a team member is without an interpersonal risk or the risk of humiliation (Edmondson, 1999). The following literature review highlights current research on the role of psychological safety in leadership and learning, as well as innovation and experimentation. These represent critical inputs and outputs of an accelerator programme and collaboration between accelerator programme managers, mentors and founders.

2.3.3 Leadership

Leadership behaviour influences team processes and dynamics, especially the climate and orientation towards learning and innovative work behaviour (Aryee et al., 2012; De Smet et al., 2021; Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Mogelof, 2005; Hult et al., 2000; Norrgren & Schaller, 1999; Raub & Robert, 2010; Tu & Lu, 2013). We will not draw on the discussion of whether team leadership is an input or output

variable in the intertwined relationship with team processes (Zaccaro & Klimoski, 2002), though it would be critical should causation be further explored. We, rather, follow the assumption of a unidirectional influence with available research assigning a mediating role to psychological safety in this relationship (Carmeli et al., 2010, 2014; Ortega et al., 2010; Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009).

Studies have shown that psychological safety consistently relates to leadership behaviour, especially in cross-disciplinary collaboration in product development (Edmondson, 1999, 2003; Hult et al., 2000; Lovelace et al., 2001; Norrgren & Schaller, 1999). Additionally, it is supposed to reduce the negative effects of status differences (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Logically, the learning process of teams and psychological safety within the team is influenced by the power structure and behaviour shown by leaders (Edmondson, 2002a). Walumbwa & Schaubroeck (2009) found that employee perception of psychological safety mediated the positive relationship between leaders' ethical leadership and the voicing behaviour of employees.

Traditionally, professional status influences the employees' belief on how easy it is to engage in behaviour supporting psychological safety, such as speaking up, asking questions or raising concerns. Nembhard & Edmondson (2006) introduce the construct of leadership inclusiveness as "words and deeds exhibited by leaders that invite and appreciate others' contributions" (p. 947). Their study in healthcare teams has shown that in cross-disciplinary teams, the relationship between status and psychological safety is weakened when leader inclusiveness is high. Raub & Robert's (2010) study highlights the mediation relation of psychological empowerment and employees in positions with less power who showed assertive, challenging, extra-role behaviour. Especially in cross-disciplinary teams, inclusiveness can help to minimise power differences (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Cross-disciplinary cohorts formed in accelerators include members from the entrepreneurial venture, mentors and the accelerator programme managers, in a way that power and objectives can differ on each side, potentially causing frictions (Mahmoud-Jouini et al., 2018).

Inclusive leadership that supports psychological safety is accessible, acknowledges fallibility, and provides constructive feedback to increase learning from failure (Edmondson, 2002a).

Inclusive leaders portray a certain level of openness towards their subordinates; they provide emotional support to employees, increase trustworthiness and position themselves as unbiased (Hollander, 2009; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). When the initial power differences due to formal roles and titles are reduced, employees perceive fewer costs with raising new ideas they view as potentially risky (Edmondson, 2003), a finding supported by the latest research. Javed et al. (2019) found that "inclusive leadership is positively related to innovative work behaviour, and psychological safety mediates the effect of inclusive leadership on innovative work behaviour" (p.117). In a recent collaborative study with McKinsey during the pandemic, De Smet et al. (2021) demonstrate that an authoritative-leadership style is harmful to psychological safety, while consultative- and supportive leadership styles nurture psychological safety. When a team leader first invests in creating a positive team climate, with support and consultation, and subsequently starts challenging their team, the likelihood of psychological safety is the highest. Conversely, (the latter step of) challenging had no significant effect on psychological behaviour without a positive climate as a foundation.

Leaders do influence the voicing behaviour of their subordinates and should regularly assess the risk of speaking up in their work environment (Detert & Burris, 2007). A study by Carmeli et al. (2010) examined how employee creativity is fostered by inclusive leadership in a work environment, as manifested by openness, accessibility, and availability of a leader. Their findings indicate that this leadership behaviour is positively related to psychological safety, which in turn supports employees' engagement in creative activities. In a subsequent study, Carmeli et al. (2014) found that transformational leadership establishes a work climate of psychological safety that cultivates reflexivity processes, promoting employees' creative problem-solving capacity.

Psychological safety increases the accountability of individuals in a team as one becomes accountable for jointly set targets. Team leaders are responsible for defining these shared goals and highlighting them along the way (Edmondson, 2002a). In turn, this shared vision positively affects the team's reflexivity, which enhances the team's overall effectiveness (Schippers et al., 2008). Interestingly, Carmeli et al. (2014) findings highlighted that psychological safety is related to this creative capacity through reflexivity, both directly and indirectly.

2.3.4 Reflexivity

Reflexivity at the team level is defined as "the extent to which group members overtly reflect on, and communicate about the group's objectives, strategies (decisionmaking) and processes (communication), and adapt these to current or anticipated circumstances" (West, 2000, p. 3). Research has shown that team reflexivity in challenging team environments is an important predictor of team outcomes, especially innovation; it causes actions such as deep processing, exchange of ideas among team members and critically reflecting ideas and therefore fostering more innovation (Carter & West, 1998; De Dreu et al., 2008; De Dreu, 2002; Paulus & Yang, 2000; Tjosvold et al., 2004). When facing a demanding work environment, "highly reflexive teams will be more innovative than teams low in reflexivity […]" (Schippers et al., 2015, p. 769). According to a field study by Edmondson et al. (2001), the collective learning process of responsible personnel in organisations with established processes is supported by reflections that promote a shared understanding of process improvements or required innovation.

Yet, it is still relatively little known about the ways leadership facilitates learning in temporary teams and the process of teaming, such as in accelerators. The environment in accelerators is unique in its context, which influences leadership, learning behaviour and reflexivity.

2.3.5 Experimentation & Innovation

As accessible and straightforward as the concept of psychological safety might seem, it requires great effort to establish and maintain psychological safety within a team, independent of the complexity of work contexts (Edmondson, 2018). It takes time to develop psychological safety on a team level (Edmondson, 1999); therefore, measures should be implemented early at the project or team start. The entrepreneurial and accelerator work environment is characterised by high-risk, uncertainty and failure as part of the road to success. Main activities revolve around innovation and experimentation, especially at the start of a new business (Edmondson & Mogelof, 2005). Activities expected of the entrepreneurial team can be equated to what Edmondson (2002a) defines as "the engagement of employees in behaviour for which the outcomes are both uncertain and potentially harmful to their image" (p. 256). The launch of new products includes not only financial and

business risks but tacit and undiscussed interpersonal risks among team members, which could cause anxiety and increase their fear of speaking up (Edmondson, 2002a; Edmondson & Mogelof, 2005).

To establish an innovative work environment, the activities listed above - asking questions, experimenting, and seeking advice - are learning behaviours desirable to be seen (Edmondson, 1999; West, 2000). Accelerators aspire to support a climate that invites members' curiosity, the open sharing of ideas, and collectively learning from failures (Weiblen & Chesbrough, 2015). However, by doing so, individuals can fear an interpersonal risk of being seen "as ignorant, incompetent, negative, or disruptive" (Edmondson, 2002a, p. 257). When experimentation with new approaches or decisions at the workplace fails, this could lead to adverse repercussions for the individual despite the intentions of their behaviour (Ryan & Oestreich, 1998; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Timing does matter in this regard, as team members, especially in projects, can fear slowing down team executions at one point in time and creating frustration for fellow members (Ford & Sullivan, 2004).

The willingness of team members to engage in learning behaviours such as sharing thoughts, concerns and ideas about critical work processes indicates successful learning in various teams (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2011). However, most individuals do not perceive their work environment as safe enough to speak up and challenge the traditional way of working (Milliken et al., 2003; Morrison & Phelps, 1999; Ryan & Oestreich, 1998). Ryan & Oestreich (1998) interviewed employees across all hierarchy levels in 22 companies and found that 70% of them shared the belief that speaking up about concerns could result in negative consequences. In the literature, there is growing evidence that risks associated with learning behaviours inhibit individual and organisational learning as employees do not contribute to the process (Detert & Burris, 2007).

2.3.6 Learning Behaviour

For organisations to continuously improve and enhance performance, they need to learn. In organisational research, learning is presented either as an outcome or a process.

Learning as an outcome of an organisation's process means "encoding inferences from history into routines that guide behaviour" (Levitt & March, 1988, p. 320). Contrasting, Argyris & Schön (1978) defined organisational learning as a process of detecting and correcting errors. Building on this latter definition, Fiol & Lyles (1985) highlights the increased knowledge and understanding an organisation gains in the process of change and action improvements. Based on this understanding, Edmondson (2002b) coined the term 'team learning behaviours' to refer to actions such as asking for help or reporting an error. In this paper, we adopt an understanding of learning as a process as our research explores how psychological safety influences members of the temporary team and their perception of learning in the programme. Sarin & McDermott (2003) studied 229 members of 52 high-tech new product projects and found that democratic leadership and given structures of goals by team leaders were positively related to team learning. They empirically demonstrated that innovativeness and the time-to-market of new products were positively affected by team learning. Psychological safety "mitigates interpersonal risks and facilitates a structured learning process in teams" (Edmondson, 2002a, p. 255).

Subsequent research underscores the linearly and nonlinearly relationship between psychological safety and team exploitative and exploratory learning (Kostopoulos & Bozionelos, 2011). It could be argued that psychological safety supports failure-based learning behaviours in a team, reducing the fear of failure, which can be seen as an information carrier (Edmondson, 2018). As earlier introduced, Hirak et al. (2012) found that inclusive leadership was positively associated with team members' perception of psychological safety. The climate of psychological safety in a team could facilitate learning from failures within the unit, which positively related to the subsequent performance. However, recent research has shown that the likelihood of unethical work behaviour increases when the work environment is characterised by a high degree of psychological safety (Pearsall & Ellis, 2011). Carmeli & Gittell (2009) introduced a mediation model in which high-quality team member relationships and learning from failure in an organisation are mediated by psychological safety. Both are positively related to psychological safety, leading to increased employee learning behaviours (Carmeli et al., 2009).

In Bergmann & Schaeppi's (2016) longitudinal study of Google, psychological safety was the leading characteristic of successful, high-performing teams. In Google's moonshot factory X, employees celebrate teams when they kill their project; failure is seen as a success and, in return, leads to a higher degree of psychological safety, encouraging the team members to take on more risks (Bergmann & Schaeppi, 2016).

In conclusion, available research indicated the mediating, beneficial influence of psychological safety on outcomes at work, such as increased creativity, experimentation abilities and more open and efficient collaboration in and between teams. The context of entrepreneurial ventures in the unique setting of an accelerator provides the opportunity for our exploratory study. We aim to understand how psychological safety affects teaming in accelerator programmes and whether they benefit from the associated outcomes.

3. Method

Our research explores how psychological safety affects teaming in accelerator programmes. With an exploratory approach, our study aims to provide insight into how psychological safety affects learning, innovation, and the interaction between individuals seeking to accelerate the entrepreneurial venture.

3.1 Research Design

This qualitative research is built on the epistemological assumption that social phenomena, such as psychological safety, are too complex to be reduced to single isolated variables (Yilmaz, 2013). With this choice of method, we treat informants as knowledgeable agents because the ontological assumption is that reality is subjective (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Perspectives and insights from those individuals as primary informants will be explored using a qualitative inquiry. Half-standardised interviews, which use critical methods, such as open-ended questions, will explore and surface opinions that may not be obtained through quantitative research.

For this study, the following three roles in an accelerator are of central importance. Founders from entrepreneurial ventures are referred to as the accelerator programme participants. The accelerators' programme managers structure the accelerator programme and focus on facilitating the programme delivery. Mentors offer advice or coach participating founders in a specific cohort. In a programme, programme managers, mentors and members of the entrepreneurial teams interact and they join cohorts throughout the programme. Accordingly, the unit of analysis is the most recent cohort of each accelerator programme. During the programme, new mentors are introduced, and others may leave; hence the cohort constitution changes throughout the programme. The unit of observation in semi-structured, in-depth interviews is the individual. Choosing an exploratory multi-case study research design, we explore the unique organisational setting of an accelerator and the effects of psychological safety. Case studies are a suitable choice, especially when factors of influence that might be relevant to the outcomes are not known before the study (Eisenhardt, 1989).

We follow the grounded theory approach to surface concepts and potentially develop new concepts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory is a research method aiming at generating new insights and theory which is "grounded" in the data that has been systematically collected and analysed (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Our study aims to understand the collected data by identifying key themes and categories (Thomas, 2006). The chosen research method is an active approach that includes constant comparison, theoretical sampling, and systematic data collection through asking generative and concept-related questions, followed by coding procedures and guidelines to attain conceptual density and integration (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Following the grounded theory approach to surface concepts, our study aims to identify and develop patterns through the collected data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Data is coded, and themes are identified following the Gioia Methodology. The Gioia Methodology is "a systematic approach to new concept development and grounded theory articulation that is designed to bring "qualitative rigour" to the conduct and presentation of inductive research" (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 15). This method allows the discovery of new insights during the data collection, as we suspend judgement after the initial consultation of existing literature and its conclusions. Unlike quantitative research designs that require data to fit into preconceived defined codes, the codes emerge while data is collected, and we stay alert for emerging ideas.

During the data collection process, informants are given an extraordinary voice and treated as knowledgeable agents (Gioia et al., 2013). Their experiences and stories matter for the analysis of how psychological safety affects teaming in accelerators. The study design and instruments in use, such as the half-standardised questionnaire, were further developed through the execution of this study, rather than having everything planned in advance. We were able to iterate questions based on interview responses and backtrack prior informants to ask subsequent questions developed later in the study process. This strategic choice allowed us to pursue relevant key themes and categories as they evolved through data collection. Our study did not collect process data strictly; however, we came across insights about establishing psychological safety among individuals over time.

Hereby, difficulties occur in assigning triggering events or methods in use unambiguously (Langley, 1999). With the choice of a qualitative research approach, our study can take the specific context of each accelerator and cohort into account, which is relevant to studying the phenomenon as events influence participants' openness toward each other.

3.2 Data Sample

The data sample includes two cohorts of more than two founders, several mentors and programme managers in two non-corporate accelerators. This study followed the approach of theoretical sampling, increasingly used by researchers in qualitative data analysis (Bryman, 2015). Theoretical sampling in grounded theory is the approach to collect data and decide what to collect based on the initially consulted theory and emerging categories from the collected data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This approach represents a form of purposive sampling, where researchers sample cases strategically to ensure their relevance to the research aim (Bell & Bryman, 2007). We determined where to collect the next data points through the data collection and analysis. With this choice of sampling, sites (accelerators) and individuals (in the roles of founders, mentors and programme managers) were selected because of their relevance to the research question (Charmaz, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The accelerators have an international or national operating business in Oslo, Norway. Due to these geographic characteristics, a smaller sample size limits the validity of this study. A higher density of accelerators in a specific geographic area within Norway was not considered; therefore, the probability of being part of the sample is unknown (Singleton & Straits, 2018).

The accelerators were found by looking into our LinkedIn network, professional network, and university contacts. Initial contact was established with two programme managers of two accelerators located in Oslo, Norway. We used direct messages on LinkedIn and e-mail to introduce our study and relevant information. From this initial sample, further informants in each accelerator were identified by snowball sampling, where our interviewees and we helped recruit future informants for this study (Bryman, 2015). Following guidelines from the Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees (2019), conflicts of interests must be prevented, and the independence between the informants and us, as researchers, is guaranteed.

There was no conflict of interest. The (potential) informants were informed about the purpose of this study and the processing of gathered information before conducting interviews. The initial sample size was higher than the final sample due to lower response rates and the willingness of informants to share their experiences.

3.3 Data Collection

Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The collection of primary data was completed in the period between March 2022 and April 2022. None of the accelerator programmes hosted a programme at this time; hence data was collected from the previous cohort members from the organised accelerator programme during Fall 2021. During this period, the programmes were provided either hybrid or digital due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.3.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Traditionally, qualitative research was conducted with in-person interviews. We utilised the synchronous online tools Zoom and Google Meet, depending on the interviewee's technical preference, as well as physical meetings if interviewees preferred. This choice was made due to current pandemic restrictions and uncertainty given about potential interview times and locations. Choosing online tools allows us to target the sample and individuals in real-time and in a more convenient and cost-efficient way (Gray et al., 2020). The two of us participated in every interview, and we were able to observe and bring forth individual perceptions of the interviewee. In online interviews, the goal was to establish an on-site experience and lively conversation with the interviewee, despite interaction through a web camera from both the interviewee and interviewers. We preferred this as it allowed for non-verbal communication (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014).

With the choice of this study sample, potentially excluding certain interviewees was less crucial. Entrepreneurial teams and accelerator members are known to be information system affine and show a high technological competence (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). We could not eliminate technical difficulties during the qualitative data collection with videoconferencing tools, which partially influenced the ability to collect and document all relevant information during a conversation (Archibald et al., 2019). We held physical interviews in the interviewees' offices.

We conducted 11 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with participants from two cohorts in two accelerators. Participants include programme managers, mentors and start-up founders. All interviews were video or audio recorded with the written consent of informants. We utilised the recordings to ensure that all interesting points could be followed (Bryman, 2015). As indicated in Table 1 below, the duration of the interviews varied from approximately half an hour to more than an hour. We experienced detailed and relevant reflections of all participants despite the duration or tools used to conduct the interviews. Once the interviews were recorded, we instantly transcribed them and deleted the files. When we refer to direct quotes in our findings, we use the following abbreviations: Founder = F, Mentor = M, Programme Manager = PM. Any personal information was replaced with a number and the respective role in each accelerator #1 or #2 to avoid the possibility of identification.

Interviewee	**Accelerator**	**Format**	**Duration (in min)**	**Recorded**	**Transcribed**
Founder #1	A1	Semi-structured	77:14	Yes	Yes
Founder #2	A1	Semi-structured	67:23	Yes	Yes
Founder #3	A1	Semi-structured	60:05	Yes	Yes
Founder #4	A2	Semi-structured	65:14	Yes	Yes
Founder #5	A2	Semi-structured	33:29	Yes	Yes
Mentor #1	A1	Semi-structured	55:19	Yes	Yes
Mentor #2	A1	Semi-structured	48:37	Yes	Yes
Mentor #3	A1	Semi-structured	80:54	Yes	Yes
Programme Manager #1	A1	Semi-structured	40:31	Yes	Yes
Programme Manager #2	A2	Semi-structured	63:14	Yes	Yes
Programme Manager #3	A2	Semi-structured	54:45	Yes	Yes

Table 1: List of Interviews Conducted

3.3.2 Interview Guide

We conducted semi-structured interviews. We could target specific categories while having the ability to ask follow-up questions and gather more in-depth data to explore this research topic and answer the research question. The flexibility allowed us to delve into curious topics, new insights and rich information (Bryman, 2015; Cooper & Schindler, 2014; Singleton & Straits, 2018). Using an interview guide, researchers aim for consistency in a sequence of semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2015). We created three initial interview guides tailored to each role in an accelerator: programme manager, mentor and founder (see Appendix A). During the data collection, we recognised that the interview guides needed further iteration and adaptations during interviews to capture interesting findings. The interview guide was a guideline, not a controlling or limiting factor in our exploratory study (Charmaz, 2014). We asked follow-up questions on interesting observations or exemplifications in order for us to understand the participants' answers truly.

We started with initial introductions in each interview, introducing our backgrounds and purpose of study, while interviewees introduced their backgrounds and role. In this step, we emphasised the guaranteed anonymity of the informants and data to encourage openness and truthful sharing of experiences. Anonymity is one way of operationalising confidentiality of research results (Wiles et al., 2008). As the personal experience influences the sharing of one's perception of psychological safety and personal experiences in the interviews, we ourselves needed to establish a psychologically safe environment where participants felt encouraged to open up.

This study aims to understand what happens when dynamic teams emerge and individuals engage in teaming activities and how psychological safety affects this environment. As the unit of analysis is the most recent accelerator cohort, all questions focused on the contribution of temporary or permanent members in the accelerator cohort, their experience and perspective on collaboration.

Leading questions about psychological safety were formulated in advance and built the basis for the interview guide. We derived the questions from Edmondson's (1999) 7-scale measurement, which can be found in Appendix B. We translated this scale into explorative, open-ended questions to encourage the interviewees to open up, which gave us the freedom to investigate interesting findings further.

We needed to ensure that the questionnaire was thorough and did not lead to learning-the-witness questions (Gioia et al., 2013). By constructing the interview guide on an existing scale for measuring psychological safety, we built more substantial content, criterion and construct validity. The guide was utilised in all interviews to strengthen the reliability of our study (Singleton & Straits, 2018).

3.4 Methodological Considerations

In this chapter, we present our additional considerations and limitations to ensure the validity and reliability of our exploratory study findings. The choice of our research design shows potential shortcomings that need to be further addressed (Singleton & Straits, 2018).

3.4.1 Ethical Considerations

As "social researchers, [we] are expected to follow general standards of scientific inquiry, emphasizing logical reasoning, objectivity, and control for bias and error" (Singleton & Straits, 2018, p. 47). Ethical considerations before, during and after a research study are important to sustain. This study is conducted with the institution of BI Norwegian Business School. All research activities were planned and performed in accordance with the National Research Ethics Committee for Social Sciences and Humanities (NESH). We ensured that results were used confidential and anonymously in accordance with Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) regulations. Before conducting the interviews and processing any personal data of the participants, we submitted a digital form to NSD for this research project (see Appendix C). NSD assessed and approved the application. We initiated our data collection after receiving the approval.

The study's research assets are imperative for the study's completion, and treating the interview participants with respect is important to establish an arena where information is shared openly. The interviewees are the study's most valuable assets, and all data collected has been anonymised. Individual information was replaced with a number and the respective role in each accelerator programme #1 or #2 to avoid the possibility of identification.

The study used informed consent (Singleton & Straits, 2018) to inform informants of the purpose of the study, the rights they have on objections and confidentiality and anonymisation before participating in the study. This supports the ethical objectives of "4. Voluntary informed consent" and "6. Impartiality" shared by the Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees (2019).

3.4.2 Interview Biases

During the interviews, we were both active participants and listeners, which helped ensure the quality of each interview and the reliability of the study (Singleton & Straits, 2018). We made great efforts to ensure as slight bias as possible but acknowledge that some bias is present. Questions were raised to not lead the interviewees towards a specific answer but rather in an explorative manner.

The perception of psychological safety is subjective, and measurement equals a self-report. This study was built solely on subjective measurements. We can not guarantee that we avoided common method bias as a measurement error when we obtained responses from the same participants as a source for data (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Measurement errors can result from the sociability of respondents wanting to provide a positive answer. This social desirability bias is a common interview bias (Singleton & Straits, 2018). We tried to mitigate interviewees' options to alter their responses to satisfy external factors such as cultural norms, society or even from us. First, we thoroughly informed the informants about their anonymity and the processing of the collected data to prevent them from altering their answers. Second, when analysing the collected data, an emphasis was put on identifying biases in the collected responses. Third, as data was collected from several individuals in similar roles in one accelerator programme cohort, differences in their answers were identified. This is particularly important for this study's objective, as differences in the perception of the collaborative environment highlight the characteristics of psychological safety.

A shortcoming of our study is that specific situations that occurred during the accelerator programme might be perceived in a certain way at the time and be seen differently as time passes, or subsequent experiences affect the perception. Our study put less emphasis on objective success measurement and more emphasis on the perception of the collaborative environment during an accelerator cohort.

We are interested in exploring how individuals perceive the accelerator programme's value. Last, we acknowledge that confirmation bias is present. We aim to answer the research question and hence purposely seek findings. By analysing the data line by line (Gioia et al., 2013), we were capable of reducing the bias. We looked into contradictions and specifically sought findings to validate such contradictions.

3.4.3 Lack of Generalisability

As this study studies only two accelerator cohorts, one could question the generalisability of the study. We acknowledge the lack of generalisability and the application of the study to the broader population (Eisenhardt, 1989). Our intent is not to reflect the broader population as accelerators represent a niche organisational form. By studying two different accelerators, we explored their structural differences to strengthen the explanatory power of our findings and their further application.

3.5 Data Analysis

Following the grounded theory approach, several structured steps characterise our data analysis process. Through the gradual construction of a category system (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This inductive approach allows for data-driven generalisations. The codes emerge during data collection, unlike preconceived codes used in quantitative research. The final data structure was built by abstracting the informants' first-order codes, grouping them into second-order themes and finally aggregating key dimensions. In this research, the process of data collection, data analysis and drawing on initial theory are necessarily intertwined. Coding the generated qualitative data enabled us to identify patterns in the data, leading to the development of new insights (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In accordance with the Gioia Methodology (Gioia et al., 2013), our study does not review a single case over time. However, it uses elements of this methodology to code and analyse the data. This analysis structure allowed us to be transparent and provide credible evidence for interpretations made on the collected data (Gioia et al., 2013). The process was structured as the following.

We performed an initial data coding. The development of first-order codes is based on interviewees' terminology, extracted from direct quotes as being the informants-centric terms. In this way, our judgments or standpoints, influenced by the initial research consultation, can be avoided. The interview transcripts served as the basis for the initial data coding. These were created using the professional Nvivo's Transcription software and interview recordings. A direct word-for-word transcript of each interview enabled us to cover aspects questioned outside of the initial questionnaire or draw on additional interviewee statements.

This proves especially relevant in inductive research approaches (Charmaz, 2014). In addition, we mitigated the confirmatory biases by searching for contradictory evidence in the empirical data, which can not be ignored (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). The two of us reviewed the coding separately to enhance the validity of this study. During this sensemaking period of the data analysis, we stayed open and tried to learn as much as possible from the data. An un-codifiable step will inevitably be our processing capability and insight during this initial coding (Weick, 1979). To mitigate this, we reviewed the transcripts first individually and coded these into individual tables. We went over each coding table to compare findings. The final table was generated when we both agreed on the most prominent codes. Each code was defined to avoid misunderstandings for the following codes. We were precise and narrow in this inductive coding step which allowed capturing the complexity and diversity of the data (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). The definitions for each code can be found in Appendix D. This process created the first data structure.

Following, a comprehensive compendium of first-order codes was organised into ten second-order themes, drawing on the initially consulted theory (Gioia et al., 2013). In this step, relationships between and among those first-order codes (referred to as axial coding) were identified, facilitating the process of assembling those into second-order themes (Corley & Gioia, 2004). The constant comparison between different codes enabled the grouping of those (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These core categories are expressed as gerunds, i.e. collaborating, identifying competency gaps as those represent activities (Langley, 1999). As appropriate, the second-order themes were aggregated in three overarching theoretical dimensions: *accelerators, teaming* and *psychological safety.*

The table below illustrates the coding process with examples of quotes for first-order codes and second-order themes.

2nd Order Themes	Selected Quotes on 1st Order Codes
Collaborating The action of programme managers, mentors and founders working together towards their goals	***Providing mentorship advice*** *"I also encourage them to, you know, get in contact again if they would like to get further elaboration on the same questions and so on . So I think that's important that the entrepreneur must not feel guilty when he is calling you an extra time every week or two times extra every week." (A1, F1)* ***Tools*** *"So they used Miro a lot and they actually kind of made a competition, you know, so like even with the stuff for you to prep in advance, they'd give you exercises. so you could go out and see who had it done and who didn't have it done. I thought it was good." (A2, F2)*
Team Learning The action of learning through teaming activities by programme managers, mentors and founders	***Peer-to-peer learning among start-ups*** *"And because you have that relationship and like everyone understands each other's companies, you know, within a couple of weeks, a lot of the time the best feedback that you're getting is from the other companies, not actual mentors." (A2, F4)* ***Becoming more open over time*** *"All of them that I have been working with are still very open and are like that through the programme … I think those who are not open and won't open through the programme either" (A1, PM1)*
Accelerator Structures The set-up of an accelerator programme and the organisation in itself	***Length & intensity of accelerator programme*** *"I can't really actually remember their names because it was such a short time. So it's only three months." (A1, M2)* ***Investments into start-ups*** *"We invest before and then work with them to increase the chance to talk to other investors and get more investments afterwards." (A2, PM2)*

Table 2: Illustration of Coding Process with Examples of Quotes and Themes

We did not apply these steps strictly linearly. Instead, we followed a "recursive, process-oriented, analytic procedure" (Locke, 1996, p. 240). This enabled us to create an overall understanding of the emerging relationships until new data relationships with interviews were not found anymore. In the form of a horizontal tree-shaped illustration, the data structure below is presented as a key output of this research and coding process (Corley & Gioia, 2004).

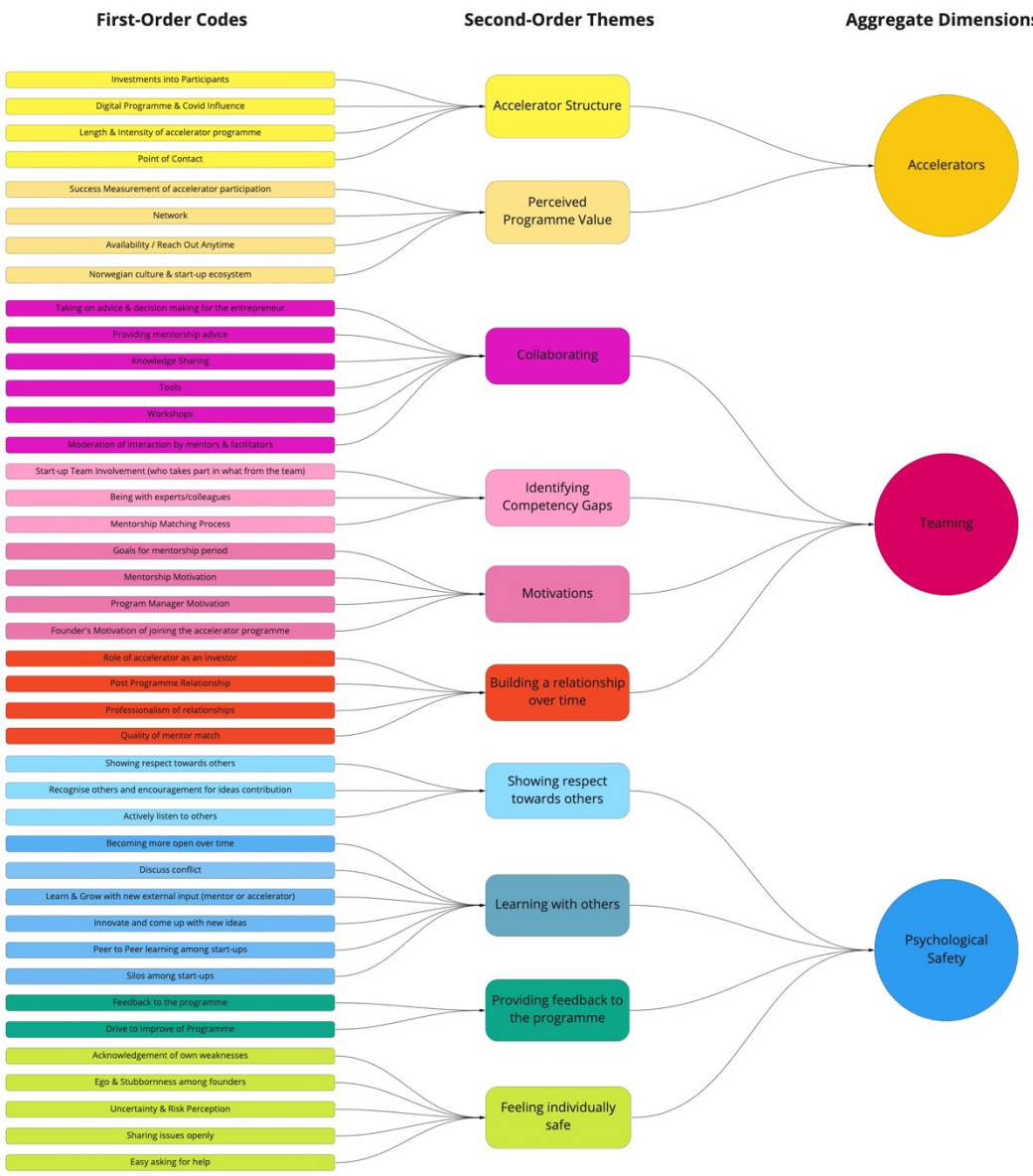

Figure 1: Data Structure

The data structure above summarises the second-order themes our inductive model is built upon. In order to articulate grounded theory, we identified dynamic relationships among the second-order themes in the data structure. This step transforms the static data structure into a dynamic inductive model, which we present in the following chapter. In our discussion, we reflect upon our findings and articulate emerging concepts and relationships identified by considering the current research state.

4. Findings

In the following chapter, our main findings from the conducted interviews are presented. We begin this chapter by presenting our *Inductive Model (4.1),* where key relationships between the aggregate themes and the second-order codes are presented. This model is grounded in the data that has been systematically collected and analysed. The subsequent chapters are structured according to the aggregate dimensions: *Accelerator Structure (4.2), Teaming (4.3), Psychological Safety (4.4)* and finally, *Perceived Accelerator Value (4.5).* Based on the collected data, we distinguish between accelerator structures and perceived accelerator value as themes of accelerators to highlight. In every other aggregate dimension, second-order themes give structure to the content of identified first-order concepts.

4.1 Inductive Model

Complexity in the data reflects the complexity of the phenomenon of psychological safety our study attempts to understand. With the development of new concepts, the challenge of reflecting on this complexity arises. We aim to create a simple, inductive model with high explanatory power rather than a complex one with little additional explanatory benefit. As Daft (1983) suggests: “design Research as a Poem, Not as a Novel" (p. 541). Valuable research shows characteristics of a poem, such as the choice of fewer variables that add up to a coherent whole and provide a depth of meaning.

From our study of two accelerator programmes, we found that programme structure affects teaming and psychological safety, which in turn directly affect the perceived programme value. The main dimensions in our model are: accelerator structure, teaming, psychological safety and perceived accelerator value. In Figure 2, straight lines represent a direct contextual relationship which can have positive or negative effects. The circular lines within ‘Teaming’ and ‘Psychological Safety’ exemplify the interdependence between the four second-order themes for each aggregate dimension.

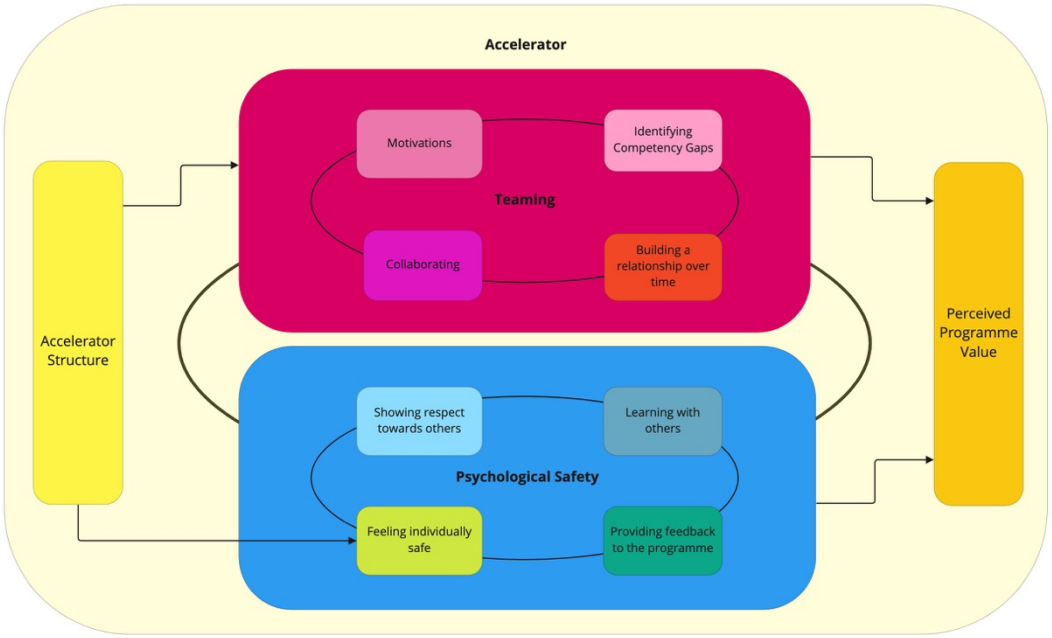

Figure 2: Inductive Model based on Data Analysis

The accelerator structures influence teaming directly and indirectly through its effect on psychological safety. Teaming and psychological safety, in turn, positively affect programme value. Teaming has four interrelated constructs, which are (1) motivations to team, (2) identifying competency gaps, (3) collaborating and (4) building a relationship over time. These constructs are reciprocally interdependent with the psychological safety constructs (1) showing respect towards others, (2) learning with others, (3) providing feedback to the programme, and (4) feeling individually safe. For example, building relationships over time contributes to feeling individually safe which in turn positively influences learning with others.

Accelerator Structure. The structural elements are (1) providing investment to the participants and (2) establishing a point of contact (POC) for participating founders. Two effects of structure stand out from our analysis. First, prior investment affects participants' individual safety negatively. When the accelerator invests in the start-ups, founders find it difficult to open up about weaknesses. Programme managers are motivated to establish long-term relationships by being investors in the ventures. Whereas, by joining to draw upon the accelerator's financial and human resources, the founders' motivation for developing a successful relationship is reciprocated when the programme managers invest in the start-up before the programme start. Second, the accelerator appointment of a POC for founders positively affects the relationship built over time between programme managers and founders. By being a point of contact, programme managers lower the threshold for founders to ask for help and share honest feedback.

Teaming. The four interrelated constructs of teaming are (1) the motivations to team, (2) identifying competency gaps, (3) collaborating and (4) building a relationship over time. Four effects stand out from our analysis. First, the motivations of programme managers, mentors and founders positively affect their respect towards each other. The members have incentives to support each other in order to accelerate the ventures' successes. Second, identifying competency gaps positively affects learning with others. Programme managers aim to identify the competency gap and establish connections based on expertise and needs. When there is compatibility, founders learn from mentors, programme managers and other programme participants. Third, collaborating positively affects feeling individually safe. Programme managers and mentors moderate sessions and interactive workshops. When they acknowledge the founders and their needs, founders feel safe to open up. Last, building relationships over time positively affects feeling individually safe. Over the duration of the programme, programme managers, mentors, and founders become more open. Specifically, founders' willingness to ask for help and provide support to other founders increases. This reciprocally influences relationships built over time and learning with others.

Psychological Safety. The four interrelated constructs of psychological safety are (1) showing respect towards others, (2) learning with others, (3) feeling individually safe, and (4) providing feedback to the programme. Four effects stand out from our analysis. First, showing respect towards others positively affects relationships building over time. Programme managers, mentors and founders respect each other, as they are aware of their mutual benefit in the programme. When members show respect, they do build relationships over the course of the programme. Second, learning with others positively increases the perceived programme value. Founders join with the motivation to network and learn. They value the synergies among founders in the programme. Whereas silos between founders decrease the perceived accelerator value. Third, feeling individually safe affects learning with others. When founders do not feel interpersonal risks, they speak up about their weaknesses and issues. They ask for help from programme managers, mentors or other founders. Last, providing feedback to the programme positively affects collaboration. Founders share feedback with the programme managers and dictate when they do not see value in a workshop or session. Programme managers listen to the feedback and adjust collaborative modules.

Perceived Programme Value. The perceived programme value is measured around the successes of founders' participation. When founders feel individually safe and learn with others, this positively affects the perceived programme value. Founders find the programme more valuable when they receive support from programme managers, mentors and other founders concerning issues they express.

Summarising our model, teaming and the programme value are positively affected by psychological safety. In a psychologically safe environment, members further engage in teaming activities. Both teaming and psychological safety, in turn, positively influence the perceived programme value. We revisit the main implications of these interdependencies identified in our discussion chapter. First, we present our findings according to the aggregate dimensions.

4.2 Accelerator Structure

In our study, we identify two accelerator structures as (1) investments in participants and (2) appointment of a point of contact. The two characteristics, (3) intensity and duration of the accelerator programme, as well as (4) providing a hybrid and digital programme due to the pandemic, will be elaborated upon only when of influence.

4.2.1 Investment into Participants

The two studied accelerators are located in Oslo, Norway. The table below shows their distinct differences. We will only elaborate on these differences if relevant to our research aim.

	Accelerator A1	***Accelerator A2***
Location	Headquartered in Oslo, Norway; Local Operations	Headquartered in Oslo, Norway; Global Operations
Active since	2016	2017
Accelerator funded by	Corporate Partners	Own VC and foundation
Accelerator focus	Proptech, fintech, retail tech	Impact driven ocean start-ups
Ecosystem	Hundreds of experts and mentors available	Hundreds of experts and mentors available
Period of last cohort	Fall 2021	Fall 2021
Duration time	12 weeks	12 weeks
Accelerator programme delivery in 2021	Hybrid	Digital
Investment	Potentially post	Prior accelerator participation Between 1 500 000 - 5 000 000 NOK
Start-up phase	Early stage	Early Stage
Number of accelerator programmes during a year	Two	Two
Accelerator team size	Four	Five

Table 3: Structural Characteristics of the Studied Accelerators

In our study, the two studied accelerators set the framework for teaming. Two structural elements, investing in participants and appointing a point of contact (POC in the following) for participating founders, significantly influence psychological safety constructs.

Founders associate capturing value in an accelerator programme with recognising and addressing one's own weaknesses. Programme managers from both studied accelerator programmes state the need for founders to be transparent when talking to them. They need to know their weaknesses in order to help them overcome them.

We find the initial willingness of founders to share their weaknesses and discuss issues openly decreases when the accelerator A2 invests in the start-up prior to the programme. Founders state that they find it helpful and valuable to be associated with a specialised industry or impact accelerator that is an investor. They value the accelerator as being strategically relevant for their subsequent growth. Nevertheless, we find founders find it challenging to switch from an investor-seeking mode into a learning mode. At the start of the programme, programme managers recognise a lack of confidence among the founders in the exercises they provide.

A2 uses different formats to map out the weaknesses of start-ups and founders at the start of their programme. One tool used is the ‘Company Mapping’ which they require founders to complete before their accelerator programme participation. This tool is a self-assessment where founders rank their capabilities on topics related to communications, financial understanding, team structure, and diversity. Programme managers observe that founders tend to overscore themselves on company mapping at first because they fear the consequences of being transparent about their shortcomings.

"... in the beginning, we see some hesitation of the participating start-ups to be very transparent about their weaknesses because they don't fully understand how they feel, since we are an investor. They think they need to kind of deliver on what they've said during the prior interview. But I do think that we encourage this transparent, more open behaviour through several sessions as all of them become a bit more vulnerable, such as sharing our own weaknesses. I think that we pretty quickly break down that barrier and open their willingness to share obstacles and weaknesses. If we feel that they have a challenge, we will try to contribute to address it. Their willingness to be open and share also depends on our ability and willingness to be a bit vulnerable and be clear on our expectations that like we do believe in you and we have already invested or made the decision to invest." (A2, PM3)

A2 aims to de-risk their investments by providing the accelerator programme to founders and the teams they invest in. By getting to know the start-ups and their needs better, they simultaneously open themselves to the participating founders. They are motivated to establish a long-term relationship as the success of the start-ups will ultimately become the success of the accelerator. Programme managers display a willingness to put in a bit more extra time and work.

"We say that in the beginning, just use us. So that's why we are here for you. We have already put money into your company, and we're sitting here for the next 8 to 10 years. This is part of a long-term strategy, so it's not like we're pulling out any time soon." (A2, PM2)

Through the programme, founders retrospectively recognise more of their weaknesses, and programme managers ask them to re-do their assessment after participation. The hesitation of founders to be transparent decreases.

"We also had some of them do [the self-assessment] after the programme and observed that they really over-assessed themselves at the start and reflecting now back on it after going through the programme and their learning curve is very satisfying to see… Everyone in the accelerator will be kind of equipped to do that together with their point of contact company and hopefully we just see the benefit of staying focused. So I think it's useful to have something to kind of check in on that's actually kind of being criticised as an accelerator and the programme, more often than just before and after the programme." (A2, PM3)

4.2.2 Appointment of a Point of Contact

The second structural element, appointing a POC for participating founders, influences the interaction between programme managers and founders. A2 has an intentional organisation where each start-up is assigned a POC from the accelerator team. A1 follows a similar structure with an assigned POC from the accelerator team whilst more prominently facilitating a match between a start-up and a mentor.

Having a POC is perceived positively by founders as POCs promote speaking up about specific issues. They help and initiate networking activities with other relevant contacts, such as experts or mentors. In A2, founders use their POC as the link between themselves and the mentor pool, whilst in A1, founders use their POC mainly for programme check-ins.

"I think the way [A2] organised the programme was very well, well done. [PM3] was my first contact point , and she was very good at that. And I think that she was sort of a gatekeeper as well. And I think that was very helpful . She was the centre point of contact, which made it very valuable for me." (A2, F5)

When highlighting their role, POCs do not see themselves as part of the start-ups' team but as advisors. They invest their time and want them to succeed.

"I'd consider myself more as an advisor than part of the start-ups team. But you do get very invested in what they do and you really want them to succeed, especially if solo founders join. I think I am not necessarily a team member, but definitely like a team player and I just feel like it's all about identifying needs that aren't already covered by the programme." (A2, PM3)

The perceived value of the accelerator programme is positively influenced by the perception of how approachable the programme managers and POCs are during and after the accelerator programme. Founders openly share that having a POC reduces the barrier of reaching out to programme managers and mentors, even after the programme has ended. One founder shares that if they were in a future situation where the start-up was at risk of an investor pulling out, they would certainly reach out to their POC for guidance. The meetings involve discussing any issues founders may have come across or if any new connection needs to be established. The founders share that POCs provide ad hoc help at any time during and after the programme, as they connect them to the accelerator's network.

"There are things that we do afterwards. I think they really appreciate that we are a point of contact for the start-ups, because then it's much easier for them to contact us later. They also have been negotiating their contracts with one or two of our team members, so they also know them quite well. I think, and what many of us say, that the start-ups really appreciate that we're close to them. So we're available for them and also that we connect them with our network . We give them opportunities." (A2, PM2)

4.3 Teaming in Accelerators

In our study, we find teaming has four interrelated constructs, which are (1) motivations to team, (2) identifying competency gaps, (3) collaborating and (4) building a relationship over time.

4.3.1 Motivations

We find the motivation members have to team positively affects their respect towards each other. By respecting each other, members contribute positively to collaboration which in turn positively affects relationship building over time. The different members of the programme have individual incentives to support each other in order to accelerate entrepreneurial ventures. Programme managers have incentives through their position as investors before or after the accelerator programme to enable start-ups becoming successful. Founders' incentives are their private interest in developing their business, which includes expanding their network, being introduced to a pool of mentors and working with relevant experts. Founders' goals vary from monetary goals such as receiving investment to non-monetary goals such as receiving strategic guidance, expanding their network, identifying relevant industry connections for further company growth, and meeting like-minded people. Mainly co-founders and occasionally commercial managers take part in the programme. All members emphasise the construct of teaming; collaboration is important to perceive the programme as valuable.

Both accelerators access a large pool of mentors, including former entrepreneurs and industry or subject matter experts. Mentors' incentives to contribute include providing expertise and experience, knowing they will not commercially or personally benefit from their contribution. They participate and allocate their pro bono time voluntarily, usually 20 per cent of their working capacity.

> *"I want to help them try to sell product services. The chemistry with the entrepreneurs drives me, the teams , what their ambitions are and what they have to lose. And it should be intellectually funny. Fun on the human level ... I've got quite a lot of altruism. At the same time, I'm not naive and I'm not looking for a commercial relationship with someone." (A1, M3)*

4.3.2 Identifying Competency Gaps

Driven by the motivation of programme managers, mentors and founders, all display a shared understanding that they are not omniscient. We find they individually understand that they are contributors to the teaming activities and that knowledge sharing is essential to learn with others. Programme managers identify the compatibility of founders' needs (problems) and mentors' knowledge (solutions). In line with the motivations founders' have to join, they seek advice for

business and commercial-related topics. The mentor matching process is a measure to identify their compatibility and close the founders' competency gaps. The accelerator closes this gap by facilitating this match. When mentors and founders perceive their match as valuable, the perceived accelerator value is positively affected.

"So I've been working with both, the mentors and participants, because we need to connect, we don't know everything ourselves, so we need to connect the sets to to have that broader knowledge in different areas" (A2, PM2)

The mentor matching process is coordinated differently in the studied accelerators. A1 follows a lead mentor structure meaning that one lead mentor is assigned per start-up, while A2 switched to ad hoc matching for specific issues.

"The previous structure among mentors and mentee has been characterised by assigning a lead mentor per company, but we've kind of moved away from that and doing introductions a bit more based upon their needs, the specific moments. We usually introduce most of the mentors at launch night, and to our network then we try to encourage them to connect in a more natural way. That led to some good cases and relations. And then second, we also ask the founders if they do have a wish list from the pool of mentors that we have and we try to facilitate those introductions in the beginning of the programme. Some mentor-mentee interactions are kind of one offs, others meet several times over the length of the programme. And we saw it worked way better if the company requests a mentor introduction, rather than us forcing those relations on them." (A2, PM3)

Both accelerators provide founders with a list of mentors with a short bio and expertise field. Founders can wish for specific mentors based on their needs. Founders state the challenge of connecting with somebody unknown digitally.

"We only saw the mentors on a piece of paper where they introduced themselves and their contacts, and all what they do and their expertise. But it was super short , so we didn't get a real impression of what they could actually help us with." (A1 ,F2).

Founders perceive the facilitation of mentor matches as valuable and indispensable. Particularly that the match *"provides the possibility to build a unique network" (A1, F3)* in line with founders' motivations to join the programme. Once a mentor is connected with a founder, both sides support commonly agreed-upon goals for the mentorship period. Mentors and founders can agree upon these goals without the programme manager's involvement.

"There must be a mutual understanding on what you want to get out of the mentoring and throughout that time … And then you need to sit down to discuss how one can work together to achieve the desired outcomes for the company. Then I think that there has to be a consensus that the world should work together in a certain way, to be able to focus on the set goals in terms of meeting regularly and having open minds and discussing different issues." (A1, M1)

Founders and mentors highlight the need for a mutual understanding of what they want to achieve during the programme and which work methods of cooperation they use towards their desired outcome. In line with identifying competency gaps, this cooperation positively impacts learning with others. For learning to transpire, founders need to be open to external advice and receive help when they know what they need based on reflections of weaknesses. For a proficient connection, founders need to be willing to collaborate, communicate and open up about struggles or difficulties related to their business.

"A successful collaboration between mentor and mentee is when they both feel like they get something out of it. ... Mentors often just open up their network, and they will both benefit from that because the mentor knows that they need this, and the start-up's needs a network ." (A2, PM3)

Founders find mentoring sessions helpful because these fill their competency gaps and expand their network. Founders refer to mentors as colleagues, acting as equal counterparts.

"He [my mentor] is teaching me things that I don't know, basically filling in the gaps and making it a little more structured and a lot more relevant to the way I need to work on my product. So, he was basically sitting as my counterpart in my mind. He was sitting on my side of the table. Basically, I was with my colleague." (A1, F2)

We find founders value the provided expertise and networking opportunities but express that the number of available capabilities creates a feeling of overwhelment.

"So there are experts and market experts and sales experts…There's nobody that's going to help you with nothing. But again, these people have got so much experience for such detailed knowledge that they can overwhelm you." (A1, F2)

When information and knowledge sharing becomes too extensive, founders question the programme's value. Nevertheless, with time, founders are found to value the learnings. Programme managers in A2 seem to be aware of this, as they plan to change their programme structure.

4.3.3 Collaborating

Mentor sessions are mainly organised and framed in collaboration between mentors and founders. The accelerators organise one-on-one meetings, structured sessions, workshops, guest lectures, and presentations from former CEOs, other founders and experts. The formats directly or indirectly promote sharing issues in a discussion; for example, A2 offers different modules, such as ‘Investor Readiness’ or ‘Scale-

Up Simulation', to help founders realise where their knowledge capabilities are. In those sessions, founders feel challenged and acknowledge shortcomings where they can subsequently receive help.

"We do host a CEO forum, where we get a guest speaker in and they get to quickly introduce themselves and what they can support with. And so it's typically on the specific topic that's been challenging for the start-ups. For example, scaling a team was one topic that we had last year.. And then around the table everyone shares relevant experience or advice. And then we often see that the participants or the CEOs of the start-ups come with input to each other, such as "We've been there.. We tried this, that didn't work, but then we tried this and so ..." So I feel like that as long as there is a person that introduces a challenge and there's someone from [A2] it is usually a good team dynamic. But since we as [A2] know the teams a bit better than the person coming in, we are also making kind of the introduction and moderation ... so they connected through the session, because we identified a need that someone else could fill." (A2, PM3)

The programme managers, either as organisers or timekeepers, carefully planned and facilitated the accelerator programme and its sessions. They or mentors moderate individual sessions. During such workshops and sessions, the moderator is conscious of including all participants and making introductions.

"So it's very informal and we as [A2] people usually always take a round around the table. We always introduce everyone, new and known people. " (A2, PM3).

Mentors and programme managers aim to create a collaborative environment in workshops, making them feel less like an investor meeting, board meeting or similar activity where intentions would be more formal. During the pandemic, they increasingly use digital tools such as Slack, Miro, and shared online folders. Meetings, seminars, lectures and workshops are hosted digitally in Zoom, Google Meet and Teams. The programme manager's goals are to "*create the workshop feeling" (A2, PM2)* in the digital space.

"... founders work on the same task in Miro and can also see what other teams have done. They might have done this task before or are working on this at the same time, so they get the feeling that they're working together with more of the other companies. It pushes them a little bit, because they see all of the other start-ups working, then they need to share [their work, too]." (A2, PM2)

The digital format is perceived positively and negatively. A1 only had one physical meeting during the cohort's period. Founders feel they miss out on the start-up accelerator atmosphere in Oslo, and the digital form reduces the ease of establishing connections.

"*If it is all digital, it is less of a workshop, but more just a frontal lecture or meeting." (A1,F1)*

Feedback from founders to the digital programme delivery advocate that recorded sessions do not work as well as workshops due to the lack of interactions. A source of learning is the discussion among participants, mentors or programme managers, or experts in live sessions.

Our findings highlight how members give and receive advice as an element of collaboration. The accelerators intend to advise founders for future successes. The characteristics of advice help founders see additional perspectives. Mentors feel accountable for the advice they provide. The advice should be well founded, realistic and useful. From a mentor's perspective, they expect the founders to reach out for further explanations or questions. Mentors encourage founders not to feel guilty for reaching out more than once if they are uncertain.

> *"And as there's probably a lot of bad mentors, as I mentioned, you should not give direct directions. It should be more sort of a guidance. You are, of course, accountable for advice that you give and it should be well founded and only used if you really know the business, otherwise you should be cautious." (A1, M2)*

The studied accelerators provide the structure for several members to team. We find the proactivity of founders determines the use of available mentors and programme managers. Our findings highlight that founders treat the received advice from mentors or programme managers as information or input. They ultimately decide whether to either use it, ignore it or react to the given advice. Mentors understand and respect that the founders are the final decision-makers, as the advice should ultimately benefit the founders' businesses.

> *"Our meetings with mentors or any experts were pretty much like an open dialogue, where we just discussed different topics and different issues we may be facing if we chose one option or went in this direction. So we didn't come to like a specific conclusion after these sessions. It was more like a space where we could ask questions and they could provide specific advice. After all, we are the ones who are taking the decisions." (A1,F3)*

Collaboration in terms of giving and receiving advice is influenced by the members' motivation and psychological safety constructs of individual safety and team respect. The way founders receive advice influences their perception of individual safety. For example, one founder states that she did not want to continue a mentor relationship with a mentor that did not listen to her and respect her co-founder.

4.3.4 Building a Relationship Over Time

An aspect of collaborating is building a relationship over time between mentors, founders and programme managers. We find building relationships over time positively affects feeling individually safe. During the programme, programme managers, mentors and founders become more open - specifically, founders' willingness to ask for help and provide support to other founders increases.

The accelerator programme's short duration and high intensity (with its modules, sessions and collaborative workshops) stimulate a working environment where participants get to know each other on a more personal level. Our findings outline that mentors, founders and programme managers are more invested as time passes.

> *"I feel like three months isn't that much time, but it is intense. If you meet a person every week, you do get to know each other on a personal level as well. It's not necessarily like a friendship based on the conversations you have, but you do get invested in each other." (A2, PM3)*

Founders find the environment to be *"... flexible, fun, open but professional" (A2, F4).* The aspect of friendship is not necessarily a commonality within accelerators. Most founders state, retrospectively, that some mentor relationships were purely business focus, on an ad hoc basis and as an exchange relationship.

> *"Like a mentor and mentee, it is an exchange equation" (A1, M2)*

The mentor matching is, as previously mentioned, part of closing founders' competency gaps. Founders find the quality of the mentor match dependent on the mentor, their communication and dynamics. Most mentor matches and teaming activities are contemplated success by the founders, yet not all matches were deemed successful. When a mentor and a founder do not match, the relationship ends sooner than expected. Interviewees in all three roles reflect that no relationship can be forced upon. Relationships end when goals are not aligned or met and no contractual frameworks are in force.

> *"I think it was most likely the dynamics that were kind of off. Everything took a long time and maybe he didn't understand our case as well as we wanted, so it was probably a miscommunication from our side as well." (A1, F6)*

Even though the mentoring period is strictly facilitated during the accelerator programme, we find some mentor matches evolve to become long-term relationships.

One founder shares that the successful match was a factor in both parties' commitment to collaborate and continue to build the founders' business past the accelerator programme.

"They matched me with mentors that, I think, I would enjoy. And that was exactly the way they were. I have never met one before, and I'm going to make a big effort to make sure that I continue to have a relationship with him . And I never would have met him if it hadn't been for the [A2] programme." (A2, F5)

After the intense twelve weeks of an accelerator programme, contacts and relationships established during this period may conclude. In A1, the relationships are officially concluded as the accelerator is not an investor. A1 refers to their completed accelerator start-ups as alumni with whom they stay in touch through a Slack channel.

"When they are done, they are kind of done."..."We dont push them after that because we don't have the capacity." (A1, PM1)

In A2, relationships between the accelerator and participants evolve to ad hoc communication. Their role as an investor requires dialogue for matters such as regulatory requirements or impact measurement.

4.4 Psychological Safety in Accelerators

Our identified teaming constructs are reciprocally interdependent with the identified psychological safety constructs, which are (1) showing respect towards others, (2) learning with others, (3) feeling individually safe, and (4) providing feedback to the programme.

4.4.1 Showing Respect towards Others

Programme managers, mentors and founders in the accelerator programme show respect towards each other for being different in terms of background, job title or experience. They accept, and even expect, contacts they engage with to be different. This is in line with their shared motivation to benefit from collaboration.

"It was just different people from different walks of life, having different experiences, looking at a problem in a different way." (A2, F5)

Mentors are viewed as subject matter experts. Programme managers and founders do not only respect what mentors have achieved, where they came from, and what

they aim to do, but in particular, they are respectful of the use of the mentors' time. There is a mutual acceptance of differences among members and a shared perception of value when looking at problems. By interacting during sessions and workshops, all interviewees state they do not have and do not sense an interest in sabotaging people or efforts. From a founder's perspective, the interest in stealing anybody's idea is not viable as there is, simply put, no time for that.

"In the meetings with the other start-ups/founders I felt very comfortable. The accelerator provided a very open environment to share struggles. They provided a safe space to share the struggles, because people are often very concerned with showing their weak side, and getting advice from other start-ups because they're so afraid that someone will steal their deal or whatever. But the truth is that entrepreneurs have so much to do so they don't have time to steal anybody's idea or even want other ideas." (A1, F3)

Mentors recognise the variation in their communication style in sessions to stimulate an open environment. They sense that everyone wants to contribute. They need to allow all people to come forward with comments, not only the most extroverted ones.

"Everyone comes to a meeting or to a group, uh, with the intention of contributing something that is positive. You need to leave some space in the meeting to allow people to come forward with comments. And to establish that confidence in between the participants … You have to be willing to vary your style. You know, if you come to every meeting as if it is a board meeting, then everyone feels lined up and feels that there is very little room for comments." (A1, M1)

Both programme managers and mentors recognise the necessity of establishing confidence among all participants and actively facilitating interaction to encourage different opinions. The ability to listen is frequently cited as an important competence among mentors and founders. Active listening cultivates their understanding of others. It is as important to listen as well as to share experiences.

"... when you work in a group, you need to make continuous room for others to advocate their opinions and ideas." (A1,M1)

We identify a situational interdependence regarding founders' sharing behaviour. If one founder does not share as much, other founders are less willing to share as they otherwise would be.

"If they [other founders] are not being that open with you, then you're not going to be as open with them. The one time, yeah, I think we were put into breakout rooms once or twice with one or two of those particular companies, and you would definitely be less likely to open up." (A2,F4)

The aspects of openness and respect are equally important in relationship building among collaborating members. Issues arise when the dynamics among mentors and founders are off. When mentors do not listen to the founders' concerns and leave out space for discussion, founders turn away and ignore the given advice.

"Another issue with this mentor was that he was speaking a lot. He didn't give us the space to respond to his claims, and the things he said in general. So the two of us were just looking at each other and knew: Yeah, that's not going to happen and just let it go." (A1, F3)

The majority of founders state that they need to be clear on, set expectations and ask for what they need whilst being willing to listen. They are aware that new knowledge could contradict their own former experience. Through discussions and disagreements, new perspectives and ideas are generated. Founders recognise the need for their willingness to open up and allow constructive discussions.

4.4.2 Learning with Others

Individuals in the accelerator programmes learn and indicate personal and business growth by receiving input from mentors, other participants or programme managers. The accelerators facilitate this exchange to an extent. While in A1, silos are perceived among start-ups, A2 organises collaborative sessions, creating an environment of mutual understanding and learning. The accelerator hosts sessions, such as 'wins, challenges and changes', for founders to attend voluntarily. In these, they can share what happened in past weeks and upcoming issues they would like to discuss.

"We always try to encourage the start-up teams to share a challenge or a risk . We have seen that in an intentional format, it's been a bit more difficult. But for example , when we discuss start-up impact we did have three start-ups alongside the same value chain but different responsibilities […] They also kind of gave suggestions, challenged each other on impacts and in terms of that from a different angle than we could have done, and now they could do it themselves. That was very, very interesting to see." (A2, PM3).

The collaborative sessions with the other start-ups are seen as the most useful sessions among all founders, where they can identify synergies among each other.

"There is also something that's very powerful and what we call "wins, challenges and changes" which is a session just for people to attend voluntarily. It's not mandatory. You can jump in once a week to just share what's been going on the last week on the business side of your programme or you and your start-up. And then it's also very much about seeing the synergies connecting." (A2, PM3)

According to programme managers in A2, the programme aims at facilitating peer-to-peer learning. The founders go through the burden of the programme together, and *"if start-ups would not engage with each other, I guess we would be viewed as more of an investor"* (A2, PM2). In A1, start-ups rather work in silos and do not learn from each other to the extent as stated in A2. Little to no collaboration is observed between different mentors and founders of start-ups. At the end of the programme in A1, start-ups initiate the collaboration themselves.

"I think the start-ups stick to themselves. I've seen other accelerators where it's more of a group or rather community feeling." (A1, F3)

We find peer-to-peer learning among founders in the studied accelerators is valued as one of the most important sources of learning. In organised sessions, founders value getting to know how others solve problems of a similar kind.

In A2, accelerator programme managers openly communicate the principle of willingness to learn and collaborate. According to mentors and founders, this principle sets the tone early in the programme.

"I thought that there was a tremendous amount of collaboration. The accelerator facilitators set a tone very early on. That was more "we're going to get through this all together as a family-oriented kind of thing." I do sense that. And everybody had a huge willingness to participate in the programme and make sure everybody got the most out of it." (A2, F5)

Mentors share the experience that founders are interested in learning and growing and wish to listen. If a founder's business is more mature, mentor advice and discussions are used more as an inspiration, not necessarily immediate action points. Mentors are aware of this. To learn with others, less mature founders reach out to more mature founders. More mature founders state they offer help with no expectations in return.

"So like within two or three weeks when everyone kind of knew each other and there's a few companies started reaching out to us kind of saying all we'd really love to talk to you about actually building units. So we had about five calls with other companies where basically we were just giving them advice posts. It wasn't really going the other way. It was just kind of offering them help." (A2, F4)

This collaboration is based on not only supporting and comforting but challenging each other. Strong beliefs and visions drive founders. Mentors are eager to achieve something extraordinary during that period that had not necessarily been thought of before. Ideas dominate discussions in sessions rather than final solutions.

"You know, there are no snowflakes in the room for one moment. There are no final solutions, often only drafts of ideas. Sometimes absolutely nothing, except for strong beliefs. Founders might be fundamentally wrong about their market and customer understanding. In which case, we as lead mentor or mentor are trying to help them understand why we think they are wrong. Or they can help us to understand why we are fundamentally wrong. That works in a way that you feel safe." (A1, M3)

"...And I think when the companies get insight into the industry and the mentor gets insight into a different part of the industry, they encourage each other to ideate and validate if there is anything that can make the start-ups solutions better? (A2, PM3)

Hereby, ideas can contrast with prior understanding. Mentors challenge founders' assumptions about their market or customer when it contrasts with their own understanding. If there is no trust among members in the working group and the ability to challenge each other is not present, mentors believe the work will not progress. The members in those working groups may not only be mentors but other founders in the same cohort. Participating founders are valued as mentors as well. Start-ups learn from each other during the accelerator programme and benefit from peer-to-peer learning and mentoring.

"So, as far as I'm concerned, every start-up is a mentor as well. You don't just view them as start-ups. They're also all mentors." (A2, F2)

In our interview, founders, mentors or programme managers exemplify no conflict. Interestingly, their perspective on conflict and how to leverage conflict differs with their cultural background. A founder states he would rather handle conflict at its surface and directly, while others would handle conflict with a softer, more empathic approach. Another founder refers to conflict as a technique to reach a goal by knowing who the cultural counterpart is.

4.4.3 Feeling Individually Safe

The characteristics of asking for help, ease in approaching others and receiving support are related to individual safety. We find the perception of individual safety in the accelerator cohort is an important attribute influencing learning behaviours and, ultimately, the perceived programme value.

Members in both accelerators state that they become more open over time towards each other in terms of opening up about weaknesses, getting to know people on a personal level, and connecting. According to programme managers opening up is a necessity to benefit from the programme.

“If start-ups are not willing to share, they are not a good fit for the programme and should not be there.” (A1, PM1). If founders are unwilling to share, programme managers' experience states that this will not change during the programme. The majority of founders did not expect to open up to the extent they ultimately did. This indication can be seen as a finding supporting team learning in a psychologically safe environment.

"It's usually the finances which we keep for ourselves. But funnily enough, as the programme went on, we got more and more open, because you had to because like one of the main modules was all about fundraising and finance, and it just made more sense if you were open about it, you know, so we actually kind of were sharing everything, really. So, it was right and there was no issue with this." (A2, F4)

Over time, mentors experience more efficient interactions with founders because they become franker. Programme managers and founders are often surprised by mentors’ ability and willingness to share, be open and contribute by going the extra mile, whether to make a new suggestion towards the accelerator or another start-up. Founders openly share that support is always received regardless of the issue addressed. Over time, each one of them recognises the other's individual behaviour and uses these insights when asking for help. The willingness to help increases over time when people get to know each other.

"When you get to know people you know how they behave, you know what you can expect of them and what you can ask them for. Obviously, the more you get to know people, the more comfortable you are with them and the more they are willing to help." (A1, F2)

Even though mentors and programme managers are approachable and supportive, founders’ egos and stubbornness influence founders’ willingness to take on advice provided by programme managers and mentors. Mentors want to provide an external perspective when founders do not see the right path after working on their own business over time. Some mentors feel founders are too convinced that their approach or idea is the right one and hence struggle to provide advice.

"You need to work around that entrepreneur's ego in a way, because when an entrepreneur has an idea , they're like this in their mind: this is going to work." (A1, M3)

Founders do, however, acknowledge that their ego could hinder them from taking on advice due to feeling at risk. *“You need to put your ego behind. Don’t feel at risk” (A1, F1).* Mainly, the uncertainty and risk perception is related to the entrepreneurial activity and not the accelerator environment.

Mentors and programme managers sense that founders take high risks close to their fear threshold. Founders understand that their business and entrepreneurial activity are constantly at risk.

"Risk and safety are basically analogies, not quite the opposite. In our environment, the business is at constant risk, right?... But, it has to be part of the deal. You need to provide ways and mechanisms to cope with risk." (A1, F1)

Sharing issues openly is interlinked with the collaboration within the programme, the quality of the mentorship match, and how comfortable the founders are in sharing issues they want to discuss. Founders perceive the accelerator environment and atmosphere as a safe space to share. One founder shares an example where he receives questions, feedback and guidance on the direction of the business. Instead of being silent, he shares his real struggles.

When directly interacting with others, the founder does not hesitate to ask questions back. In a later group session, where all founders gathered, they are asked to ideate together on solutions or business directions for him.

"And it was basically just like a little therapy session where you, if you had, had a big win or a big success or if you were having a big issue or a challenge that you could just talk about with us." (A2, F4)

Certain non-mandatory sessions are perceived as facilitation for sharing issues. At the start of the A2 accelerator programme, programme managers use tools such as 'Company Mapping' to ground founders' weakness acknowledgements. They sense the hesitancy of founders in answering truthfully. Our findings highlight the importance of triggering events that increase the founders' feeling of individual safety. The sessions 'Investor Readiness' and 'Scale Up Simulations' are seen as points in time when less open participants finally open up.

"We felt at one point the moment for an open, even more collaborative environment happened. It was at a module we provide, which is called investor readiness, by a trainer who's rather harsh, asking the tough questions, and anticipating toughness of investors. He's just prepping the start-ups for any hard question that can come from an investor at a later point. He can be really tough. Some people like it , some people don't . We really appreciate it, because it automatically puts these companies in the vulnerable space and is part of an interactive exercise […] so I feel at that point everybody is open to share, challenge and learn." (A2, PM3)

In this event, founders open up and show the vulnerability of what capabilities they are lacking and would need help in improving. In addition, the 'Scale up Simulation' session, with its gamification aspects, put founders in a space to

identify their current and future shortcomings. By participating in these events as a cohort, the founders get to see the other founders' shortcomings as well as realise their own. This realisation and workshop framework contributes to their individual safety and learning from others.

4.4.4 Providing Feedback to the Programme

Providing feedback to the programme positively affects collaboration. Founders share feedback with the programme managers and dictate when they do not see value in a workshop or session. Programme managers listen to the feedback and adjust the collaborative modules.

> *"I was quite pissed off about it to be honest. And when [A2, PM2] asked me "how did you find the workshop?" I answered that it was a complete waste of time. And she was a little bit like, "Oh", but no, she was totally fine about it. I think I wasn't the only one to say that, a couple of other people did. They [A2] definitely took it on board." (A2,F4)*

> *"So I did get some, or we did get some harsh feedback last time. This programme is a new one. And we're always trying to become better. It's OK to have some negative thoughts about the programme. And it's also pretty good to get some of that feedback because, of course, we can get back and improve." (A1, PM1)*

Founders in A2 use their weekly meeting with their POC to discuss how things are going and last week's content. In our interviews, the founders state they are honest and share openly that some of the modules were a waste of time. Feedback topics range from the content of modules, management constitution, and mentors' behaviour to the intensity and amount of input. Programme managers show motivation and drive to improve the programme for future accelerator participants and use the founders' feedback. Topics they recognise without founders' input which need improvement are the time zone issue with providing a digital/hybrid programme, workshop formats and order, monitoring and following up with mentor-mentee-relationship after the programme, and programme intensity. Our findings indicate a high overlap between the feedback of founders and the improvement possibilities programme managers identify.

4.5 Perceived Programme Value

The perceived programme value is measured around the successes of founders' participation. Programme managers encourage founders to set concrete goals for what they want to achieve throughout the accelerator and mentoring period.

In A1, founders and programme managers set concrete goals for the programme, which was perceived as useful by founders.

“My main point was that you need to set a certain programme to be able to look back and see that you've actually achieved something throughout that period.” (A1,F1)

A2 uses OKRs (Objectives and Key Results) or KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) to set goals for founders’ participation in the programme. As their accelerator programme has objectives on impact, goals must reflect in their success measurement. Goal selection and measurement are grounded in the ‘Company Mapping’ assessment.

The majority of founders perceive their programme participation as valuable. Some can secure investors after their participation or connect with relevant contacts, and others do not see the need to participate in a second programme.

"It was definitely the right time for us to go into A1, because it was a programme for very, very early start-ups and people who had not actually found their product market fit yet. So, yeah, it was definitely the right time for us to join in, and a lot of things in the programme were super valuable. Especially the last pitching day, we pitched our idea and won a seat where three investors reached out to us afterwards." (A1, F3)

"I don't think we will participate in another accelerator, I think this is enough. I think what we'll do now is move on and we'll go for a series A and just continue our growth that way. I gained a complete understanding and I have enough contacts. I don't think repeating that would be worthwhile for me." (A2, F5)

According to programme managers, the monetary investment from A2 is the initial motivation to work with the accelerator, whereas the most stated benefit by founders though is the expansion of their network and working with relevant partners. The accelerators introduce founders to the mentor pool and accelerators’ network(s).

"I think the main thing that we were aiming to get out of it was networking and connections because they [A2] had a huge network and a very relevant network, you know . It [the accelerator] was quite specific already to us, which was definitely what was important to us. You know, that it wasn't just a generic accelerator. So even all the other companies were doing slightly different things . Most of them are working in the same environment as us, and they're having a lot of the same problems as we would. So, yeah, the connections were definitely the biggest benefit." (A2, F4)

When founders feel individually safe and learn with others, this positively affects the perceived programme value. When they receive support from programme managers, mentors and other founders, founders find the programme more valuable in helping them address expressed issues.

5. Discussion

In our study of psychological safety in two separate accelerator programmes, we found that psychological safety has an effect on teaming activities among programme managers, mentors and founders. According to Edmondson (2003), psychological safety can be seen as the intermediate link between collaborative work environment characteristics and individual behaviour, such as perception, motivation, and performance. Our data analysis and findings reinforce this perspective of psychological safety in teaming in an accelerator.

Teaming across boundaries is part of the current paradigm shift of ways to build teams while businesses are being built (Edmondson, 2012a). In the accelerators studied, we found members organising to accelerate entrepreneurial ventures; the members participate in activities to innovate, help each other and generate new ideas to support founders. These align with what Edmondson (2003) lists as activities performed when individuals sense that they do not put themselves at risk. Establishing psychological safety is essential to team successfully.

Throughout our discussion, we identify properties of the phenomenon of psychological safety that particularly affect teaming in an accelerator. We do not propose our contributions as being exclusive or exhaustive. The properties discussed should be seen as interdependent, overlapping through the activities performed by members in an accelerator. We first discuss the role of power structures among accelerator members, which impacts the establishment of psychological safety, drawing upon members' perception of risk as an important facet of entrepreneurial activities. Second, we discuss how non-official appointed leaders display inclusive leadership behaviour among members. Third, we emphasise time's mediating influence on establishing psychological safety in accelerator programmes. Last, we draw upon the serendipitous finding of teaming being a goal in itself in the accelerator programme.

5.1 Power Structures in an Accelerator

Collaborating in a psychologically safe environment means "… it's not that it's easy for [individuals] to take [...] interpersonal risks; rather, they understand it's expected of them." (Edmondson, 2012a, p. 47). At first, we assumed that founders were mainly concerned about these interpersonal risks. Throughout our study, we discovered, however, that founders' concern to speak up about weaknesses and issues is not only related to the perceived interpersonal risks but feared negative consequences for their own company. In line with Edmondson (2002a) and Edmondson & Mogelof (2005), the facets of risk, founders associated with entrepreneurial activities, ranged from business to interpersonal.

In particular, structural elements of the accelerator, such as being an investor, influence founders' perception of risks and experience of individual safety. We find a prior investment affects participants' individual safety negatively. Our findings suggest that founders are more reluctant to show weakness and engage in behaviours that could threaten their image in the eyes of their investor, being the accelerator. This in turn, negatively affects their ability to learn from others in the accelerator. If a founder is afraid of sharing failure, they could perceive opening up about challenges as detrimental to their own expertise or risky for their business. Being open about challenges is a key attribute of successful accelerator participation of founders, and we emphasise this as a key principle.

Prior research has emphasised the influence of power structures on the learning process in cross-disciplinary teams (Edmondson, 2002b). These structures influence individuals' behaviours and strengthen the importance of promoting psychological safety to reduce the negative effects of status differences (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Our study sharpens the understanding of power structures in an accelerator.

We find power structures re-entering the accelerator in a rather unusual way. Instead of individuals, who are given positions with more or less power, members join from different organisations in an accelerator. The perception of power moves from their specific role and over to the organisation they represent. Programme managers from the investing accelerator, for instance, are perceived as superior to the participating founders in an accelerator cohort.

As Edmondson (2002a) states, individuals are "impression managers" (p.256). At the beginning of the programme, the potential consequences of showing weakness are unknown to the founders. They may perceive them as uncertain or potentially harmful to their company's investment. The perspective we present has important implications for the behaviour of programme managers representing the investing accelerator.

Prior research has shown that psychological safety is related to leader behaviour (Edmondson, 1999, 2003; Hult et al., 2000; Lovelace et al., 2001; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Norrgren & Schaller, 1999). Founders perceive the behavioural traits shown by programme managers in the invested accelerator as supportive and accessible. Programme managers lead by example and need to be willing to open up to expect founders to open up. Their behaviour nurtures founders' feeling of individual safety and mitigates the influence of their perceived power differences. We support research by De Smet et al. (2021), providing evidence that consultative and supportive leadership style supports the establishment of psychological safety.

5.2 Inclusive Leadership Behaviour

In the accelerators studied, we found that formal leadership and authorities do not characterise their organisational structure. Our data analysis revealed that inclusive leadership is still equally present and important. By being a POC, programme managers lower the threshold for founders to ask for help and share honest feedback. Rather than an officially appointed leader organising teaming, we dispute that individuals show leadership behaviour in their roles.

Our perspective suggests that POCs act as boundary spanners between founders and mentors across organisational boundaries and others. Edmondson (2012b) states that teaming happens across physical, competency, or status boundaries. Boundaries in competencies result from different experiences, knowledge, and expertise (Edmondson, 2012b). In our studied accelerators, programme managers as POCs schedule regular visits encouraging sharing among mentors and founders to match their competencies, bridging the boundary. By using digital tools, they facilitate knowledge sharing among founders and mentors.

Status boundaries are met with inclusive leadership behaviour and proactively engaging members in discussions (Edmondson, 2012a). Without having a defined role as a leader, we find POCs inclusively lead in facilitating temporary teaming. The POCs are advocated to be open, accommodating and attentive. One founder even states that they later referred to the POC as a friend and confidant, which is rare as friendly relations are not the norm. When two individuals collaborate, we acknowledge that psychological safety at this level is salient, similar to trust (Edmondson, 2004). As POCs invite and appreciate founders' contributions, providing feedback to the accelerator and the programme, this behaviour can be considered inclusive leadership, potentially minimising status differences as discussed in the previous chapter.

Interestingly, our findings reveal that programme managers do not see themselves as team members or leaders in the accelerator cohort. This perception conflicts with the founders' perception of the programme managers and POCs. They view the programme manager as an essential team member, as they contribute to the programme's success. Our proffered perspective on leadership suggests that programme managers should not underestimate their importance, namely for promoting the accelerator, collaboration, and contributing to a psychologically safe environment during the programme.

Last, a POC for founders can enhance reflexivity among members in an accelerator cohort. Reflexivity is critical in the exploratory phase of a founder's business, learning, and innovation (Edmondson & Nembhard, 2009). Recent studies have emphasised the role of reflexivity in uncertain and innovative environments (Carter & West, 1998; De Dreu, 2002; Schippers et al., 2015; Tjosvold et al., 2004; West, 2000). They have not articulated an actual practice to promote reflexivity in temporary teams, particularly in an organisational structure such as an accelerator. We argue that an appointed POC eases founders' threshold to reach out to the accelerator; founders can indicate, share, and express when they do not see value in a session. Such reflections promote a shared meaning of improvements or required process adaptations (Edmondson et al., 2001), in turn influencing the perceived programme value.

The following section discusses the importance of acknowledging weakness for team learning and establishing psychological safety within an accelerator cohort. Edmondson (1999) argues that psychological safety reduces the perceived risks and negative consequences associated with opening up and discussing failures. Our study supports this conclusion and further finds that for the development of individual safety among all members collaborating, it is vital to acknowledge weaknesses, lower the threshold to ask for help, and foster team learning.

5.3 Team Learning Behaviour

Acknowledging weaknesses and speaking up about challenges is part of the founders' learning process in an accelerator and establishing team learning behaviours. Edmondson (1999) advocates that reducing the fear of failure increases learning as a team. Failure is an important information carrier (Edmondson, 2018). Our collected data can be challenged for not once mentioning the word failure. We argue that psychological safety supports failure-based learning behaviours in an accelerator cohort. Members of the studied accelerators have experienced setbacks before their accelerator participation; during the programme, they share these previously positive or negative experiences with what they learned. Other founders may have been in similar situations before and contribute to failure-based learning. In building entrepreneurial ventures, failure is part of the road to success.

Programme managers use different tools and workshop formats to understand founders’ strengths and weaknesses. Our provided perspective emphasises that the use of any tools can be questioned if founders do not respond honestly. Furthermore, if founders are not willing to be open, are they suited for the programme? Accelerator programmes require founders to be willing to share their vulnerabilities, especially if they expect others to do the same. In organised events in A2, such as ‘Scale Up Simulation’, founders are put in a space to identify their current and future shortcomings. By participating in these events as a cohort, founders show vulnerability and see other founders' challenges. Programme managers take an active role in enabling and moderating this learning exchange.

Accelerators provide the structure for several members to team. However, the proactivity of founders determines whether and how to use available mentors and programme managers to generate the intended value and receive access to relevant contacts. This does not necessarily indicate that it is easier for different founders to act in accordance; their beliefs about interpersonal interactions are likely shaped by their personalities and history of interactions (Edmondson & Mogelof, 2005). For instance, egos and stubbornness of founders negatively influence willingness to either provide or act on advice. Even though the majority of participants in our study express comfort in sharing their ideas, doubts and opinions, some remain closed about information that is either confidential or personal. We see this as counterproductive for their own and others' learning experiences.

5.4 The Role of Time and Intensity

We consciously decided not to study the role of time. Unexpectedly, we find time does influence the dynamics of teaming and the establishment of psychological safety in the studied accelerators. The accelerator programmes operate for twelve weeks. Relative to former research on psychological safety in temporary teams (Edmondson et al., 2001; Marks et al., 2001), this duration is relatively short to establish a psychologically safe environment. Nonetheless, we find evidence of psychological safety, allowing for open sharing among programme cohort members. Our perspective proposes that time is an important but not constraining variable influencing the establishment of psychological safety. An accelerator programme's short duration and high intensity encourage collaboration and enforce getting to know each other early on. A challenge of temporary teaming activities performed in accelerators is that people may not take the time to establish trust and mutual understanding (Edmondson, 2012b). Our findings show that individuals initially found the intensity and short duration of the programme challenging in getting to know other participants. Interestingly, most founders shared camaraderie experiences in the teaming efforts and opened up further than expected. The latter confirms that psychological safety was established despite constraints of time and intensity. The experience of starting a new programme and being in a cohort is known to foster uncommonly strong connections among founders. As Cohen (2013) states, in an accelerator cohort, "...Peer bonds form quickly, but deeply" (p.22).

5.5 Teaming in Itself as a Goal

Although not being our primary research intention, we want to draw attention to teaming and a serendipitous finding. In an accelerator, teaming unfolds differently in temporary arrangements of collaboration. Specifically, we find members of an accelerator cohort are not employed by the same company; they are individuals who collaborate based on their motivation to join and within the structure of the accelerator programme. These are attributes of teaming (Edmondson, 2012a). Our perspective proposes that the interrelated constructs of teaming in the accelerator programme are reciprocally affected by the interrelated constructs of psychological safety. Accelerators aspire to create an environment prime for teaming among cohort members. As such, we argue that teaming in itself is the goal.

As uncertainty characterises the accelerator environment, mentors, programme managers and founders innovate, help each other and generate new ideas to support the start-ups. Members engage in dynamic activities whilst building entrepreneurial ventures. Our findings highlight that proactivity needs to characterise interactions among programme managers, founders and members. Were proactivity non-existent, the necessary connections between individuals would not be supported and teaming as a goal in itself not be achieved.

Individual participants may contribute with prior knowledge of engaging in teaming activities, while others may not have the same experience, such that the former then contribute with their teaming competencies. According to Edmondson (2012b), individuals benefit from serial teaming by developing broader knowledge, increasing interpersonal skills and widening their network of potential collaborators. The fluidity of changing members in the dynamic teaming activities positively affects the founders' continuous learning with others.

Interestingly, by taking on the different roles of programme managers, mentors and founders, individuals seem to know what is expected of them and which responsibilities they take on in the programme. This understanding of roles exemplifies psychological safety in utilising and valuing different, unique skills and expertise (Edmondson, 1999). Our perspective strengthens how vital psychological safety is not only in organising teams but in organising accelerator programmes.

6. Implications

Our discussion yields several implications for research on the concepts of teaming, psychological safety and accelerators, and practical managerial implications for programme managers, mentors and participants in an accelerator. The recommendations are neither exclusive nor exhaustive.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

Our research scope of psychological safety on teaming in accelerators is specific. We argue, however, that this context provides rich opportunities for further research. Our study contributes new insights into the concepts of psychological safety, teaming and accelerators.

Accelerators represent an interesting organisational structure to study due to their dynamic, uncertain environment. A perspective on teaming has allowed us to understand the collaboration dynamics in an accelerator, and with our study, we contribute to previous research on temporary arrangements of collaboration (Edmondson, 2012a; Mortensen, 2014; Valentine & Edmondson, 2015). We believe a perspective on teaming and temporary collaboration arrangements complements the existing research on accelerators and their structure by insisting on the essential role of psychological safety in accomplishing the goal of accelerating entrepreneurial ventures.

First, this further suggests how a psychologically safe environment can be built through the interactions of individuals. Our study provides a first contribution by sharpening the understanding of power structures in an accelerator. Instead of the role of individuals, it is namely the organisation they represent that influences their status. Second, current research on the role of inclusive leadership suggests that officially appointed leaders influence the establishment of psychological safety among subordinates; rather, we contend that inclusive behaviour is displayed in the ongoing collaboration among members. This offers an alternative interpretation of inclusive leadership behaviour in these organisational structures. As such, structural elements of accelerators need to be taken into consideration.

We document time as an interesting variable worthy of further research attention. In line with Edmondson (1999), we propose that it takes time to develop psychological safety on a team level in an accelerator, but the intensity of collaboration under time pressure should as well be examined. We propose studying the process of establishing psychological safety in unison with the process of teaming.

With this, the concept of social capital could provide an interesting angle to discuss the value of establishing psychological safety in accelerators. Social capital is defined as the value of networks of relationships between individuals which enable productive benefits (Coleman, 1988). Intangible resources, such as knowledge, ideas and opportunities, are exchanged through internal and external relationships (Coleman, 1988). In an environment of positive social capital, where people exchange and share those resources, they are more likely to feel comfortable freely expressing themselves, thereby increasing their capacity to learn (Carmeli & Gittell, 2009). Our study proposes that through the interactive sessions in the accelerator programme, members form interpersonal relations of higher quality by virtue of the space made for getting to know each other. Previous research advocates that this supports effective learning (Earley & Gibson, 2002).

Further research is required to understand whether the degree of influence of psychological safety differs on performance, innovation and learning outcomes on individual, team, and organisational levels. We encourage fellow researchers to pursue perspectives and enhance our understanding of the effects of psychological safety on teaming in accelerators.

6.2 Managerial Implications

Our findings and discussion highlight the importance of establishing high-quality relationships among programme managers, founders and mentors in an accelerator cohort. The question arises of how accelerators can facilitate an environment of psychological safety. Grounded in our findings and discussion, we present recommendations for establishing a psychologically safe environment in an accelerator.

6.2.1 Recommendations For Programme Managers

Programme managers should not underestimate the importance of their role in promoting the accelerator, fostering a collaborative environment and contributing to a psychologically safe environment. This study encourages programme managers to facilitate the establishment of psychological safety as early as possible in the accelerator programme. Attempts to implement it later can cause friction, and learning opportunities may be lost in the absence of ease and safety to share openly.

Before programme delivery, programme managers can organise and facilitate the mentor-founder matching process as networking events to get acquainted. Appointing a POC in the accelerator can lower the threshold for founders to reach out regarding challenges and questions, firstly to the accelerator, which further expands on the accelerator expert pool. With the use of digital tools, programme managers should dedicate enough time at the beginning of a programme to establish a certain familiarity among cohort members. This is the first step to create a psychologically safe environment.

Investing in activities that encourage a psychologically safe environment is equally important during the programme. Providing sessions with the intention to promote sharing failures and challenges can help to encourage founders to open up. Programme managers should be aware that founders have different perceptions of interpersonal risks. When an accelerator is an investor, it influences the individual safety of founders entering the accelerator programme. Their perception of individual safety can be increased through sessions and activities during the programme. Programme managers should encourage and emphasise the accelerators' values. Further, POCs can encourage founders to open up without fear

of interpersonal risk by being in close contact through the programme. Programme Managers should lead by example and open up as well. In addition, the accelerator environment is characterised by proactivity, and so should the provided modules. Interactive sessions are preferable to establish synergies among participating founders, allowing peer-to-peer learning. By participating in events as a cohort, founders can be presented with each other's issues. These events are considered more beneficial than sessions held in a lecture-like fashion while encouraging teaming and collaborative learning.

An accelerator programme should balance educational modules with those modules helping founders to work on issues and challenges. Programme managers should, in addition, initiate activities such as retrospectives to promote reflexivity among members. Similar activities should be incorporated to receive regular programme feedback.

6.2.2 Recommendations For Founders

Founders are encouraged not to fear opening up about weaknesses and challenges in accelerators. The founders' reasoning and motivation to join an accelerator is to absorb new knowledge from experts and accelerate their venture. In order to do so, opening up about struggles and accepting guidance are essential for future business development. When founders receive an investment from an accelerator, they should distinguish between receiving and collaborating with the investment department and accelerator programme participation. Fearing interpersonal risks for opening up about weaknesses is unfounded. Programme managers and mentors are eager to give well-founded advice. It is the founder's responsibility to implement the recommendations received. Ego and stubbornness can only hinder the potential value an accelerator can provide.

The accelerator provides the medium for founders to engage in teaming activities and peer-to-peer learning. If they aim to create synergies and learn from other participating start-ups, they need to be aware of the potential discomfort of opening up. They should lead by example if they expect other founders to do so. They should be encouraged to be each other's mentors.

6.2.3 Recommendations For Mentors

Mentors are encouraged to facilitate an open and honest environment among founders. Their expert role is valued, and their competency is essential for providing value in an accelerator. It is important that mentors be aware of their position as a source of knowledge and provide well-founded advice to avoid stimulating the perception of interpersonal risk among founders. Delizonna (2017) recommends thinking in advance about the reactions to the advice provided; ensuring, as the messenger, that the content is heard rather than seen to be attacking anyone's identity or ego. Psychological safety is about exercising more candour and not being polite and overly at ease with each other (Edmondson & Hugander, 2021). Active listening needs to characterise a mentor-founder relationship and the relationship formed with programme managers in the accelerators. If it does not, our findings show that the relationship will not endure, which is not in the interest of an accelerator. In addition, mentors and founders must build on a mutual understanding of mentorship period goals and cooperation. Mentors should work with other mentors to facilitate better collaboration and knowledge flow to the founders, easing the process of teaming with founders and programme managers. Team learning can ultimately increase the perceived value of an accelerator programme.

7. Conclusion

"Psychological safety is both fragile and vital to success in uncertain, interdependent environments." (Delizonna, 2017)

Our study aimed to explore how psychological safety affects teaming in accelerators. By conducting an exploratory study in two different accelerator programmes, we found evidence for the existence and influence of psychological safety among the collaborating members. Both teaming activities and the perceived programme value are positively affected by psychological safety. In a psychologically safe environment, members further engage in teaming. Teaming and psychological safety, in turn, positively influence the perceived programme value.

A key contribution of our study is the identification of structural elements of an accelerator influencing teaming and psychological safety among collaborating members in an accelerator cohort: being an investor and appointment of a point of contact for participating founders. First, being an investor negatively influenced founders' feeling individually safe. Second, appointing a point of contact for participating founders positively influenced their feeling of individual safety and ability to speak their minds. Our discussion highlights the influences of power structures and inclusive leadership behaviour on the perception of psychological safety in accelerator programmes.

We, therefore, call for an integrative perspective of psychological safety, teaming and accelerators. Understanding that psychological safety affects teaming in accelerators may bring us closer to an understanding of the importance of establishing a safe work environment among collaborative individuals. Accelerators aim to provide a peer-to-peer environment and create networking opportunities (Christiansen, 2009). By building on a foundation where members share their concerns freely and do not resist challenging each other, they can innovate together and accelerate their ventures. Perhaps this paper will encourage researchers to increasingly focus their attention on understanding the phenomenon of psychological safety in such temporary collaborations.

7.1 Limitations

We recognise limitations in the choice of our research design and the validity of our findings. First, our exploratory study lacks generalisability, as referred to in Chapter 3. To ground the inductive model and recommendations given, they require details on similar incidences, which this research was unable to obtain further. Even though we were able to conduct interviews in two different accelerators, we acknowledge that our findings lack representativity among a broader sample. Second, the studied accelerators were both located in Oslo, Norway. The study was conducted in Western culture, which equals predominantly available studies. The influence of culture on the development of psychological safety is not yet explored to a satisfactory extent (Newman et al., 2017), and this study's findings offer limited insights. Third, we utilised the participants' self-assessment of psychological safety during subjective interviews; hence we did not obtain evidence that the reported behaviour was truly shown. Triangulation of sources can increase the confidence of our presented results (Singleton & Straits, 2018). Fourth, we acknowledge that moving to digital programme elements might have influenced the establishment of psychological safety and its effects. We consciously did not further elaborate upon initial findings but call for future research. Last, we studied the phenomenon of psychological safety at a fixed point in time and not over time. The available data limits the ability to address potential negative implications of psychological safety or whether it can be rebuilt over time. These topics remain empirical research interest for process data studies.

7.2 Future Research

How psychological safety is established among members engaging in temporary teaming provides room for various future research. First, our exploratory study provides insights which need to be verified across different accelerator programmes and their relative context, for example, different accelerator classifications being a seed accelerator or a corporate for-profit accelerator (Frimodig & Torkkeli, 2013). One research question of particular interest is, how does the presence of psychological safety in accelerator programmes lead to better results?

A second opportunity for future research yields from accelerator programmes being delivered digitally. Our findings hinted at the complexity of establishing the relationships among the collaborative members in a hybrid or digital environment.

As Edmondson & Mortensen (2021) highlight, different measures might be taken to ensure a psychologically safe environment. Third, we recommend that future researchers study more accelerator programmes and similar organisational structures to be able to generalise our provided insights.

Last, in line with Newman et al. (2017), we advocate alternative research methodologies to study the phenomenon of psychological safety. We encourage researchers to enhance theoretical understanding and promote more multi- and cross-level studies to understand further the relative influence of factors on an individual-, team-, and organisational-levels on psychological safety and the associated outcomes.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guides

We created the following three interviews to guide the semi-structured interviews.

A.1 Programme Managers in an Accelerator Cohort

Parts	**Questions**
Introduction - Introduction to master thesis and topic of study - Explore role and responsibility of the individual	Could you tell us a little about your position and role? Could you state some of your key responsibilities? How long have you worked in this role and industry? Could you tell us about your team? What are your day-to-day tasks? (individual vs. teamwork) What do you enjoy doing most and why?
Leading the accelerator programme - Motivations of joining/accelerator programmes - Progress measurement in an accelerator (OKRs, KPIs)	Could you tell us about the programme? (Investment focus, structure, length, size of batch, programme adjustments due to covid, frequency) Could you tell us about your role in the programme? How and why do you measure the success of your participants in a certain way? (OKRs, KPIs, Milestones) In your opinion, how do the teams handle setbacks and deviance from desired results? How does your programme define a successful collaboration between mentors and mentees?
Perception of psychological safety Build on Edmondson's scale	<u>Individual safety:</u> How do you discuss difficult issues and problems in your team? Do you, and if so, how, receive retaliation or criticism if you make an error or mistake? How easy is it to ask a member of your team for help/advice/support? To what extent do you feel safe in offering new ideas, even if they aren't fully formed plans yet? To what extent would you agree that it is safe to to take risk (individually) in this team?

	How are members of this team valuing and utilising your unique skills and talents? <u>Team respect</u> How would you describe your team's acceptance of each other? How do you deal with new ideas in the process and to what extent do you give them time and attention? How would you describe the value of others' (mentors/mentees) contributions to your (entrepreneurial) effort? <u>Team Learning</u> In what way do people talk openly about mistakes and ways to improve and learn from them? To what extent does the team take time to find new ways of collaborating to improve the overall goal? How do members of this team raise concerns they have about team plans or decisions (other than yourself)? How do you discover underlying assumptions and seek counterarguments about issues under discussions?
Characteristic of the work environment - Collaboration - Learning - Dealing with Failure - Creativity - Leadership - Knowledge Sharing	To what extent are you collaborating with both, mentors and founders? How do you describe the work environment during an accelerator cohort? How do you/the programme create an environment which encourages sharing and support seeking of founders? What specific actions does the programme hold to handle setbacks and deviances from desired results? Do you have any concrete actions or practices to enhance collaboration?
Closing	Would you like to mention anything else that we may have forgotten to ask you? Is it okay if we contact you again in case of clarifications? Could we speak to one of your other team members?

A.2 Start-up Founders in an Accelerator Cohort

Parts	Questions
Introduction - Introduction to master thesis and topic of study - Explore role and responsibility of the individual	Could you tell us a little about your position and company? How long have you worked in this role and industry? Could you state some of your key responsibilities? What do you enjoy doing most and why?
Participating in the accelerator programme - Motivations of joining/accelerator programmes - Progress measurement in an accelerator (OKRs, KPIs)	Could you tell us about the programme and experience? Which batch were you participating in/did you participate in? Why did you sign up/take part in the accelerator programme? If applicable, with which goal/intention did you enter the programme? Could you tell us about your start-up team and who was involved in the programme and engaged with mentors/facilitators? How and why do you measure the success of your participation in a certain way? (OKRs, KPIs, Milestones)
Characteristic of the work environment - Collaboration - Learning - Dealing with Failure - Creativity - Leadership - Knowledge Sharing	How was your mentoring collaboration set-up? (matching, meetings, frequency) How often do you meet, how frequent is your exchange with mentors/facilitators of the programme? What characterises your relationship? How did your team/your mentor raise concerns they have about team plans or decisions (other than yourself)? What did the decision-making process look like when discussing new plans/options (were you rather seek advice, decide on your own or consensus with the mentor/facilitator) Retrospectively, would you and if so, why say it was a successful collaboration? To what extent are you in touch or collaborated with the other batch start-ups? How did you collaborate with them during your time? (or after) How do you deal with new ideas during the

	programme duration, and to what extent do you give them time and attention? How would you describe the value of others' (mentors/mentees) contributions to your (entrepreneurial) effort? Are there activities the programme offers to integrate you, your team/other members and your mentor? → certain structures, processes and activities? How do you perceive the working environment - to what extent does it encourage sharing and support seeking of mentees? Could you please recall a situation that you remember particularly from your participation where you've learned something (either for your team, yourself, your start-up, your goal)? Did you feel at risk when raising a specific opinion in a meeting with your mentor/facilitators? If so, why? If not, why not? In your opinion, how did the teams handle setbacks and deviance from desired results during this time? Do you feel the importance of building and maintaining a psychologically safe environment is sufficiently incorporated in the accelerator programme? And why? Do you have any concrete actions or practices to enhance collaboration? Do you have any concrete actions or practices to enhance psychological safety?
Perception of psychological safety Build on Edmondson's scale	<u>Individual safety:</u> How do you discuss difficult issues and problems in your team? Do you, and if so, how, receive retaliation or criticism if you admit to an error or mistake? How easy is it to ask a member of your team for help/advice/support? To what extent do you feel safe in offering new ideas, even if they aren't fully formed plans yet? To what extent would you agree that it is safe to to take a risk (individually) in this team? How are members of this team valuing and utilising your unique skills and talents?

	<u>Team respect</u> How would you describe your team's acceptance of each other? How do you deal with new ideas in the process and to what extent do you give them time and attention? How would you describe the value of others' (mentors/mentees) contributions to your (entrepreneurial) effort? <u>Team Learning</u> In what way do people talk openly about mistakes and ways to improve and learn from them? To what extent does the team take time to find new ways of collaborating to improve the overall goal? How do members of this team raise concerns they have about team plans or decisions (other than yourself)? How do you discover underlying assumptions and seek counterarguments about issues under discussion?
Closing	Would you like to mention anything else that we may have forgotten to ask you? Is it okay if we contact you again in case of clarifications? Could we speak to one of your other team members?

A.3 Mentors in an Accelerator Cohort

Parts	**Questions**
Introduction - Introduction to master thesis and topic of study - Explore role and responsibility of the individual	Could you tell us a little about your background and current job? How long have you worked in this role and industry?
Mentoring in the accelerator programme - Motivations of joining - Progress measurement in an accelerator (OKRs, KPIs) - Mentoring activities	Could you tell us about your part in the programme? Could you state some of your key responsibilities? What do you enjoy doing most as a mentor and why? Could you tell us with whom you collaborate (as mentees/team members)?
Characteristic of the work environment - Collaboration - Learning - Dealing with Failure	How was your mentoring collaboration set-up? (matching, meetings, frequency) How often do you meet, how frequent is your exchange with mentors/facilitators of the programme?

- Creativity - Leadership - Knowledge Sharing	What characterises your relationship? What changed over time? How did your team/your mentor raise concerns they have about team plans or decisions (other than yourself)? What did the decision-making process look like when discussing new plans/options (were you rather seek advice, decide on your own or consensus with the mentor/facilitator) Retrospectively, would you and if so, why say it was a successful collaboration? How and why do you measure the success of your mentoring in a certain way? (OKRs, KPIs, Milestones) during and after the programme? In your opinion, how does your team (start-ups teams + mentors) handle setbacks and deviance from desired results? How do you perceive the working environment - to what extent does it encourage sharing and support seeking of mentees? What specific actions does the programme hold to handle setbacks and deviances from desired results? Do you feel the importance of building and maintaining a psychologically safe environment is sufficiently incorporated in your accelerator programme?And why? How do you/your programme enable cross-boundary teaming (across accelerator employees and start-up members) through structures, processes and activities? If you could change sth. about the mentoring environment/programme, what would it be and why? Do you have any concrete actions or practices to enhance collaboration?
Measure PS Build on Edmondson's scale	<u>Individual safety:</u> How do you discuss difficult issues and problems with your team? Do you, and if so, how, receive retaliation or criticism if you admit an error or mistake? How easy is it to ask a member of your team for help/advice/support? To what extent do you feel safe in offering new ideas, even if they aren't fully formed plans yet? (experimentation-related)

	To what extent would you agree that it is safe to to take risk (individually) in this team? How are members of this team valuing and utilising your unique skills and talents? <u>Team respect</u> How would you describe your team's acceptance of each other? How do you deal with new ideas in the process and to what extent do you give them time and attention? How would you describe the value of others' (mentors/mentees) contributions to your (entrepreneurial) effort? <u>Team Learning</u> In what way do people talk openly about mistakes and ways to improve and learn from them? To what extent does the team take time to find new ways of collaborating to improve the overall goal? (retrospectives, reflexivity) How do members of this team raise concerns they have about team plans or decisions (other than yourself)? How do you discover underlying assumptions and seek counterarguments about issues under discussion?
Closing	Would you like to mention anything else that we may have forgotten to ask you? Is it okay if we contact you again in case of clarifications? Could we speak to one of your other team members?

Appendix B: Psychological Safety Measurement Scale

This scale was introduced by Edmondson (1999) in her study of psychological safety on the level of group work of interdisciplinary teams in hospitals. Participants rate on a scale from 1 to 7 how strongly they agree or disagree with the following statements.

1. *If I make a mistake in this team, it is held against me.*
2. *Members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues.*
3. *People on this team sometimes reject others for being different.*
4. *It is safe to take a risk in this team.*
5. *It is difficult to ask other members of this team for help.*
6. *No one on this team would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts.*
7. *Working with members of this team, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilised.*

Appendix C: NSD Approval Assessment

Notification form / Masters thesis: The effect of psychological safety in accelerat... / Assessment

Assessment

Date
14.03.2022

Type
Standard

Reference number
795784

Project title
Masters thesis: The effect of psychological safety in accelerator teams

Data controller (institution responsible for the project)
Handelshøyskolen BI / BI Oslo / Institutt for strategi og entreprenørskap

Project leader
Øystein D Fjeldstad

Student
Martine Klock

Project period
11.03.2022 - 01.07.2022

Notification Form

Comment
ABOUT OUR ASSESSMENT
Data Protection Services has an agreement with the institution where you are carrying out research or studying. As part of this agreement, we provide guidance so that the processing of personal data in your project is lawful and complies with data protection legislation.

We have now assessed the planned processing of personal data. Our assessment is that the processing is lawful, so long as it is carried out as described in the Notification Form with dialogue and attachments.

TYPE OF DATA AND DURATION
The project will be processing general categories of personal data until the date documented in the Notification form.

LEGAL BASIS
The project will gain consent from data subjects to process their personal data. We find that consent will meet the necessary requirements under art. 4 (11) and 7, in that it will be a freely given, specific, informed and unambiguous statement or action, which will be documented and can be withdrawn.

The legal basis for processing general categories of personal data is therefore consent given by the data subject, cf. the General Data Protection Regulation art. 6.1 a).

PRINCIPLES RELATING TO PROCESSING PERSONAL DATA
We find that the planned processing of personal data will be in accordance with the principles under the General Data Protection Regulation regarding:
• lawfulness, fairness and transparency (art. 5.1 a), in that data subjects will receive sufficient information about the processing and will give their consent
• purpose limitation (art. 5.1 b), in that personal data will be collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes, and will not be processed for new, incompatible purposes
• data minimisation (art. 5.1 c), in that only personal data which are adequate, relevant and necessary for the purpose of the project will be processed
• storage limitation (art. 5.1 e), in that personal data will not be stored for longer than is necessary to fulfil the project's purpose

THE RIGHTS OF DATA SUBJECTS
As long as the data subjects can be identified in the data material, they will have the following rights: access (art. 15), rectification (art. 16), erasure (art. 17), restriction of processing (art. 18), data portability (art. 20).

We find that the information that will be given to data subjects about the processing of their personal data will meet the legal requirements for form and content, cf. art. 12.1 and art. 13.

We remind you that if a data subject contacts you about their rights, the data controller has a duty to reply within a month.

FOLLOW YOUR INSTITUTION'S GUIDELINES
We presuppose that the project will meet the requirements of accuracy (art. 5.1 d), integrity and confidentiality (art. 5.1 f) and security (art. 32) when processing personal data.

If you use a data processor (online survey tool, cloud storage or online interview platform) the processing must meet requirements under arts. 28 and 29. Use a data processor that your institution has an agreement with.

To ensure that these requirements are met you must follow your institution's internal guidelines and/or consult with your institution (i.e. the institution responsible for the project).

NOTIFY CHANGES
If you intend to make changes to the processing of personal data in this project it may be necessary to notify us. This is done by updating the Notification Form. On our website we explain which changes must be notified: https://www.nsd.no/en/data-protection-services/notification-form-for-personal-data/notify-changes-in-the-notification-form
Wait until you receive an answer from us before you carry out the changes.

FOLLOW-UP OF THE PROJECT
We will follow up the progress of the project at the planned end date in order to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded.

Good luck with the project!

Appendix D: Definitions of First-Order Codes

10 Second-Order Theme	41 First-Order Codes	Definition of First-Order Codes
Accelerator Structure	Investments into participants	Difference in accelerator, investing into companies prior or post programme
	Point of Contact	Set-up of accelerator Point of Contact structure which facilitates collaboration among actors
	Digital programme & covid influence	The effect of global pandemic on the accelerator programme, how it changed from physical attendance to fully digital, to a hybrid.
	Length & Intensity of accelerator programme	The reactions to the length and intensity of a 3-month programme (short, intense)
Perceived Programme Value	Success measurement of accelerator participation	The way success is measured of accelerator participation
	Network	Accelerator introduces the participants to the mentor-pool and network(s)
	Availability /Reach out anytime	Availability of accelerator facilitator and POC is associated with the value of the accelerator programme
	Norwegian culture & start-up ecosystem	Influence of the Norwegian culture and start-up ecosystem on the value associated with the accelerator participation and interaction during the programme
Collaborating	Taking on advice & decision-making for the entrepreneur	The entrepreneur's decision to take on advice he or she receives from a mentor or facilitator. The decision can be to either use it, ignore it, or react to it
	Providing mentorship advice	The characteristics of advice provided by mentors and accelerator facilitators to participants in an accelerator programme
	Knowledge sharing	Sharing of knowledge among facilitators, mentors and start-up team members
	Tools	Digital tools used in the accelerator programme
	Workshops	Session and meetings organised by the accelerator to bring together founders, mentors and accelerator personnel
	Moderation of interaction by mentors & facilitators	Mentors and facilitators framing the interactions between participants, and other mentors and accelerator facilitators

Identifying Competency Gaps	Start-up team involvement	Who takes part in the accelerator programme from the start-up team, mainly co-founders and commercial managers
	Being with experts/colleagues	Interaction with professionals and topic experts which fill a perceived competency gap, but create a feeling of overwhelming
	Mentorship matching process	Intentional process of matching mentors as part of the accelerator pool, with start-up founders as mentee. This needs to be distinguished from networking which occurred in specific events, in interactions or throughout direct contact, as well as physical or digital connection
Motivations	Goals for mentorship period	Commonly agreed goals for mentorship period over accelerator time, can be agreed upon by mentors and mentee without facilitator involvement
	Mentorship motivation	Mentors' motivation to contribute to the accelerator programme, mostly pro bono
	Programme manager motivation	Accelerator Facilitators' Motivation contributing to teaming, Investor perspective can influence motivation
	Founder's motivation of joining the accelerator programme	Founders' motivation of joining the accelerator programme
Building a relationship over time	Role of accelerator as an investor	When the accelerators, or mentors invests in start-ups, this influences the relationship being build over time with the accelerator
	Post programme Relationship	Mentors and mentees, as well as start-up founders and accelerators stay in touch after their accelerator participation
	Professionalism of relationships	Professional characteristics of relationship between mentor, founders, and accelerator facilitators
	Quality of mentor match	Perceived quality of the match between mentors and mentees being the start-up founders. Quality was mostly identified over time.
Showing respect towards others	Showing respect towards others	Members in the accelerator programme do not reject others for being different in terms of background, job title or experience. There is a mutual acceptance of differences.
	Recognise others and encouragement for ideas contribution	Members in the accelerator programme recognise others and encourage each other to contribute with experience, ideas and effort
	Actively listen to others	Members in the accelerator programme listen to each other actively and put themselves into other's positions to increase understanding

Learning with others	Becoming more open over time	Members in the accelerator become more open over time towards each other in terms of opening up about not only weaknesses, but getting to know people on a personal level and connect
	Discuss conflict	Members in the accelerator programme discuss conflict, if occurring, openly among their mentoring group or in a larger group with other participants
	Learn & grow with new external input (mentor or accelerator)	Members in the accelerator programme learn and indicate personal and business growth by receiving input from either mentors, other participants or facilitators of the accelerator
	Innovate and come up with new ideas	Members in the programme get together to innovate and come up with new ideas, not necessarily known before
	Peer-to-peer learning among start-ups	Start-ups learn from each other during the accelerator programme, they benefit from peer-to-peer learning apart from mentoring
	Silos among start-ups	Start-ups worked in silos and did not learn from each other during the accelerator programme
Providing feedback to the programme	Feedback to the programme	Participants openly stated feedback to the accelerator programme
	Drive to improve of programme	programme manager's motivation and drive to improve the programme for future accelerator participants
Feeling individually safe	Acknowledge-ment of own weaknesses	Members in the accelerator programme admit weaknesses and own shortcomings
	Ego & stubbornness among founders	Ego and stubbornness of founders is perceived as influencing their willingness to take on advice, and iterate own approaches
	Uncertainty & Risk perception	Members in the accelerator associate risk and uncertainty with the entrepreneurial activity, however, not within the accelerator environment
	Sharing issues openly	Issues can be related to the collaboration within the programme, mentorship match, or issues the start-up is facing and want to place in the programme to discuss or open up
	Easy asking for help	Approachability of accelerator facilitators and mentors, ease to ask for help and support perceived by the founders

Appendix E: Preliminary Thesis Report

Our preliminary thesis report (submitted on the 17th January, 2022) starts on the next page. We kept the original page numbers.

Preliminary Thesis Report

The effect of psychological safety in accelerator teams

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MSc Entrepreneurship & Innovation

Supervisor: Øystein Fjeldstad

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17th January 2022

Table of Content

1. Introduction to Research Question

Hierarchical structures, a clear role definition and a set of accomplishments characterised organisational structure up until the century. Nowadays, organisations need to organise according to rapidly changing external environments and increasingly rely on cross-functional, temporary teams to conduct innovative projects and explore new business opportunities (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Denison et al., 1996; Edmondson & Gulati, 2021; Edmondson & Harvey, 2018). Accelerators programs operate in a model where accelerator cohorts form temporary teams to ensure learning, experimentation and knowledge sharing resulting in fast growth or failing fast. The underlying aim is to enable and support startups to accelerate an initial business idea into an investment-ready case, during a limited time (Mahmoud-Jouini et al., 2018). The main difference between an existing organization and an accelerator cohort is that the latter cohorts come together for a limited amount of time to enable collaboration, access to capital and the acceleration of new businesses. One can argue that accelerators serve as a structural shell (organisation or program structure) that unites entrepreneurial start-up teams and mentors and is characterised by frequent interaction and fluid team boundaries. Hereby, individuals are confronted with opportunities and risks.

The launch of new products and services as part of a start-up maturing does not only include financial and business risks, which can openly be discussed in an accelerator cohort between members. Tacit interpersonal risks among team members can cause individual anxiety and fear of speaking up (Edmondson, 2002a; Edmondson & Mogelof, 2005). The context of entrepreneurial effort in the unique setting of an accelerator, representing new organisational structures, provides the opportunity for this inductive study that contributes to the understanding of the concept of psychological safety. Psychological safety fundamentally characterises a work environment and influences the team members' feeling of security and speaking up (Edmondson, 1999). Thus it influences the capability of learning, innovation and engaging in extra-role activities (Edmondson, 2004). It "allow[s] team members to relax their guard and engage openly in the behaviors that underlie learning and innovation." (Edmondson & Mogelof, 2005, p. 786). Other factors, such as intrinsic motivation of team members, leadership style or team cohesiveness

and trust influence learning and innovative behaviour in the team as well, but psychological safety has a unique, mediating role. Research available indicated the mediating, beneficial influence of psychological safety on outcomes at work, such as increased creativity, experimentation abilities and more open, and efficient collaboration (Bradley et al., 2012; Carmeli et al., 2010, 2014; Edmondson, 2018, 2018; Edmondson & Mogelof, 2005; Javed et al., 2019; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006, 2011; Ortega et al., 2010; Raub & Robert, 2010; Schippers et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2010). However, research on fluid, temporary forms of team design, such as in an accelerator, remains nascent (Lei et al., 2019; Tannenbaum et al., 2012). Empirical research is needed to thoroughly understand how members of teams collaborate in an accelerator and what characterizes and influences their activities. How does psychological safety affect accelerators teams?

This inductive study aims to explore and understand how psychological safety influences teams in accelerator programs and whether those benefit from the associated outcomes in this organisational structure. Subsequent research questions to be raised: What factors influence the activity of teaming in accelerator cohorts? How does the benefit of psychological safety differ depending on the structures of an accelerator program? How does the presence of psychological safety in the accelerator team lead to better results? As well as contributing to academic research, this study will give insights to leaders, mentors and program organisers. Depending on the reader's role, the study could provide recommendations to establish and form psychological safety. Findings can help the study participants create self-awareness, and use the findings to reflect and retrospectively improve or re-design their program to support teaming and mutual learning.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Accelerator

To answer our research question, a thorough overview of relevant theory is needed. The literature review will draw on the main concepts of accelerators, teaming and psychological safety.

Up until the 21st century, organisational structures were characterised by hierarchical structures, clear role definitions and sets of accomplishments. By the turn of this century, a new approach of organising emerged, enabled by information technology suited for higher dynamical environments to stay competitive. Kleinman et al. state that "organizing for the future requires adopting an operating model that is more dynamic, more flexible, and less structured than most companies use today" (2020). Such organizational operating models are termed incubators or accelerators (Cohen & Hochberg, 2014). The two models may seem similar but the one difference enhances other differences between them (Cohen, 2013). In recent years there has been a shift towards a focus on intangible, knowledge-intensive, support services in incubation services, in a program designed to operate in a fixed duration (Pauwels et al., 2016).

Incubators are often found in nonprofit organizations and are often affiliated with a university (Cohen, 2013). Characteristics of an incubator include co-working spaces with shared resources such as office space and administrative support services as well as ad-hoc mentorship (Bruneel et al., 2012; Hackett & Dilts, 2004). In general, an incubator allows a startup to become stronger before becoming fully independent (Cohen, 2013). Certain challenges for the startup arise, however. As the startup develops, their strategy and development adapt to survive within the incubator, and thus not necessary for the market's interest. The issue of survival outside the incubator arises (Cohen, 2013). The main difference between the incubator and the accelerator is the duration of the program. Whilst an incubator may run for several years, an accelerator program usually runs for three months (Goldstein et al., 2015). At its core accelerators can be defined as an organisation or a program that aims to accelerate and develop startups into investment-ready businesses, during a limited time. The accelerator program enables early and mid-

stage companies to either grow or fail fast (Mahmoud-Jouini et al., 2018). The program is cohort-based, includes mentorship and educational components, that culminates in a public pitch event or demo day (Cohen & Hochberg, 2014). The accelerator supports the startup by emphasising business development and offering office space, knowledge, and additional resources (Goldstein et al, 2015) as well as creating a peer-to-peer environment and entrepreneurial culture to support networking opportunities (Christiansen, 2009).

The first accelerator, Y-combinator, was founded by Paul Graham in 2005 in Cambridge, Massachusetts and is seen as the first successful privately funded accelerator (Goldstein et al, 2015). Ever since accelerators have been created around the world. No accelerator program is the same (Cohen, 2013) as the accelerator's objective may differ. Generically the accelerators did not specify what/which type of startup was selected to take part in the accelerator program. Today, programs have diversified (Cohen & Hochberg, 2014). As well as diversifications of different programs, types of accelerator programs have emerged rapidly. Originally most accelerator programs were non-corporate programs or public programs (Kanbach & Stubner, 2016), and originated as incubators often related to a specific University. Corporations, however, realised the need to keep up with external innovation and created their own corporate-funded accelerators focusing on outside-in open innovation initiatives (Mahmoud-Jouini et al, 2018). Their goal is to dedicate internal resources to ensure new knowledge is absorbed and allow for disruptive innovations (Christensen, 1997), to support the entrepreneurial mindset of employees (Weiblen & Chesbrough, 2015).

To fully understand the accelerator program, understanding the different components is key. Goldstein et al (2015), argue that there are five components of an accelerator program: the selection process, the deal, the accelerator program, the completion and lastly, the alumni program. The selection process defines the methods of finding and selecting the startups, entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial teams. Every accelerators' process varies to accommodate the individual accelerators' objectives and goals and is portrayed through the selection of participants. The accelerator may match expertise to a team if the accelerator sees the entrepreneurial team is missing a certain skill or expertise (Pauwel et al, 2016).

The deal determines the start of the program and the contractual ties between the parties, as well as initial funding (Kanbach & Stubner, 2016). The acceleration program enables the acceleration process. Mentoring, coaching, speeches, exclusive events such as workshops, networking events together with experts and alumni are exclusively held for participants (Cohen, 2013; Cohen & Hochberg, 2014; Kanbach & Stubner, 201). Mentors have a key role in the accelerator program. Mentors are usually serial entrepreneurs or accelerator alumni, as well as experts (Cohen, 2013; Cohen & Hochberg, 2014; (Hoffman & Radojevich-Kelley, 2012; Ovchinnikova & Topoleva, 2021). In the following, mentors and accelerator managers are referred to as the *accelerator facilitators*. The program's structure enables support and knowledge sharing between the two parties, them and the entrepreneurial team, functioning as an intermediary.

The completion element of the accelerator is often marked by a pitch or demonstration of the work in the duration of the accelerator program where potential investors are invited (Cohen, 2013; Cohen & Hochberg, 2014; Kanbach & Stubner, 2016). The last component is the alumni program which is where the startups continue their venture either together with the accelerator as a partner or individually, outside of the accelerator. At this stage, the startup's valuation often increases and new funding rounds are initiated (Lange & Johnston, 2020).

The entrepreneurs' and entrepreneurial teams' motivation to apply and join an accelerator program is the belief that the program initiates the acceleration of their startup by being provided with resources and capabilities to compete in the market (Lange and Johnston, 2020). Gathering and allocating of resources affect how well a business will do (Kohler, 2016), and as startups usually have scarce resources, joining an accelerator can improve chances of survival as critical resources such as knowledge, funding, infrastructure, technology, market and culture become available through the program (Lange and Johnston, 2020). The accelerator's objective to run the accelerator program often differs from the program's purpose. Corporate and non-profit accelerators often have either strategic or financial objectives (Kanbach & Stubner, 2016), whilst non-corporate accelerators often are derived from a need the founders themselves felt missing whilst in their early stages of the entrepreneurial journey. Founders of TechStars explained a motivation to

"give back" to the entrepreneurial community, whilst filling a learning and knowledge-sharing gap (TechStars, 2021; Hoffmann & Radojevich-Kelley, 2012). Corporate accelerators focusing on financial return from an accelerator uses the rationale that startups increase in value through their program and hence benefits the corporation. Accelerators with strategic objectives find more than financial benefits from running an accelerator. Inviting startups to collaborate with and open for mutual learning grants the corporate accelerator insights and methods that may not have been in reach without the accelerator's participants (Kanback & Stubner, 2016).

It is necessary for the accelerator facilitators and startup participants to cooperate and interact as a team in order to achieve their objective key result (Ovchinnikova & Topoleva, 2021; Pauwels et al., 2016). In harnessing knowledge sharing and mutual learning, innovations may arise from common activities. The following chapter introduces the concept of teaming as a phenomenon of study which is particularly relevant in accelerator programs.

2.2 Teaming

Within a modern organisation, the primary unit for learning, innovation and knowledge-creation is the team (Edmondson, 2002b; Edmondson & Nembhard, 2009; Lovelace et al., 2001). In new product development teams, members share a common goal to create desirable, high-quality products and services in a short amount of time (Edmondson & Nembhard, 2009). In the entrepreneurship literature, a diversity of streams argue what constitutes and characterises an entrepreneurial team (Cooney, 2005). According to Kamm et al. (1990), an entrepreneurial team constitutes more than one individual who jointly establish a business of financial and personal interest. This understanding was broadened to include those who have an influence on the venture's strategy with their choices (Gartner et al., 1994). Alongside the venture creation and performance, the entrepreneurial team grows. Members change, and team constitution and climate affect the overall teams' performance (Mortensen, 2014). Attributes of teams are their project complexity, cross-functionality, temporary membership and fluid team boundaries which hold and hinder potential for performance (Edmondson & Nembhard, 2009). Recently,

these highly temporary arrangements of collaboration between individuals, team-alike, has gained interest in research (Edmondson, 2012; Mortensen, 2014; Valentine & Edmondson, 2015).

Instead of analysing the unit of the team characterised by fluid design and changing members, the term teaming evolved as a phenomenon to be studied. Teaming is the dynamic activity to build and develop teams while the project or business itself is being developed (Edmondson, 2012). An organization of any maturity level should aim to build teaming capabilities, rather than just building effective teams (Edmondson & Nembhard, 2009). Characteristics of teaming are equally important for organisational learning, and innovation. This especially accounts for teams in the exploratory phase of their business. This study will refer to teaming activities related to the acceleration of an entrepreneurial venture as the *entrepreneurial effort* because team members can change during the development of a venture within an accelerator and are allocated from both sides, the start-up and the accelerator.

Individuals adapt frequently to form, manage and disband teams (Edmondson & Nembhard, 2009; Mortensen, 2014). While entrepreneurial ventures are still in development, teams are not stable and organised around the entrepreneurial effort itself. Increasingly, within and across organisations, cross-boundary teaming becomes important for innovation (Edmondson & Harvey, 2018). Edmondson (2012) defined those boundaries being physical distance, status or competence as in diverse expertise. Teaming activities emphasise sharing of knowledge and updates, inclusive leadership, engagement of members in discussions, and establishing mutual tools and goals to facilitate sharing of knowledge. Accelerators represent a construct where cross-boundary teaming is enabled through structures and activities involving accelerator facilitators, and members of the entrepreneurial venture participating in an accelerator cohort. Yet, across organisational boundaries and structures, teaming is difficult in reality and goals towards innovation or improvement are not realised (Seidel & O'Mahony, 2014). Interpersonal relationships and the work environment in which individuals team up play an important role in influencing the common entrepreneurial effort. Establishing a work environment of psychological safety is of great importance.

2.3 Psychological Safety

2.3.1 Definition

The phenomenon of psychological safety was examined on an individual, organisational or team level in academic research. The following chapter will introduce the literature published in those streams and further follow the understanding of psychological safety on a team level.

Kahn (1990) refers to psychological safety as the first one from an individual perspective as the "sense of being able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career" (p. 708). This feeling increases when individuals are trusted and supported by interpersonal relationships with their colleagues. Kahn (1990) listed dimensions of the work climate which are indicators for a psychologically safe work environment: a) supportive and flexible management which encourages employees to have control over their own work and methods used, b) clear roles and known norms, and c) self-expressions and true feeling can be revealed in work roles. Subsequent research in this decade investigated how this perception of an organisational environment is related to an employees' job involvement, efforts and shown performance. According to Pfeffer (1994) employees engage themselves more when they know that their psychological needs are met in the work environment. Building on the dimensions of a work climate by Kahn (1990), Brown & Leigh (1996) investigated the relation of job involvement, effort, and employee performance to the individual perception of the organisational psychological climate. A motivating and involving climate was positively related to job involvement and work performance.

In the same decade, the researcher Amy C. Edmondson advocates that psychological safety is better treated on a team level and defines it as "the shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking" (Edmondson, 1999, p. 350). In her first study on psychological safety, Edmondson (1996) tried to explain errors in patients' drug medication by focusing on the level of group work of interdisciplinary teams in hospitals. Her research showed that teams could compensate for errors caused by individuals when they are well-

established. When members share a common perception about the consequences of making a mistake, the willingness to share mistakes openly primarily increases the reporting rates of errors within the team. This study marks the start of subsequent academic research building on Edmondsons (1999) understanding. She became the advocate of psychological safety and the establishment of work environments that are characterised by reducing the fear of failure and hence increasing learning as a team. Sophisticated studies so far have primarily been conducted in healthcare work environments, as psychological safety plays an important role in the reduction of employee error and patient safety enhancements (Leroy et al., 2012; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Newman et al., 2017).

Psychological safety can be categorised as an intermediate link between the organizational and work environment characteristics and employee behaviour, such as perception, motivation, and work performance (Edmondson, 2003). In a work environment that is psychologically safe, employees have the confidence to express their true selves and voice their opinions without the fear to be rejected or seen as incompetent (Edmondson, 1999; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). When in doubt and gaining this confidence, employees weigh the immediate, personal costs and organisational, as well as future benefits of speaking up (Detert & Edmondson, 2007). They need to feel safe enough to contribute. In an environment with a high degree of psychological safety, individuals collaborate and provide honest feedback to facilitate mutual learning and constructive conflict resolution (Lei et al., 2019). They feel safe and encouraged to take risks and experiment. People perform activities like asking a question, seeking feedback, reporting a mistake, or proposing a new idea which is not seen as putting oneself at risk (Edmondson, 2003). If this does not hold in a work environment, employees would be reluctant to do so as, consciously or unconsciously, they fear an interpersonal risk of not their external image and perception by others (Edmondson, 2002a). Psychological safety can be categorised "as a critical driver of high-quality decision making, healthy group dynamics and interpersonal relationships, greater innovation, and more effective execution in organizations" (Edmondson & Mortensen, 2021).

2.3.2 Trust, Group Cohesiveness, Team Efficacy

Trust has mostly been researched as individual beliefs or organisational level in form of inter-organisational relationships (Kramer, 1999). In contrast, psychological safety is "an intrapsychic state that is especially salient at the group level" (Edmondson, 2004, p. 239). Trust does not capture the value and comfort an employee can feel in a work environment which can be seen as a dimension of an interpersonal experience (Edmondson, 2004). When teams are of a smaller size, psychological safety at this team level is particularly salient, similar to trust in a relationship of two individuals (Edmondson, 2004). In an accelerator, the start-ups (mainly up to five members) are organised in fluid, temporary cohorts which are of smaller size including their teams and their mentors (Cohen & Hochberg, 2014).

It is important to highlight that psychological safety in a team does not mean that every action is acceptable, or agreed upon by the team members (Edmondson, 2018). Group cohesiveness leads to the reduction of disagreement and challenging colleagues' perspectives (Janis, 1972), and needs to be distinguished from psychological safety which increases the candour of each team member. It does not reduce conflicts between team members but allows for a constructive resolution and more effective collaboration if existent on a team level (Bradley et al., 2012). Team efficacy is a member's perception that the team owns the competencies required to successfully take a task (Bandura, 2000; Walumbwa et al., 2004). Contrasting, psychological safety is the belief that taking an action as a team member without an interpersonal risk or the risk for humiliation (Edmondson, 1999). The following literature review chapters highlight the current research state on the role of psychological safety in leadership and learning, as well as innovation and experimentation. Those represent critical inputs and outputs of an accelerator program and facilitators and participants collaboration.

2.3.3 Leadership

Leadership behaviour influences team processes and dynamics, especially the climate and orientation towards learning, and innovative work behaviour (Aryee et al., 2012; De Smet et al., 2021; Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Mogelof, 2005;

Hult et al., 2000; Norrgren & Schaller, 1999; Raub & Robert, 2010; Tu & Lu, 2013). This paper will not draw on the discussion of whether team leadership is an input or output variable in the intertwined relationship with team processes (Zaccaro & Klimoski, 2002), yet it would be important when causation would further be explored. This paper follows the assumption of a unidirectional influence. Available research assigns a mediating role to psychological safety in this relationship (Carmeli et al., 2010, 2014; Ortega et al., 2010; Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009). Studies have shown that psychological safety seems to consistently relate to leadership behaviour, especially in cross-disciplinary collaboration in product development (Edmondson, 1999, 2003; Hult et al., 2000; Lovelace et al., 2001; Norrgren & Schaller, 1999). Additionally, it is supposed to reduce the negative effects of status differences (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Logically, the learning process of teams and psychological safety within the team is influenced by the power structure and behaviour shown by leaders (Edmondson, 2002a). Walumbwa & Schaubroeck (2009) found that the employee perception of psychological safety mediated the positive relationship between the leaders' ethical leadership and the voicing behaviour of employees.

Traditionally, professional status has an influence on the employees' belief on how easy it is to engage in behaviour supporting psychological safety, such as speaking up, asking questions or raising concerns. Nembhard & Edmondson (2006) introduce the construct of leadership inclusiveness as "words and deeds exhibited by leaders that invite and appreciate others' contributions (p. 947). Their study in healthcare teams has shown that in cross-disciplinary teams the relationship between status and psychological safety is weakened when leader inclusiveness is high. Raub & Robert's (2010) study highlight the mediation relation of psychologically empowerment and employees in lower power value who showed strong challenging, extra-role behaviour. Especially in cross-disciplinary teams, inclusiveness can help to minimise power differences (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Such cross-disciplinary teams formed in accelerator teams contain members from the entrepreneurial team and the accelerator facilitator, where power differences and objectives can differ on both sides, potentially causing frictions (Mahmoud-Jouini et al., 2018).

Inclusive leadership that supports psychological safety is accessible, acknowledges fallibility, and provides constructive feedback to increase learning from failure (Edmondson, 2002a). Inclusive leaders portray a certain level of openness towards their subordinates. They provide emotional support to employees, increase trustworthiness and position themselves as unbiased (Hollander, 2009; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). When the initial power differences due to roles and titles are reduced, employees perceive fewer costs with raising new ideas they view as potential risky (Edmondson, 2003). The latest research supports this understanding. Javed et al. (2019, p.117) found that "inclusive leadership is positively related to innovative work behaviour, and psychological safety mediates the effect of inclusive leadership on innovative work behaviour." In a recent collaborative study with McKinsey during the pandemic, De Smet et al. (2021) demonstrate that an authoritative-leadership style is harmful to psychological safety, while a consultative- and supportive-leadership style nurtures psychological safety. When a team leader invests in creating a positive team climate first, with support and consultation, and subsequently starts challenging their team, the likelihood of psychological safety is the highest. Otherwise, the latter step of challenging had no significant effect on psychological behaviour without a positive climate as a foundation. Leaders do influence the voicing behaviour of their subordinates and should regularly assess the risk of speaking up in their work environment (Detert & Burris, 2007). A study by Carmeli et al. (2010) examined how employee creativity is fostered by inclusive leadership (manifested by openness, accessibility, and availability of a leader) in a work environment. Their findings indicate that this leadership behaviour is positively related to psychological safety which supports the employees' engagement in creative activities. In a subsequent study, Carmeli et al. (2014) found that transformational leadership establishes a work climate of psychological safety which cultivates reflexivity processes. This in turn promotes the creative problem-solving capacity of employees.

Psychological safety increases the accountability of individuals in a team as one becomes accountable for the common set, ambitious targets. Team leaders hold the responsibility of defining these common goals and highlighting those along the way (Edmondson, 2002a). In turn, this shared vision positively affects the team's

reflexivity which enhances the team's overall effectiveness (Schippers et al., 2008). Interestingly, Carmeli et al. (2014) findings highlighted that psychological safety is related to this creative capacity through reflexivity, both directly and indirectly. The role of team leaders can differ per accelerator and its structure (Cohen, 2013).

2.3.4 Reflexivity

Reflexivity at the team level is defined as "the extent to which group members overtly reflect on, and communicate about the group's objectives, strategies (decisionmaking) and processes (communication), and adapt these to current or anticipated circumstances" (West, 2000, p. 3). Research has shown that team reflexivity in challenging team environments is an important predictor of team outcomes, especially innovation. It causes actions such as deep processing, exchange ideas among team members and critically reflecting ideas, and therefore fostering more innovation (Carter & West, 1998; De Dreu et al., 2008; Dreu, 2002, 2002; Paulus & Yang, 2000; Tjosvold et al., 2004). When facing a demanding work environment, "highly reflexive teams will be more innovative than teams low in reflexivity […]" (Schippers et al., 2015, p. 769). According to a field study by Edmondson et al. (2001), the collective learning process of responsible personnel in organisations with established processes is supported by reflections that promoted a shared meaning of process improvements or required innovation. Yet, it is still relatively little known about the ways leadership facilitates learning in temporary teams and the process of teaming such as in accelerators. The environment in accelerators is unique in its context which influences leadership, learning behaviour and reflexivity.

2.3.5 Experimentation & Innovation

As accessible and simple as the concept of psychological safety might be understood, it requires high effort to establish and particularly maintain psychological safety within a team, independent of the complexity of work contexts (Edmondson, 2018). It takes time to develop psychological safety on a team level (Edmondson, 1999), therefore measures should be implemented early at the project or team start. The entrepreneurial and accelerator work environment is

characterised by high-risk, uncertainty and failure as part of the road to success. Main activities revolve around innovation and experimentation, especially at the start of a new business (Edmondson & Mogelof, 2005). Activities expected of the entrepreneurial team can be equated to what Edmondson (2002a, p. 2) defines as "the engagement of employees in behaviour for which the outcomes are both uncertain and potentially harmful to their image." The launch of a new product towards new customers does not only include financial and business risks, which can openly be discussed but tacit and undiscussed interpersonal risks among team members which can cause individual anxiety and fear of speaking up (Edmondson, 2002a; Edmondson & Mogelof, 2005).

To establish an innovative work environment, activities as listed before (asking questions, experimentation, and seeking advice) are learning behaviours desirable to be shown (Edmondson, 1999; West, 2000). Accelerators aspire to support a climate of inviting members' curiosity, openly sharing ideas, and learning from failures to share knowledge among participants (Weiblen & Chesbrough, 2015). Yet, by doing so individuals bear the interpersonal risk of being seen "as ignorant, incompetent, negative, or disruptive" (Edmondson, 2002a, p. 3). When the experimentation with new approaches or decisions at the workplace fails, this could lead to adverse repercussions for the individual despite any intentions of their behaviour (Ryan & Oestreich, 1998; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Timing does matter in this regard, as team members, especially in projects, can fear to slow down team executions at one point in time and create frustration among members (Ford & Sullivan, 2004).

The willingness of team members to engage in learning behaviours (share thoughts, concerns and ideas about critical work processes) denotes successful learning in various teams (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2011). However, the majority of individuals do not perceive their work environment as safe enough to speak up and challenge the traditional way of working (Milliken et al., 2003; Morrison & Phelps, 1999; Ryan & Oestreich, 1998). Ryan & Oestreich (1998) interviewed employees across all hierarchy levels in 22 companies and found that 70% of them shared the belief that speaking up about concerns may result in negative consequences. In the literature, there is growing evidence that those risks associated with learning

behaviours inhibit both, individual and organisational learning, as employees do not contribute to the process (Detert & Burris, 2007).

2.3.6 Learning Behaviour

For organisations to continuously become better and increase performance, they need to learn. In organisational research, learning is presented either as an outcome or a process. Learning as an outcome of an organisation's process means "encoding inferences from history into routines that guide behavior" (Levitt & March, 1988, p. 320). Contrasting, Argyris & Schön (1978) defined organisational learning as a process of detecting and correcting errors. Building on this definition, Fiol & Lyles (1985) highlight the better knowledge and understanding an organisation gains in the process of change and action improvements. Following this understanding, Edmondson (2002b) coined the term team learning behaviours to refer to actions like asking for help or reporting an error. In this paper, the authors follow the understanding of learning as a process as the research explores in what way psychological safety influences members of the temporary team and their perception of learning in the accelerator program and the influence of accelerator structures in this program. Sarin & McDermott (2003) studied 229 members in 52 high-tech new product projects and found that democratic leadership and given structures of goals by team leaders were related positively to team learning. They empirically demonstrated that innovativeness and the time-to-market of new products were positively strongly affected by team learning. Psychological safety "mitigates interpersonal risks and facilitates a structured learning process in teams" (Edmondson, 2002a, p. 1). Subsequent research underlines the linearly and nonlinearly relationship between psychological safety and team exploitative and exploratory learning (Kostopoulos & Bozionelos, 2011). It could be argued that psychological safety supports failure-based learning behaviours in a team. It can reduce the fear of failure which can be seen as an information carrier (Edmondson, 2018). Hirak et al. (2012) found that, as earlier introduced, inclusive leadership was positively associated with team members' psychological safety perception. The climate of psychological safety in a team could facilitate learning from failures within the unit which positively related to the subsequent performance. However,

research recently showed also that the likelihood of unethical work behaviour shown by employees increases when a high degree of psychological safety has characterised their work environment (Pearsall & Ellis, 2011).

Carmeli & Gittell (2009) introduced a mediation model in which high-quality team member relationships and learning from failure in an organisation is mediated by psychological safety. Both are positively related to psychological safety which in turn lead to increased learning behaviours among employees (Carmeli et al., 2009). In Bergmann & Schaeppi's (2016) longitudinal study of Google's People Analytics Unit, psychological safety was the leading characteristic of successful high-performing teams. They advocate "when you want your team to innovate, you have to make failing easy and reward taking risks - especially if you want your people to run at the hardest problems at full speed" (Bergmann & Schaeppi, 2016). In Google's moonshot factory X employees celebrate teams when they kill their own project. Failure is seen as a success and in return, this leads to a higher degree of psychological safety and encourages the team members to take on more risks (Bergmann & Schaeppi, 2016).

Concluding, the research available indicated the mediating, beneficial influence of psychological safety on outcomes at work, such as increased creativity, experimentation abilities and more open, and efficient collaboration in and between teams. The context of an entrepreneurial effort in the unique setting of an accelerator provides the opportunity for an exploratory study. How does psychological safety affect accelerators teams? This research aims to understand how psychological safety influences entrepreneurial efforts/teaming in accelerator programs and whether those benefit from the associated outcomes.

3. Research Design

3.1 Choice of Method

This research explores how psychological safety affects accelerator teams. Drawing on the literature review, teams in the setting of an accelerator means the temporary teaming activity, with individuals contributing from the accelerator side and entrepreneurial venture. In what way does psychological safety affect learning,

innovation, and the interaction between members of the accelerator and members of the entrepreneurial teams, both aiming to accelerate the entrepreneurial effort?

Choosing an inductive multi-case study research design, this study explores the unique, organisational setting of an accelerator and the effect of psychological safety. With an inductive design, this study aims to understand to establish an understanding of the meaning of the collected data through the identification of key themes and categories (Thomas, 2006). Case studies are a suitable choice, especially when factors of influence that might be relevant to the outcomes are not known before the study (Eisenhardt, 1989). Researchers aim to deeply understand what teaming activities are going on in the accelerator context and explore the idea of whether its context structures may affect psychological safety measurement and its outcomes. Accordingly, the unit of analysis in the entrepreneurial effort, as the team members contributing to this effort, can change over time and accelerator facilitators and the entrepreneurial team members join in this effort. The unit of observation in semi-structured, in-depth interviews is the individual team member.

3.2 Data Sample

The interview sample will include 5-10 entrepreneurial efforts in more than one accelerator. Efforts from the target population are defined by the stratified random sampling method (Singleton & Straits, 2018). The accelerators should have an international or national operating business in Norway. Due to these geographic characteristics, a smaller sample size limits the validity of this study. A higher density of accelerators in a certain geographic area within Norway will not be considered, and therefore the probability of being part of the sample is not known (Singleton & Straits, 2018). Within the accelerators, team members in more than one entrepreneurial effort should be interviewed. The selection process will build on team selection criteria by Ancona & Caldwell (1992). Hereby, interviewees should represent a variety of backgrounds and expertise which characterise temporary, cross-functional teams. The initial sample size can be higher than the final sample due to response rates and the willingness of members to share their experiences.

3.3 Data Collection Plan

Semi-structured in-depth interviews will be conducted with participants in the accelerator and hence members of 5-10 entrepreneurial efforts in at least two different accelerator programs. Members include employees of accelerators and members of entrepreneurial teams in different accelerators. Semi-structured interviews allow the researchers to target specific categories, while giving them the freedom to ask follow-up questions to gather more in-debt data to explore this research topic and answer the research question. These participants can be temporary or permanent members of an entrepreneurial effort. From each effort, interviews will be held with individuals from diverse professional backgrounds and experiences. To further understand and explore the context in an accelerator, interviews with program coordinators will be held who did not participate in the entrepreneurial effort/teaming process.

Leading questions about psychological safety and associated benefits will be formulated in advance, and build the interview guide. This one will be utilized in all interviews to strengthen the reliability of this study (Singleton & Straits, 2018). This research aims to capture data on governance mechanisms to receive information about the structure of the accelerator context as a dependent variable. As the unit of analysis is the entrepreneurial effort, the phrasing of all questions and scale measurement focuses on the contribution of temporary or permanent members to the entrepreneurial effort. This study aims to thoroughly understand what happens when these temporary teams are formed and individuals engage in teaming activities.

It needs to be ensured that the questionnaire is thorough and anticipates the related issues to be asked, and does not lead to learning-the-witness questions (Gioia et al., 2013). To measure the degree of psychological safety among the entrepreneurial effort, the guide will include the 7-scale measurement for psychological safety by Edmondson (1999). This measure is proven for strong content, criterion and its constructs validity. If additional statements are included in the questionnaire, this research will be using the 7-point Likert (1932) scale to facilitate comparison between the responses and the psychological safety measurement.

Traditionally, qualitative research was conducted with in-person interviews. This study will utilise synchronous online tools such as Zoom or related tools, i.e. Skype or WebEx depending on the interviewee's technical preference. This choice was made due to current Covid-19 pandemic restrictions and uncertainty given about potential interview times and places. Choosing online tools allows the researcher to target the sample and individuals in real-time, and in a more convenient and cost-efficient way (Gray et al., 2020). The goal for those online interviews is to establish an on-site experience and lively conversation with the interview. The use of a web camera from both interviewee and interviewer is therefore preferable as it allows for non-verbal communication (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). With this choice of technology, online interviews are known to exclude certain interviewees, because it requires a certain degree of technical knowledge and equipment. With the choice of this study sample, this doubt is less crucial. Entrepreneurial teams and accelerator members are known to be information system affine and show a high technological competence (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). Technical difficulties during the qualitative data collection with videoconferencing tools can not be eliminated and could influence the ability to collect all relevant information during a conversation (Archibald et al., 2019).

The perception of psychological safety is subjective and measurement equals a self-report. This study will build on subjective and objective measurements to avoid common method bias as a measurement error when one obtains responses from the same participants as a source for data (Podsakoff et al., 2003). It results from the sociability of respondents wanting to provide a positive answer. The same participants who are asked to indicate their experience of psychological safety should not indicate their perception of performance and outcome of participating in an accelerator program. Instead, this study will obtain the measures of performance from i.e. company records and objective key result measurements (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Additionally, independent variables will build on information about the development trajectory of the participating start-ups and related measures available, such as subsequent funding, and members pursuing other business opportunities.

4. Tentative Plan for Data Collection & Ethical Considerations

According to Singleton & Straits (2018, pp. 69–72), the following stages characterise a research plan: Formulation of Research Question, Preparation of Research Design, Measurement, Sampling, Data Collection, Data Processing, Data Analysis and Interpretation of Results. Following this preliminary thesis report, preparations for measurement will be taken. Researchers will start the sampling process. Both authors will be trained, and define interview coding elements to ease the analysis process. Before conducting the interviews and processing any personal data of the participants, the researchers will submit the digital form of NSD for this research project. NSD will assess the plan and data collection only starts once receiving confirmation/approval of this plan. Results will be used anonymously and shared among interviewees to enhance willingness to participate and increase mutual learning within the programs. It is important to ensure that results will be used confidential, anonymously and shared among interviewees in accordance with NSD regulations. As the measurement of psychological safety and sharing of experiences are highly influenced by the personal experience in the interviews, both researchers need to ensure to establish a trustful environment where participants feel encouraged to open up. Researchers need to be aware of the way they communicate and phrase questions to avoid measurement errors as stated above.

Data should be collected over the course of eight weeks from February to March 2022. The analysis of interview data will follow in two subsequent weeks including transcription and analysis according to prior defined coding elements. The data will be coded using the Gioia method to systematically standardize the steps for subsequent data management and processing (Gioia et al., 2013). The interpretation of results will follow subsequently over the course of the remaining thesis duration, by drawing on existing literature available and illustrated in this literature review. Within the thesis team, one partner is responsible for the proposed timeline management. The activities required will be divided according to expertise and network availability. Activities, as outlined in a prior shared project plan, include identifying accelerator- programs according to sample, reaching out and agreeing to interviews, and establishing contacts with mentees and mentors. A Miro board, as shown in the Appendix, is used for meetings and alignments between the team.

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6. Appendix

Collaborative Work on Miro Board