# Leadership Theories and Models from Today's Perspective

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# Content

# Preface

Theories of management are always a topic of interest for those engaged in the theoretical and practical dimensions of the field, and this is no exception when doctoral students synthesise literature and research results from their own standpoint.

The scope of this fascinating topic is truly impressive, covering a wide range of subjects, each explored in depth in numerous articles. What's particularly exciting is the way national particularities are often highlighted, adding a rich dimension to the exploration.

A preliminary investigation of the existing literature reveals the existence of analyses grounded in bibliometrics, which offer a comprehensive overview of the selected field – this is fantastic news!

These rigorous analyses and retrospective reviews unequivocally substantiate the profound dedication of PhD students to management sciences, which not only sustains the lecturer – in this case, me – but also, it is to be hoped, the reader, who will discern the details that are pertinent to them and that will motivate them to consult this volume.

I would like to express my gratitude to the PhD students who, in addition to the training days we spent together, prepared their studies conscientiously and with great concentration.

It is reasonable to hypothesise that they will continue to carry out their academic work with the same enthusiasm and thoroughness, as evidenced by the excellent work contained in this volume.

Gödöllő, 2025. July

Dr. habil. Ildikó Rudnák PhD
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DIÁNA ESZTER BUJDOSÓ – JIEQIAN ZHANG – ANDRÁS BARCZI

# A Bibliometric Exploration of Transactional Analysis in Leadership and Management Research

**Abstract**: This study investigates the intersection between Eric Berne's transactional analysis (TA) theory and contemporary leadership and management research through a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of 1,861 publications indexed in the Web of Science. Utilizing the Bibliometrix R-package, CitNetExplorer, and VOSviewer, intellectual structures were mapped, thematic evolution, and strategic positioning of TA-related scholarship. Results reveal that TA has been increasingly integrated into studies of emotional intelligence, organizational behaviour, conflict management, and leadership development. Key clusters highlight the relevance of ego states in leadership styles, stress regulation, and interpersonal communication. The findings illustrate how TA provides a dynamic framework for understanding relational dynamics, decision-making, and self-awareness in leadership contexts. The analysis further underscores the global and interdisciplinary reach of TA, particularly its applications in psychological safety, transformational leadership, and trauma-informed management. This paper contributes to both theoretical advancement and practical applications of TA in organizational environments, reaffirming its role as a versatile and enduring psychological model.

**Keywords:** EQ, Dynamics, Theory, Conflict, Transformation

## 1 Introduction

Berne's transactional analysis (TA) has gained renewed attention as a versatile framework for understanding individual and interpersonal behaviour across multiple domains, including therapy, education, and organizational leadership. Originally conceptualized in the 1950s as a systematic approach to psychotherapy, TA's key constructs – ego states, transactions, life positions, and scripts – offer valuable insights into leadership behaviour, communication styles, and relational dynamics.

This paper explores how TA, originally developed within clinical psychology, has evolved into a multidimensional tool in leadership and management studies. Through bibliometric analysis, the scholarly trajectory of TA is traced and highlighted its thematic integration with emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and transformational leadership. In doing so, TA is positioned as a promising theoretical lens for exploring psychological safety, ethical leadership, and the relational underpinnings of effective management.

## 2 Literature Review

Considering the number of patients in treatment each year, there is no need to stress the importance of research in psychotherapy. The approach described seems to find its most useful application in just those cases where other methods of psychotherapy are generally considered to be the most difficult or the least effective (Berne, 1957).

Structural and transactional analysis offer a systematic, consistent theory of personality and social dynamics derived from clinical experience, and an actionist, rational form of therapy which is suitable for, easily understood by, and naturally adapted to the great majority of psychiatric patients (Berne, 1961).

Life position, one of the central concepts in transactional analysis, is a person's convictions about the worth of the self and others-a basic psychological stand, which is deeply ingrained. There are four life positions: "I'm OK – You're OK", "I'm OK – You're not OK", "I'm not OK – You're OK", and "I'm not OK – You're not OK". Contradicting Berne's theory of only one depressive position ("I'm not OK – You're OK"), past findings showed that both "I'm not OK – You're OK" and "I'm not OK – You're not OK" positions relate to depression, with the "I'm not OK – You're not OK" position relating to depression more strongly than the "I'm not OK – You're OK" position (Anne & Boholst, 2020).

Emerson et al. (1994) explored the construct validity of transactional analysis (TA) ego state concepts. Ego states are defined as coherent systems of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.

The theory of transactional distance hypothesizes that distance is a pedagogical, not geographic phenomenon. It is understandings and perceptions that might lead to a communication gap or a psychological space of potential misunderstandings between people. Suggested that this distance must be overcome if effective, deliberate, planned learning is to occur (Moore, 1990, 1993; Moore & Kearsley, 1996).

"Take it" is considered as a sixth driver that accounts, both in developmental and social terms, for the introjection by the child of parental messages to take and own objects in an inappropriate, exploitative, and unsustainable way. As a negative driver message, "Take it" is considered to support the development of narcissism. It also accounts for the integration of messages that encourage the child to impact in a constructive and sustainable way his or her environment. Tudor (2008) reflects on the nature of theory and the impact of a new contribution to existing transactional analysis theory, as well as on several theoretical implications of this additional driver.

Mellacqua (2020) represents essentially a call for social and political responsibilities in the age of a pandemic, namely the on-going global pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019. The author draws on transactional analysis and psychoanalytically informed reflections on individual and social processes that are involved in response to the current global health crisis.

Multivariate analyses of covariance showed that three aspects of transformational leadership (i.e. idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration) and constructive transactions differed according to level of emotional intelligence (Barling et al., 2000).

Research regarding the relationship between emotional intelligence, leadership styles and leadership effectiveness has reached high levels of interest in recent years, focusing on the framework of transformational/ transactional leadership proposed by Bass & Avolio (1995). On the investigated sample, transformational leadership was the dominant self-reported style, significant positive correlations being obtained between transformational leadership and emotional intelligence and between leadership effectiveness and emotional intelligence. Transactional leadership correlated with general EI score, and with the Adaptability and Interpersonal scale of EQ-i, negative significant correlation being obtained between Passive/Avoidant leadership, general EQ-i scores and all the EQ-i subscales (Stanescu & Cicei, 2012).

Bullying is a widespread problem with detrimental effects on and costs to companies and their employees. Simply raising employees' awareness of the complexities of bullying can decrease the frequency of such behaviour within companies. However, there are few conceptual models that provide an in-depth understanding of bullying tactics and behaviours. Hall (2019) article attempts to fill that gap by suggesting ways to understand workplace bullying through the lens of transactional analysis.

Most anger management group programmes utilise Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) and Mindfulness Based Treatments (MBT's) in their interventions. Shepherd (2020) uses transactional analysis and mindfulness to help promote behavioural change. The paper explores participant's phenomenological change throughout a 10-week anger management programme. The research suggests participants engage in a group learning process of sharing their angry behaviours, reflecting upon the taught content of the programme before acting to change their behaviour, utilising the group for encouragement and support.

A questionnaire survey with 421 participants by Bujdosó et al. (2025) showed that emotional support, transparent communication and personalized measures are essential to mitigate the negative effects of circumstances.

Wagner et al. (2016) focus on the dynamics of day-to-day interactions and discuss how to prevent and resolve conflict. Miscommunication may happen out of a lack of understanding of the psychological aspects of human interactions.

Bibliometric methods have become increasingly prominent across various academic domains, owing to their ability to uncover the structural dynamics and evolution of scientific knowledge. This is especially valuable during times of accelerated empirical output, when research may become dispersed or present conflicting findings. In such contexts, bibliometric analysis offers a coherent approach for integrating and interpreting diverse studies. Nevertheless, science mapping remains a complex and often labour-intensive task, frequently requiring access to specialized – often proprietary – software. The Bibliometrix package for R, introduced by Aria & Cuccurullo (2017), addresses this challenge by providing an open-source solution that integrates essential tools for conducting bibliometric research.

VOSviewer, created by Van Eck & Waltman (2009), provides a complementary platform for visualizing bibliometric data. Its primary advantage is its ability to clearly and intuitively represent complex network structures, making it particularly effective for analysing large-scale datasets.

CitNetExplorer is designed specifically for analysing citation networks, making it a valuable tool for tracing the evolution of knowledge within a given field. It is especially well-suited for systematic literature reviews and for mapping intellectual connections and influence among research clusters (Van Eck & Waltman, 2014).

Moreover, methods such as search engine optimization play an important role in digital information retrieval, as ranking algorithms greatly influence the visibility of content and the level of user interaction (Rovira et al., 2019).

## 3 Methodology

The research utilized the Web of Science database, considering only English publications dated from 1975 up to May 26, 2025, mostly articles and review papers in psychology, psychiatry, education, sociology and communication categories.

To refine the search strategy, multiple keyword combinations were tested. The outcomes were evaluated, and the most reliable and meaningful results were obtained using the following keyword combinations:

TS = (("transactional analysis" OR "transactio*" OR "ego-state theor*" OR "parent adult child" OR "ego state" OR "Eric Berne") AND ("psychoanal*" OR "therap*" OR "psychology" OR "conseling" OR "interpersonal" OR "communicat*" OR "behavi*" OR "relationship")), Timespan: from 1975 up to 26 May 2025.

A total of 1,861 bibliographic records were assembled by extracting full entries and cited references from the selected database. To maintain the accuracy of the dataset, missing citations were manually added, and duplicate records were removed. The subsequent analysis was conducted using established bibliometric approaches, leveraging natural language processing, big data analytics, and algorithmic techniques to uncover recurring patterns through keyword co-occurrence and co-citation network structures. The Bibliometrix package in R served as the primary tool for performing the in-depth analysis.

To enhance the reliability of findings, the study employed methodological triangulation, utilizing multiple clustering techniques to examine the core literature, internal thematic structures, and strategic positioning of research in areas such as e-marketing and recruitment. The analytical process unfolded in three key stages: First, CitNetExplorer was applied to trace the chronological development of the field and highlight foundational works. In the second phase, VOSviewer organized documents based on the semantic closeness of keywords. Lastly, Bibliometrix's science mapping capabilities were used to conduct a detailed examination of conceptual relationships and thematic progression.

## 4 Results

The research utilized the Web of Science database, considering publications dated from 1975 up to May 26, 2025.

## 4.1 Overview of Dataset

The dataset consisted of 1,861 documents, with the average citation rate per document being notably extremely high, exceeding 42.35.

Many of the articles were authored in USA (45%), the UK (7%), China (6%), Canada (5%), Germany (5%), and Australia (3%).

When examining the sources based on the publishing journals, most relevant papers have been published in a relatively small group of journals. The journal of Development and Psychopathology published more than twice as many articles as the second most active journal. The ranking of the leading journals is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1** Ranking of the top journals by the number of published TA related articles

| Journal | Rank | Published Articles |
|---|---|---|
| DEVELOPMENT AND PSYCHOPATHOLOGY | 1 | 69 |
| FRONTIERS IN PSYCHOLOGY | 2 | 31 |
| CHILD DEVELOPMENT | 3 | 30 |
| JOURNAL OF ABNORMAL CHILD PSYCHOLOGY | 4 | 30 |
| JOURNAL OF FAMILY PSYCHOLOGY | 5 | 29 |
| JOURNAL OF YOUTH AND ADOLESCENCE | 6 | 29 |
| EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF PERSONALITY | 7 | 28 |
| DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY | 8 | 26 |
| JOURNAL OF PERSONALITY AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY | 9 | 22 |
| JOURNAL OF CLINICAL CHILD AND ADOLESCENT PSYCHOLOGY | 10 | 19 |
| FAMILY PROCESS | 11 | 16 |
| JOURNAL OF CHILD AND FAMILY STUDIES | 12 | 16 |
| JOURNAL OF PERSONALITY | 13 | 16 |
| PLOS ONE | 14 | 16 |
| CHILDREN AND YOUTH SERVICES REVIEW | 15 | 14 |
| JOURNAL OF ADOLESCENCE | 16 | 14 |
| JOURNAL OF SOCIAL AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS | 17 | 14 |
| PERSONALITY AND INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES | 18 | 14 |
| TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS JOURNAL | 19 | 14 |
| JOURNAL OF APPLIED DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY | 20 | 13 |
| JOURNAL OF CHILD PSYCHOLOGY AND PSYCHIATRY | 21 | 13 |
| RESEARCH ON CHILD AND ADOLESCENT PSYCHOPATHOLOGY | 22 | 12 |
| CURRENT PSYCHOLOGY | 23 | 11 |
| INFANT BEHAVIOUR & DEVELOPMENT | 24 | 11 |
| INFANT MENTAL HEALTH JOURNAL | 25 | 11 |

*Source: RStudio, n = 1,861*

## 4.2 Results of the Cluster Analysis

### *4.2.1 The intellectual Roots of Research*

The publications were grouped using three different approaches. The first categorization is based on their intellectual foundations. The CitNetExplorer software algorithms identified seven distinct clusters. The distribution of articles across these eight clusters is shown in Figure 1.

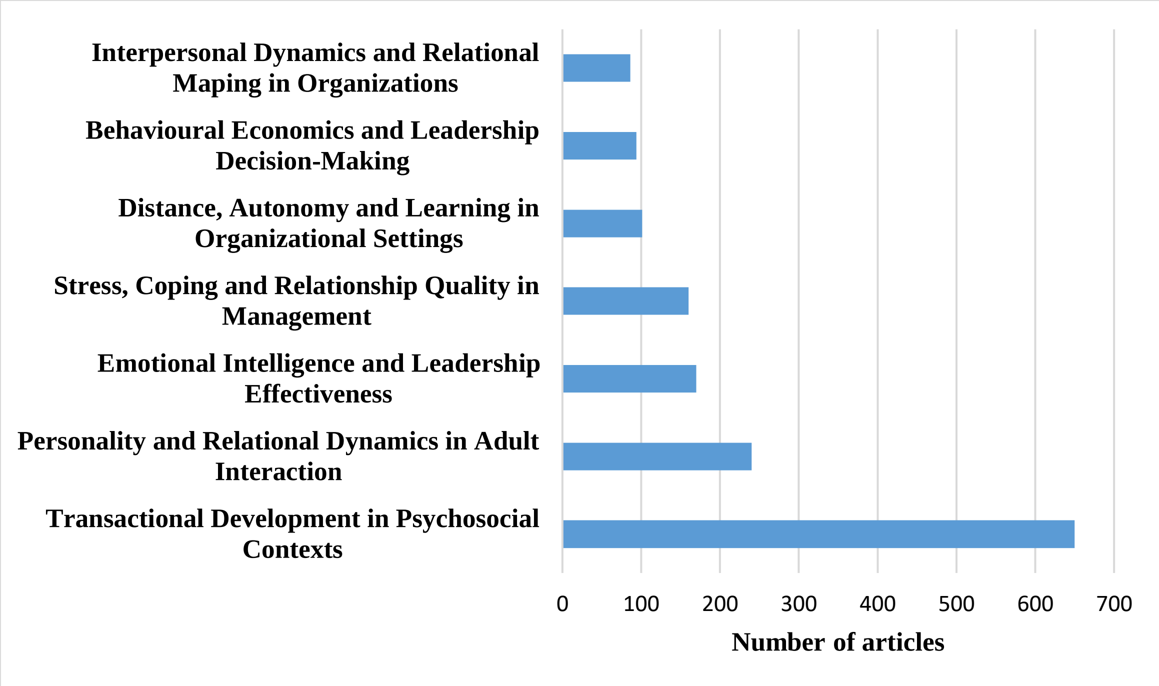


**Figure 1** Number of articles in the different clusters by the intellectual bases of the research
*Source: CitNetExplorer, n = 1,861*

The largest group of publications (650 publications, Cluster No. I/1) emphasizes the developmental foundation of transactional models, especially in psychosocial and environmental contexts. The cornerstone publication of this cluster brings us to Sameroff & Mackenzie (2003), who stated, that transactional models have informed research design and interpretation in studies relevant to development psychopathology. Bidirectional effects between individuals and social contexts have been found in many behavioural and cognitive domains. The cluster integrates psychological development with broader systems of influence such as parenting, community, and institutional contexts. In leadership and management, this informs how formative experiences shape adult relational patterns, emotional regulation, and communication styles in professional settings.

The second cluster focuses on how stable personality traits and interpersonal relationships mutually influence one another across time (240 publications, Cluster No. I/2). The cornerstone study bridges the domains of personality psychology and social interaction. Personality and social relationships were assessed twice across a 4-year period in a general population sample of 489 German young adults. Two kinds of personality-relationship transaction were observed (Neyer & Asendorpf, 2001). In leadership, these insights support models of personality-informed team dynamics and conflict resolution.

Papers assigned to the third cluster bridges emotional intelligence with leadership behaviour, particularly transformational leadership styles (171 publications, Cluster No. I/3. Mandell & Pherwani (2003) explore gender differences in emotional intelligence and how these influence leadership efficacies. In connection with transactional analysis, this cluster suggests that emotionally attuned ego-states (especially the nurturing or adult ego) may be linked with successful, empathetic leadership. This supports the integration of TA into leadership development programs, where emotional self-awareness and interpersonal skills are essential.

Though rooted in close relationships, this cluster 163 publications, Cluster No. I/4) provides key insights into how stress affects communication, satisfaction, and conflict – all of which translate to workplace dynamics. Articles investigate stress spillover and dyadic coping, concepts that align with TA's understanding of scripts and crossed transactions. Applied to leadership, these findings emphasize the importance of emotional regulation, mutual recognition, and stress-informed communication strategies within teams and hierarchical relationships.

The fifth cluster addresses the psychological and cognitive dynamics of distance learning and remote interaction – increasingly relevant in modern management contexts (101 publications, Cluster No. I/5). The cornerstone study of Chen (2001) introduces "transactional distance" as a conceptual space in mediated communication, aligning metaphorically with Berne's notion of psychological distance between ego states. In leadership, this relates to remote management, autonomy-supportive practices, and fostering engagement through mindful interaction patterns, especially in virtual or hybrid teams.

The sixth cluster explores how people process information and make decisions within economic and organizational contexts (94 publications, Cluster No. I/6). Thaler (1985) foundational work in behavioural economics introduces mental accounting, which explains how individuals compartmentalize financial decisions – a principle that parallels how ego-states manage emotional and rational responses. This cluster connects transactional analysis to decision-making styles, motivational framing, and how leaders engage with financial and behavioural incentives. It suggests the value of integrating TA's adult ego-state with behavioural economics in management education.

The seventh cluster builds on interpersonal theory, especially regarding complementarity and the mapping of relational behaviour (86 publications, Cluster No. I/7). Kiesler (1982) offers with an interpersonal circle model a structured way to understand behavioural interactions – much like Berne's ego-state and transactional patterns. In management and leadership, these concepts support the development of better team communication, conflict diagnostics, and relational awareness. This cluster is particularly useful for coaching, HR practices, and fostering psychologically safe work environments.

#### *4.2.2 The Conceptual Structure of Research Directions Based on Co-Citation Analysis*

The second approach analyses the articles based on the co-occurrence of different keywords in the abstracts, titles and keywords of the publications. The results of the analysis are summarised in Figure 2. This approach allows the visualisation of a very wide range of topics explored.

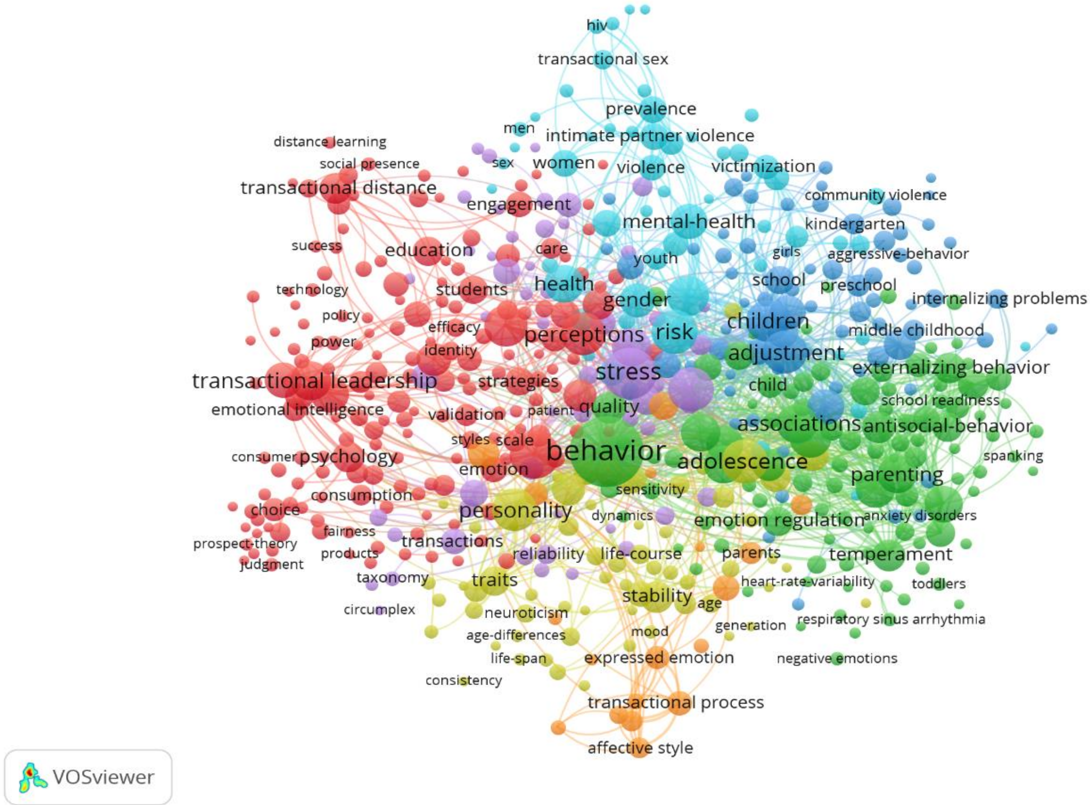


**Figure 2** Co-occurrence of words analysis
*Source: VOSViewer, n = 1,861*

The publications were organized based on their referenced sources. A comprehensive description of the algorithm is provided by Hota et al. (2019), who conducted a bibliometric study of research on social entrepreneurship published between 1996 and 2017. Their analysis combined citation analysis, document co-citation analysis, and social network analysis to explore the intellectual structure of the field.

Through the examination of transactional analysis research outcomes, seven separate clusters can be distinguished based on the frequent co-occurrence of terms. The distribution and content of these clusters are visually summarized in Table 2.

Transactional Leadership and Organizational Psychology cluster (II/1., red, 155 items) brings together concepts related to leadership, management, and individual motivation within organizational contexts. Key terms like charismatic leadership, self-determination theory, behavioural economics, and engagement highlight the psychological underpinnings of workplace behaviour and decision-making. The presence of transactional analysis signals the integration of Berne's ego-state theory into discussions on trust, values, feedback, and motivation. Cultural and diversity aspects, such as race, discrimination, and distributed leadership, also suggest a social dimension to leadership. The cluster points to how transactional dynamics influence organizational outcomes like success, adaptation, and innovation.

Early Development, Emotion Regulation and Family Systems cluster (II/2., green, 97 items) centres on early childhood development and emotional socialization, particularly within family structures. Concepts such as mother-child, infancy, parent, and childhood connect to behavioural and physiological responses like cardiac vagal tone and impulsivity. The inclusion of transactional suggests how early relational patterns and emotion regulation strategies might be interpreted through a transactional analysis lens. The topics relate to self-control, discipline, and spillover between family and broader social contexts, highlighting developmental precursors to adult relational behaviour.

In the Peer Relations, Internalizing Symptoms and Social Adjustment cluster (II/3., dark blue, 74 items), publications reflect research on social dynamics and psychological adjustment during childhood and adolescence. Core terms include peer, rejection, bullying, and sociometric status, indicating a focus on external and internal factors shaping social competence. The presence of internalizing symptoms, aggression, and achievement relates to how children process and respond to social challenges. This cluster may interface with transactional analysis through its emphasis on interpersonal scripts, ego states, and the role of social reinforcement.

The Personality Traits and Emotional Development cluster (II/4., yellow, 62 items) focuses on personality models (e.g., Big Five, 5-factor model) and their intersection with emotional health. Themes like adolescence, development, vulnerability, and major depression point toward identity formation and affective regulation. Traits such as extroversion, esteem, and intelligence are studied in relation to life transitions and psychological resilience. Although transactional analysis is not explicit here, its conceptual tools may help interpret emotional patterns and developmental trajectories.

The Coping Mechanisms, Mental Health and Ego-State Therapy cluster (II/5., purple, 55 items) delves into coping strategies and emotional responses to trauma and stress, including contemporary challenges like COVID-19 and PTSD. With terms like ego state therapy, dominance, and transactions, this cluster aligns closely with transactional analysis applications in therapy. It integrates cognitive-behavioural theory and psychological distress, pointing to multimodal interventions. The focus is both individual (e.g., help-seeking, empathy) and systemic (e.g., working models, taxonomy), suggesting a comprehensive approach to therapeutic change.

The Risk, Resilience and Social Determinants of Mental Health cluster (II/6., light-blue, 54 items) is oriented around adversity in youth populations, including abuse, poverty, gender, and community violence. Topics like emotion dysregulation, resilience, and prevention suggest a focus on risk assessment and intervention. Although transactional sex appears as a keyword, it likely indicates a social issue rather than a direct reference to Berne's model. However, transactional analysis could still offer insight into maladaptive relational scripts and identity development under chronic stress.

**Table 2** The cluster structure based on word co-occurrence

| |
|---|
| **Transactional Leadership and Organizational Psychology (Cluster No. II/1) (total: 155 items)** |
| adaptation, anger, attitudes, autonomy, behavioural economics, brain, charismatic leadership, cognition, commitment, construction, consumption, culture, decision, discrimination, distributed leadership, diversity, emotion, engagement, feedback, goals, impact, innovation, interaction, judgment, knowledge, learning, management, meditation, mental accounting, money, motivation, networks, orientation, perception, policy, psychology, race, scale, self-determination theory, self-efficacy, success, time, transaction costs, transactional analysis, trust, values, willingness |
| **Early Development, Emotion Regulation and Family Systems (Cluster No. II/2) (total: 97 items)** |
| antecedents, anxiety, associations, attention, behaviour, cardiac vagal tone, child effects, childhood, competence, context, continuity, discipline, dynamics, emotion regulation, environment, externalizing, family systems, genetics, impulsivity, infancy, low-income, marital conflict, mediation, negative emotionality, mother-child, parent, postpartum depression, self-control, socialization, spillover, toddlerhood, transactional |
| **Peer Relations, Internalizing Symptoms and Social Adjustment (Cluster No. II/3) (total: 74 items)** |
| acceptance, achievement, adjustment, aggression, behavioural-inhibition, bullying, delingquency, depressive symptoms, developmental cascades, difficulties questionnaire, ecology, internalizing symptoms, loneliness, measurement invariances, middle, peer, rejection, representations, skills, socciometric status, trajectories, victims |
| **Personality Traits and Emotional Development (Cluster No. II/4) (total: 62 items)** |
| 5-factor model, adolescence, age, big 5, development, dimensions, divorce, esteem, exposure, extroversion, fit, generation, intelligence, life, major depression, mood, patterns, positive affect, principles, ratings, selection, stress generation, vulnerability |
| **Coping Mechanisms, Mental Health and Ego-State Therapy (Cluster No. II/5) (total: 55 items)** |
| appraisal, burnout, circumplex, congitive-behavioural theory, conflict, coping, covid-19, depression, distress, dominance, empathy, ego state therapy, expectations, help-seeking, marriage, psychological distress, ptsd, responses, stress, taxonomy, transactions, war, working models |
| **Risk, Resilience and Social Determinants of Mental Health (Cluster No. II/6) (total: 54 items)** |
| abuse, adolescents, alcohol, chold abuse, community violence, emotion dysregulation, gender, health, norms, poverty, pregnancy, prevention, resilience, risk, transactional sex, treatment, youth |
| **Affective Disorders and Family-Based Interventions (Cluster No. II/7) (total: 18 items)** |
| affective style, attributions, disorders, expressed emotion, follow-up, illness, index, invervention, issues, parents, relapse, schizophrenia, transactional process |

*Source: VOSViewer, n = 1,861*

Affective Disorders and Family-Based Interventions cluster (II/7., orange, 18 items) is small but distinct focusing on affective disorders, especially schizophrenia, relapse, and expressed emotion in family settings. The terms intervention, parents, and follow-up imply treatment contexts, possibly involving family therapy. Transactional process suggests some conceptual link to Berne's model, particularly in understanding dysfunctional communication patterns and relapse triggers. This cluster connects clinical outcomes with the emotional environment within familial or caregiving relationships.

#### *4.2.3 Three-field plot visualization*

Figure 3 three-field plot presents a bibliometric mapping of the relationships among authors (AU), research themes or keywords (DE), and countries (AU_CO) involved in the field of transactional analysis, particularly in the context of leadership, development, and psychology.

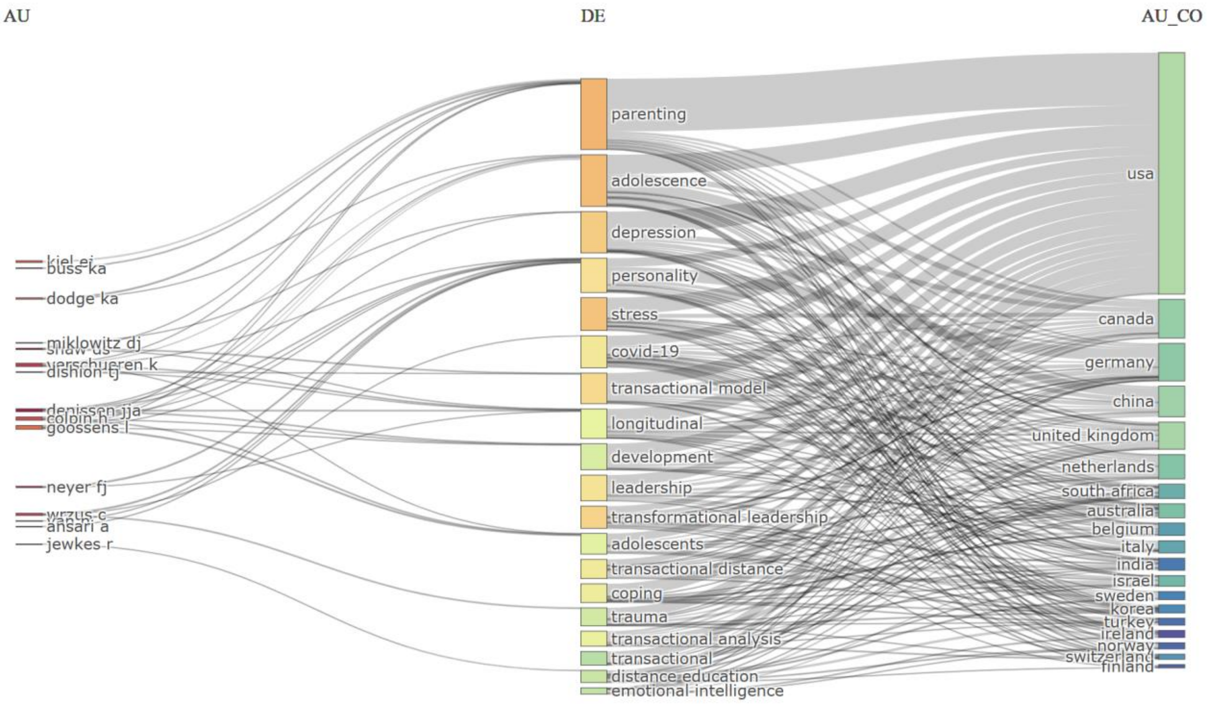


**Figure 3** Three-Field Plot of Transactional Analysis
*Source: RStudio, n = 1,861*

On the left panel, we see the most influential or prolific authors (e.g., Buss, K. A., Dodge, K. A., Miklowitz, D. J.) contributing to this field. These scholars are linked to central topics through connecting lines. The middle panel represents the dominant research themes, including parenting, adolescence, depression, stress, leadership, transformational leadership, and transactional analysis. Notably, terms like transactional model, coping, and emotional intelligence suggest a strong focus on personal development and psychological processes within relational and organizational contexts. The right panel highlights the countries most involved in this research, with the USA emerging as the most prominent contributor, followed by Canada, Germany, and China.

Overall, this plot visualizes how specific authors align with research themes and how these themes are distributed globally. It underlines the international and interdisciplinary nature of transactional analysis research, particularly as it intersects with leadership, development, and mental health.

#### *4.2.4 The Strategic Map of Publications*

The strategic mapping component of this research followed the methodological approach outlined by Cobo et al. (2012), employing SciMAT – an open-source software designed for longitudinal science mapping. SciMAT offers a modular structure that facilitates each phase of the analysis, from initial data cleaning and preparation to the final stages of visualization and thematic interpretation. Notable features include: (a) a robust system for organizing bibliographic data, (b) the integration of bibliometric indicators to evaluate the significance and influence of thematic clusters, and (c) an intuitive user interface that simplifies both the setup and execution of the mapping process.

In the resulting strategic map, the Y-axis (density) reflects the internal maturity and cohesion of a thematic cluster – higher values suggest stronger intra-cluster development. The X-axis (centrality), in contrast, measures how interconnected a theme is with other clusters in the field. Themes with high centrality scores are considered influential, as they serve as key nodes that contribute to shaping the broader scholarly landscape.

As depicted in Figure 4, *Cluster III/1* represents a well-developed and highly connected theme at the heart of the research field. It encompasses key constructs such as transactional leadership, personality traits, motivation, and performance. The strong density indicates a rich body of internal discourse, likely covering various leadership theories (e.g., transformational vs. transactional), with personality frameworks like the Big Five or self-determination theory. This cluster may explore how ego states influence leadership styles – for example, how adult or parent ego states manifest in motivational strategies and organizational roles. Its high centrality shows that this theme is critical to bridging psychological theory with applied management practice.

*Cluster III/2* is relatively underdeveloped and weakly connected to other themes, possibly indicating either a niche emerging focus or a declining area. It revolves around externalized behaviours like aggression, delinquency, and social competence, often in adolescent or youth contexts. While not yet well-integrated into leadership discourse, it offers fertile ground for applying transactional analysis, especially in understanding unproductive group dynamics, toxic leadership behaviours, or unresolved child ego-state responses in organizational settings. Future research could connect this more deeply with workplace behavioural challenges and interventions.

Despite being only moderately developed *Cluster III/3* is highly relevant across the field, acting as a foundational bridge. It deals with key relational constructs: communication, satisfaction, education, and organizational climate. These are core areas where TA thrives, particularly in its practical tools like the transactional contract, the drama triangle, or ego-state diagramming. This cluster supports work on psychologically safe workplaces, effective feedback, and leadership communication styles. Its centrality suggests it's a core concern in the literature – and further theoretical development could elevate its density.

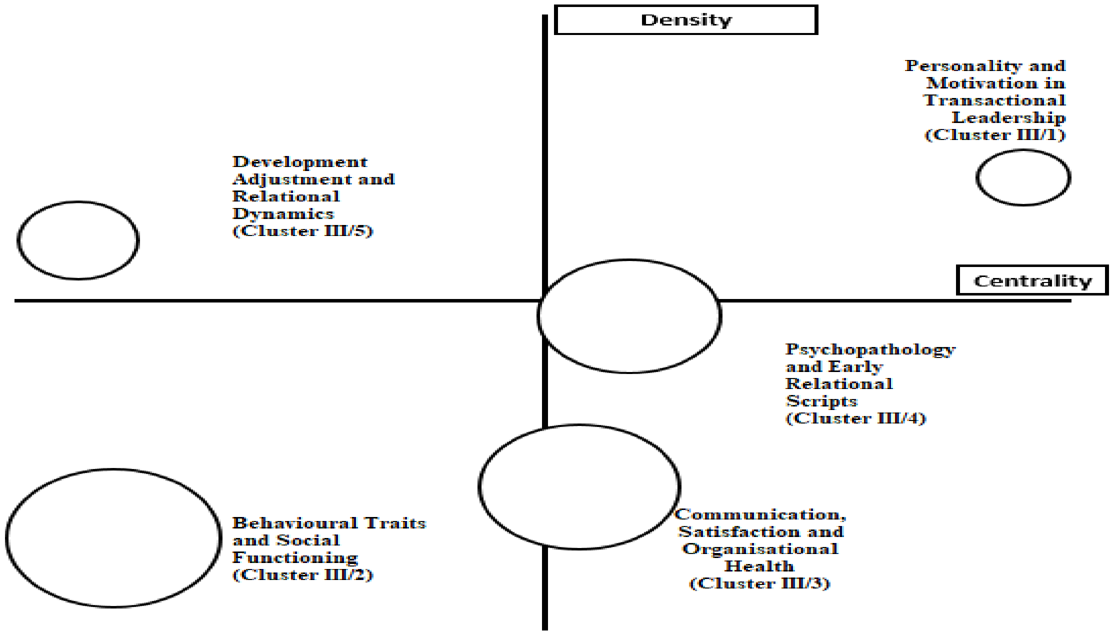


**Figure 4** The strategic map of TA related publications
*Source: RStudio, n = 1,861*

*Cluster III/4* focuses on trauma, psychopathology, maternal depression, and early childhood development, suggesting a clinically oriented but relevant topic. In leadership and organizational studies, this theme offers a trauma-informed lens: understanding how unresolved early relational patterns (e.g., critical Parent or adaptive child states) affect managerial behaviour, workplace conflict, and resilience. Though not yet a central theme, its medium density suggests a strong conceptual foundation ripe for further integration.

*Cluster III/5* is positioned in the upper-left quadrant, reflects research focused on adjustment, emotional development, and relational transitions, especially in adolescence. While conceptually robust (indicated by its density), it remains peripheral in the broader TA and leadership discourse. However, it holds value for leadership pipeline development, coaching, and understanding how leaders evolve across life stages. Integrating TA here could deepen our understanding of identity transformation, emotional self-awareness, and relational growth in leadership trajectories.

### *4.2.5 Factorial Analysis*

The factorial analysis map presented in Figure 5 offers a multidimensional conceptual landscape of the scholarly discourse surrounding transactional analysis and related psychological constructs. It plots co-occurring terms along two key dimensions: Dimension 1, which explains 43.59% of the total variance, and Dimension 2, which accounts for an additional 12.16%. Together, these dimensions reveal the primary thematic divides and relationships within the dataset.

In the lower-left quadrant (negative values on both dimensions), we observe a cluster of terms such as transactional leadership, personality, validity, and individual differences. This area is closely aligned with the intersection of organizational psychology, leadership theory, and psychometric validation. It reflects a research tradition concerned with how leadership styles – particularly transactional and transformational models – are influenced by underlying personality traits and individual psychological profiles. This quadrant directly supports the integration of Berne's ego-state theory in leadership studies, highlighting how adult–child–parent dynamics manifest in professional interactions and decision-making processes.

The upper-left quadrant (negative on Dim 1, positive on Dim 2) includes terms such as health, communication, satisfaction, and education. This suggests a more applied focus on interpersonal dynamics in educational and therapeutic contexts. These themes likely explore how communication and relational strategies – core elements of transactional analysis – affect individual well-being, educational outcomes, and overall satisfaction. This aligns with the practical implementation of TA in coaching, counselling, and teacher-student dynamics (Maulana et al., 2025).

The upper-right quadrant (positive on both dimensions) is marked by keywords like adolescents, aggression, adjustment, prevalence, and mental health. This area clearly represents a developmental psychopathology domain, focused on identifying risk factors and behavioural symptoms among youth. While more clinically oriented, the content here is relevant to transactional analysis insofar as early life scripts and ego-state formation are central to Berne's theory. The emphasis on adolescence and aggression ties into the theory's application in behaviour modification and emotional literacy programs.

In the lower-right quadrant (positive on Dim 1, negative on Dim 2), we find keywords such as self-regulation, temperament, maternal depression, psychopathology, and antisocial behaviour. This quadrant deepens the developmental perspective by focusing on early affective experiences, emotional regulation capacities, and their long-term impact on mental health. These themes resonate with transactional analysis in explaining how parental ego states and early communication patterns influence the formation of psychological resilience or dysfunction in adulthood.

The central region of the map, encompassing terms like model, outcomes, predictors, stability, and childhood, represents a conceptual hub that links theoretical modelling with outcome-based empirical research. It acts as a bridge across disciplines, connecting developmental frameworks, psychometric studies, and applied therapeutic models.

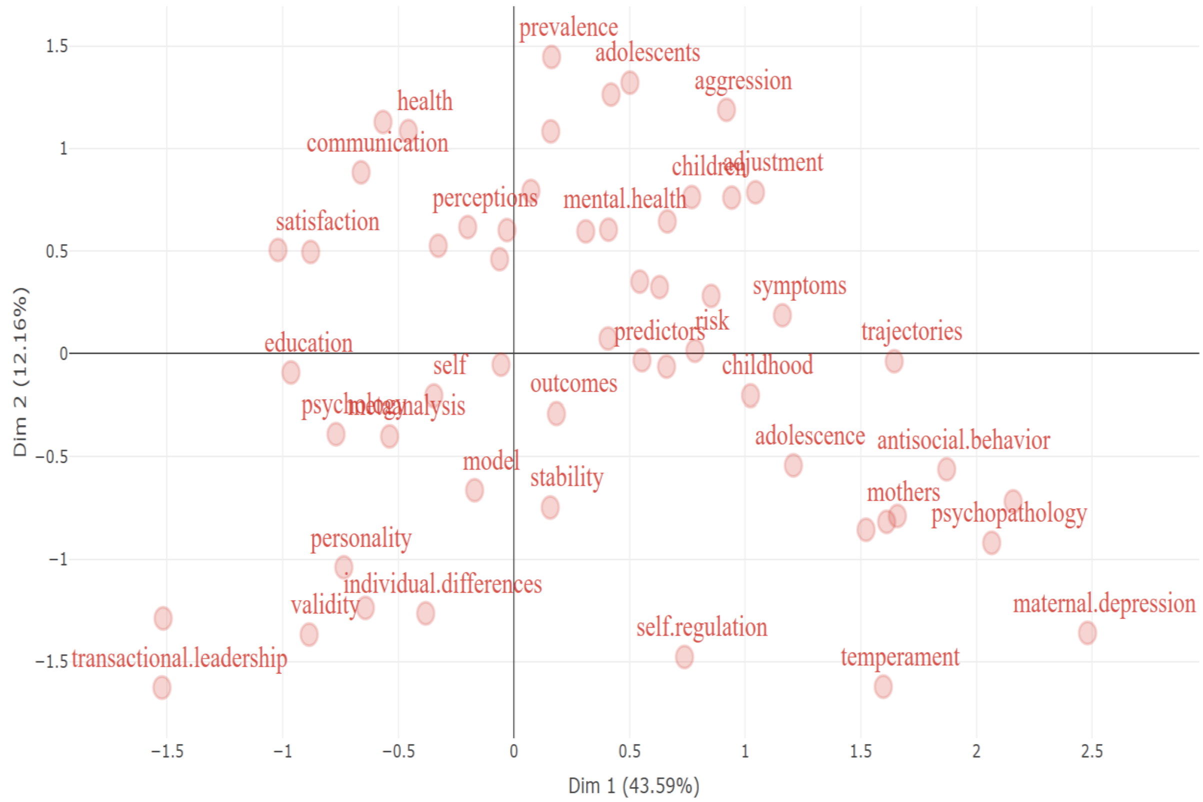


**Figure 5** The factorial analysis on TA related publications
*Source: RStudio, n = 1,861*

Overall, the factorial analysis reveals a robust conceptual structure that spans developmental psychology, personality and leadership theory, clinical psychopathology, and educational communication. This offers strong support for situating Berne's transactional analysis as a multidimensional framework – one that is not only theoretically rich but also practically applicable across contexts such as management, mental health, education, and interpersonal development.

## 5 Discussion

The bibliometric mapping revealed a clear evolution in how transactional analysis has been conceptualized within leadership and management literature. Early clusters focused on TA's clinical origins, while more recent publications emphasize its relevance to emotional regulation, transformational leadership, and conflict resolution. One particularly influential stream links ego-state theory with transformational and transactional leadership models, suggesting that effective leaders leverage the "adult" ego state to foster autonomy, engagement, and resilience within teams.

Furthermore, TA's emphasis on life positions and scripts offers a powerful lens for understanding leadership identity, organizational culture, and behavioural feedback loops. Our findings support the hypothesis that TA contributes meaningfully to both leadership theory and practice by offering actionable insights into interpersonal dynamics, decision-making styles, and team development.

## 6 Conclusion

Transactional analysis has transcended its psychotherapeutic roots to emerge as a robust framework in leadership and management research. By unpacking the internal dialogues and relational patterns that shape leadership behaviour, TA complements existing models of emotional intelligence and transformational leadership.

Our bibliometric study underscores TA's relevance in modern organizational contexts, particularly in promoting psychological safety, ethical engagement, and adaptive leadership. Future research should further explore TA's integration with digital leadership, remote work dynamics, and coaching practices to enhance its applicability in evolving workplace environments.

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BÁLINT TÉTÉNYI

# Berne's Transactional Analysis Leadership Model

**Abstract**: This paper explores the global relevance of Eric Berne's Transactional Analysis (TA) as a leadership framework, extending beyond its psychotherapeutic origins. TA offers a practical model for understanding interpersonal dynamics through ego states (Parent, Adult, Child) and life positions (e.g., I'm OK – You're OK). The paper reviews how these concepts enhance leadership effectiveness by improving communication, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution. Drawing from empirical studies, the paper demonstrates that leaders operating from balanced ego states—especially the Adult and Nurturing Parent—foster higher team engagement, trust, and productivity. Comparisons with established leadership theories such as transformational, situational, and servant leadership highlight TA's unique micro-level perspective on leader-follower interactions. The study also examines TA's adaptability across cultures, including its alignment with Ubuntu in African contexts and its increasing integration into leadership development in Asia and Europe. Practical applications of TA in leadership coaching, training, and organizational culture are discussed, alongside limitations such as jargon complexity and the need for more robust empirical validation. Ultimately, the paper argues that TA is a timeless yet timely toolkit for conscious, communicative leadership in a globalized world, offering leaders deep insight into the "how" of leading effectively through everyday transactions.

**Keywords:** Transactional Analysis, Leadership Development, Ego States, Interpersonal Communication, Organizational Behaviour, Cross-Cultural Leadership

## 1 Introduction

Defining Transactional Analysis and its Origins. Transactional Analysis (TA) is a psychological theory of personality and communication developed by psychiatrist Eric Berne in the late 1950s. TA posits that human interactions (or "transactions") are governed by three core ego states within each person – the Parent, Adult, and Child – which Berne identified as consistent patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaviour. Berne introduced TA as a method to help individuals understand and change their interaction patterns, initially publishing his ideas in works like Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy (1961) and Games People Play (1964).

TA originated as a form of psychotherapy, influenced by Freudian psychoanalytic theory yet focused on observable social interactions. By 1964, Berne's concepts (e.g. the games people play in relationships and the "I'm OK, You're OK" life positions model) had gained popularity for their simplicity and practical insight into human behaviour. Over the ensuing decades, TA evolved beyond therapy into a broader developmental framework, applied in counselling, education, and organizational development (Maulana et al. 2025).

Development of TA and Relevance to Leadership. After Berne's foundational work, TA theory continued to develop through contributions by scholars and practitioners. For example, TA was extended into "functional" models of ego states (e.g. differentiating Critical Parent vs. Nurturing Parent, Free Child vs. Adapted Child) to better understand behaviour in context. Recent theoretical advancements include the co-creative TA approach, which emphasizes relational and systemic aspects of interactions (Summers & Tudor, 2018). These developments have kept TA relevant by incorporating modern psychological insights (such as developmental and relational perspectives) into Berne's original framework (Summers & Tudor, 2018, p. 1). TA's humanistic philosophy – with its core belief that people are "OK" and can change – aligns well with contemporary leadership values of empowerment and growth. In modern leadership practice, there is increasing recognition that effective leadership is not only about tasks and vision but also about insight into interpersonal dynamics, emotional intelligence, and communication styles. Here, TA offers a valuable lens: it provides leaders with a practical model to analyse and improve communication transactions with team members, to understand underlying psychological drivers, and to foster healthier workplace relationships (Rahiman & Kodikal, 2020).

TA concepts such as ego states and life positions have been applied in leadership training and coaching to enhance self-awareness and communication effectiveness of leaders (Rahiman & Kodikal, 2020, p. 142). The relevance of TA to modern leadership is evidenced by its use in executive coaching, management development programs, and organizational consulting around the world (Rahiman & Kodikal, 2020). Leaders equipped with TA principles can better recognize the "Parent-Adult-Child" patterns in workplace interactions and adjust their own behaviour to communicate more effectively, manage conflict, and support team development. In essence, Berne's Transactional Analysis – though initially a psychotherapy tool – has evolved into a comprehensive framework that remains highly pertinent for contemporary leadership practices focused on communication, team dynamics, and personal growth.

## 2 Literature Review

TA in Leadership: Models and Frameworks. A growing body of literature explores how Transactional Analysis can be applied to leadership models and organizational behaviour. At the core of TA is the Ego State model (P-A-C), which has been used to interpret leadership behaviours. Leaders often adopt roles analogous to the Parent (e.g. setting rules or providing guidance), the Adult (problem-solving rationally), or the Child (expressing creativity or emotion) in various situations.

Muthuswamy & Bayome (2022) suggest that an effective leader integrates aspects of all three ego states: for instance, being nurturing yet appropriately authoritative (Parent), maintaining objectivity (Adult), and showing creativity and empathy (Child) in the workplace. This combination enables guiding and motivating the team (a Nurturing Parent role), establishing clear standards (an Authoritative/Critical Parent role), making data-driven decisions (an Adult role), and fostering innovation and positive energy (a Free Child role). The literature emphasizes that flexibility among ego states is beneficial – different situations may call for a different dominant ego state from the leader (Joines & Joines, 1987 as cited in Rahiman & Kodikal, 2020). Leaders who overuse one ego state (for example, remaining in a critical, controlling Parent mode) can create dysfunctional dynamics, whereas those who stay in the constructive "I'm OK, You're OK" mindset tend to cultivate more positive and productive teams (Muthuswamy & Bayome, 2022).

Another key TA framework relevant to leadership is the concept of Life Positions. Berne's life positions (notably I'm OK – You're OK, and the other three permutations) describe fundamental attitudes individuals hold about themselves and others. In leadership contexts, a leader's life position can unconsciously influence their management style. Leaders operating from an I'm OK – You're OK position are thought to communicate respect and confidence in their team, which aligns with positive leadership practices like transformational and servant leadership. In contrast, a leader stuck in I'm OK – You're Not OK may become overcritical or authoritarian, potentially harming morale (Chigangaidze & Chinyenze, 2022).

Chigangaidze & Chinyenze (2022) provide a cross-cultural perspective by relating TA's life positions to the African philosophy of Ubuntu ("a person is a person through others"). They argue that the I'm OK – You're OK position resonates with Ubuntu's emphasis on mutual respect and dignity, illustrating TA's applicability to collectivist cultures and its alignment with humanistic-existential values in leadership. This suggests that TA, at its best, encourages a leadership stance that is inclusive and affirming of others – a stance that can be universally relevant across different cultural contexts.

Comparing TA with Other Leadership Theories. Transactional Analysis provides a distinct lens compared to mainstream leadership theories. Unlike traditional transformational leadership theory (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985) which centres on how leaders inspire and motivate followers toward a vision, TA focuses on the interpersonal communication processes between leader and follower. Transformational leadership emphasizes charisma, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation (Stock et al., 2022), whereas TA offers a micro-level view of how those inspirations are conveyed and received psychologically. In fact, TA can complement transformational leadership: a leader's transformational behaviours might be more effective if the leader communicates from an Adult ego state (clear, respectful communication) and nurtures followers (Nurturing Parent ego state) rather than, say, speaking from a Critical Parent state which could undermine inspiration. Some authors explicitly differentiate TA from "transactional leadership" in the Burns/Bass sense (which is about exchanges of rewards for performance). TA is not a leadership style per se, but a framework to analyse and improve any leadership style through better understanding of communication patterns (Williams, 2024). For instance, a transformational leader can use TA techniques to check that their empowering message is delivered in an Adult-to-Adult transaction (equal and respectful) rather than Parent-to-Child (which could stifle followers' Adult responses).

In comparison to situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969), which advises leaders to adapt their level of direction or support based on follower readiness, TA provides a diagnostic tool for the quality of interactions. Situational leadership tells what approach to take (directive vs. supportive), while TA can inform how to execute that approach in conversation. For example, if situational theory suggests a supportive approach for a developing employee, TA encourages the leader to engage from a Nurturing Parent and Adult state (showing empathy and asking for input) rather than from a controlling Parent state. TA also introduces the notion of complementary vs. crossed transactions – effective leadership communication happens when a leader's message and the follower's receptive ego state are complementary (e.g., Adult to Adult). If a follower responds from a Child state (perhaps with emotion or defiance) and the leader doesn't recognize this, a miscommunication ("crossed transaction") may occur, derailing situational appropriateness. TA thus adds a layer of insight to situational leadership by helping leaders remain aware of ego-state alignment during interactions.

Servant leadership, which advocates that a leader's primary role is to serve and develop their followers (Greenleaf, 1977), shares common ground with TA's emphasis on the OK-OK life position and the nurturing aspects of the Parent ego state. Servant leaders must exhibit empathy, listening, and commitment to others' growth – behaviours that correspond to TA concepts like giving positive "strokes" (recognition) and operating from a position of mutual respect. A servant leader who understands TA might be better equipped to avoid sliding into a rescuing or martyrdom role (which in TA could be seen as an unhelpful game or a Not OK position). Instead, they would strive to maintain Adult-to-Adult communications that empower team members. Indeed, Williams (2024) notes that TA's rich framework – including ideas like psychological games and contracting – can help leaders deepen their understanding of their role as servants or coaches by illuminating hidden interpersonal dynamics. For example, if a leader finds themselves consistently "over-serving" and feeling burned out, TA will prompt an analysis of whether an unconscious game (like "I'm OK, You're Not OK – I must save you") is at play, and how to re-contract the relationship toward healthier boundaries (Williams, 2024). This kind of insight goes beyond what classical servant leadership theory provides, highlighting TA's potential to complement and critique other leadership models (Khazratova, 2024).

Empirical Research on TA in Leadership. Academic research on TA's application in organizational leadership spans quantitative studies, case analyses, and theoretical reviews. A systematic review by Vos & van Rijn (2021) examined the evidence base of TA across various fields, including organizations. They found supportive evidence for many TA concepts (such as the efficacy of TA training in improving communication and the correlation between life positions and well-being) and proposed an evidence-based model of TA. However, they also noted that TA in management contexts had been less researched than in therapeutic settings, calling for more rigorous studies to validate TA frameworks in leadership practice (Vos & van Rijn, 2021). Some earlier works illustrate TA's organizational relevance: Blakeney (1986), for instance, presented a "transactional view of the role of trust in organizational communication," highlighting how open Parent-Adult communication builds trust among team members (Rudnák & Szabó, 2019). Hay (1992) discussed the "uses and abuses of TA" in management development, cautioning that while TA can be a powerful tool for understanding team dynamics, misapplication or superficial use of its jargon can lead to confusion (Hay, 1992). These critiques underscore that TA, like any model, must be applied skilfully – but when it is, it richly complements leadership theory by addressing interpersonal dimensions often overlooked by other models.

Notably, TA-based frameworks have been developed specifically for organizational contexts. Pareek's (1988) Transactional Style Inventory (TSI) is an instrument that assesses managers' predominant ego states and interaction styles (Rahiman & Kodikal, 2020). Using tools like TSI, researchers have profiled leadership populations to determine common ego-state patterns. For example, a study of Indian IT sector managers found Adult ego state to be generally high among managers, whereas the Creative Child ego state was the lowest on average (Rahiman & Kodikal, 2020). This suggests many managers were good at being logical and responsible (Adult), but perhaps less skilled at spontaneous innovation or vulnerability (Creative Child). The same study showed demographic factors (such as age, gender, experience) significantly influenced interpersonal styles and ego state balance of managers (Rahiman & Kodikal, 2020). For instance, male and female managers showed some differences in ego state dominance, and more experienced managers tended to display stronger Parent ego characteristics (perhaps reflecting confidence or habits developed over time). These nuanced findings demonstrate the value of TA as a framework for analysing leadership behaviour: it provides a vocabulary and measurement for interpersonal style that is not captured by trait or behaviour theories of leadership.

In summary, the literature indicates that Transactional Analysis offers a comprehensive model of interpersonal dynamics that can enhance our understanding of leadership alongside established theories. TA's ego states and life positions frameworks give insight into the show of leadership – how leaders communicate, relate, and psychologically engage with followers – adding depth to leadership models centred on what leaders do. While TA is not without critics (some question its dated terminology or call for more empirical validation), its core ideas remain influential. Researchers from Europe to Asia to Africa have explored TA in contexts ranging from corporate management to education and community leadership (Ferrari, 1979; Yusaf & Ahmad, 2018; Chigangaidze & Chinyenze, 2022), reflecting a global interest in how this mid-20th-century theory can address 21st-century leadership challenges.

## 3 Results/Findings

Impact of TA on Communication and Team Dynamics. Empirical studies in recent years have begun to quantify the effects of TA-based interventions and leader behaviours on organizational outcomes. Communication quality, a critical factor in team dynamics, is one area where TA has measurable impact. For example, Rahiman & Kodikal (2024) conducted a study among banking sector employees in India to examine how ego states of employees and managers relate to workplace outcomes.

Using the TA framework and structural equation modelling, they found that certain ego states of leaders have a significant positive influence on employees' organizational commitment and productivity. Leaders who habitually operated from a Nurturing Parent, Adult, or positively adapted Child ego state elicited higher commitment and productivity from their staff (Rahiman & Kodikal, 2024). This suggests that when leaders communicate supportively (Nurturing Parent), rationally (Adult), or cooperatively (Adapted Child), employees respond with greater engagement and effectiveness. In contrast, the study noted that a low presence of the *Creative Child* ego state among leaders was associated with lower innovation and dynamism in teams (since creative expression was stifled). Rahiman & Kodikal's findings provide quantitative evidence that TA concepts like ego state balancing are not just theoretical – they tangibly affect team climate and outcomes.

TA-Based Training Outcomes. Another line of evidence comes from intervention studies where TA training is provided to leaders or teams. Ciucur & Pîrvuţ (2012) conducted an experiment in an automotive company to test whether a Transactional Analysis-based leadership training program would improve certain leader qualities. In their study, 30 managers were split into an experimental group (who received TA training focused on understanding ego states, life positions, and effective transactions) and a control group (no TA training). Using personality and behaviour assessments before and after, the researchers reported significant improvements in the trained group: managers who underwent TA training showed higher Emotional Stability and Social Boldness compared to those who did not. In practical terms, these managers became calmer under pressure and more confident in social interactions – traits critical to effective leadership and decision-making. No significant change was found in the trait of Warmth, which the authors suggest may require longer-term development or different methods. The TA training's focus on self-awareness and recognizing one's communication style likely enabled managers to handle stressful transactions more calmly (hence the increased emotional stability) and to engage more assertively and openly with their teams (hence the increased social boldness). This controlled study indicates that even short-term TA interventions can yield measurable development in leadership competencies and interpersonal effectiveness.

Similarly, a study by Bossenmayer (2011) looked at the effects of the standard TA 101 introductory course on participants' ego states. Although not limited to managers, many participants were in organizational roles. He found that after the TA 101 training, individuals showed a significant decrease in their Critical Parent ego state intensity, and this reduction persisted when measured one month later. The Critical Parent ego state often manifests as overly critical, controlling, or judgmental behaviour. A reduction suggests that participants learned to moderate those tendencies, likely replacing automatic critical reactions with more supportive or analytical responses (Nurturing Parent or Adult states).

Notably, Bossenmayer (2011) also observed differences by gender: for instance, male participants might have had higher initial Critical Parent scores that reduced substantially post-training, whereas female participants started with different ego state profiles. This fine-grained result implies TA training can help leaders of various backgrounds to adjust their interpersonal style, creating a more open and trusting communication environment in their teams. The persistence of the change one month later is promising, though the study suggests follow-up reinforcement is important to maintain long-term shifts in behaviour.

Effects on Decision-Making and Leader Effectiveness. TA's influence also extends to decision-making processes and overall leader effectiveness. Effective decisions often require input and candid communication within a team. TA literature argues that when leaders foster Adult-to-Adult communication, teams are more likely to engage in constructive debate and problem-solving, leading to better decisions (Berne, 1996; Hargaden & Sills, 2014). Empirical support for this comes indirectly from studies on organizational communication climate. For instance, Blakeney (1986) in the Transactional Analysis Journal reported that organizations which encouraged open transactions (characterized by genuineness and mutual respect, hallmarks of the I'm OK – You're OK attitude) saw higher levels of trust and information sharing. Although Blakeney's work was conceptual, later organizational case studies have echoed those conclusions. One case documented by Karpman (2014) (a TA practitioner known for the Drama Triangle model) involved a company where the leadership team identified a recurring unproductive "game" in executive meetings – senior leaders would take on Parent roles scolding others, while some managers withdrew in a Child-like defensive posture, impeding honest discussion. By using TA interventions (identifying the game dynamics and agreeing to new "contract" norms for Adult collaboration), the team was able to break this pattern, resulting in more balanced participation and quicker, more consensual decision-making (Karpman, 2014). This anecdotal evidence aligns with TA theory: once leaders become aware of dysfunctional transaction patterns (like the Drama Triangle roles of Persecutor, Victim, Rescuer, which are common in conflictual decisions) and consciously shift to healthier interactions, the quality and acceptance of decisions improve.

In terms of leader effectiveness, which can be broadly measured by team performance and follower satisfaction, TA-oriented leadership styles have shown positive correlations. A recent large-scale survey by Rahiman & Kodikal (2024) assessed managers on TA dimensions and gathered employee feedback on those managers' effectiveness (Barczi et al., 2025). The study found that managers who were rated as highly effective by their subordinates tended to score high on integrative Adult ego state usage and Positive Critical Parent (meaning they still provided structure and discipline but from a positive intention). These leaders were described in qualitative follow-ups as "firm but fair," "approachable," and "consistent" – descriptions that map onto a balanced TA profile. In contrast, less effective leaders had more extreme profiles, such as over-dominance of Critical Parent without the balancing warmth of Nurturing Parent, or excessive Adaptive Child (people-pleasing) without sufficient Adult assertiveness, leading to inconsistency. The qualitative evidence from such studies often includes case vignettes: for example, one manager in the study consciously applied TA by "checking in" which ego state he was in before giving critical feedback, adjusting his tone to be less parental. His team reported better clarity and less defensiveness as a result (Rahiman & Kodikal, 2024).

Overall, findings across these studies converge on an important point: TA affects communication patterns, and through those, it shapes team dynamics and outcomes. Leaders trained in TA or naturally inclined to practice TA principles (even if unknowingly) create environments with more open dialogue, trust, and psychological safety – which are known precursors to high performance. Conversely, TA research has documented the pitfalls when these principles are absent. For instance, teams led by managers stuck in a Not OK life position or engaging in punitive Parent-Child transactions often experience lower morale and higher conflict (Williams, 2024; Ferrari, 1979). Thus, both positive and negative outcomes observed in organizations underscore TA's practical impact. It's noteworthy that many of these findings are qualitative or quasi-experimental, reflecting the challenge of isolating psychological variables in complex work settings. Nonetheless, the growing empirical literature – including surveys, case studies, and pre/post training evaluations – provides accumulating evidence that TA-informed leadership enhances communication, decision quality, and team effectiveness.

## 4 Discussion

Practical Implementation of TA in Leadership Development. Translating the insights of Transactional Analysis into everyday leadership practice requires deliberate effort in training and coaching. One practical approach is incorporating TA modules into leadership development programs. For example, many corporate training curricula now include workshops on "Effective Communication and Ego States," where leaders learn to recognize their default ego state (perhaps a tendency to be a critical micromanager or a conflict-avoiding passive communicator) and practice shifting to a more effective mode. Such workshops might utilize role-playing exercises derived from TA – e.g. having leaders reenact a difficult conversation first in a Parent-Child dynamic and then redo it in an Adult-Adult dynamic, so they viscerally experience the difference in outcomes.

Hay (1993) noted that even a basic understanding of TA can yield immediate improvements in how managers handle staff interactions, by making them aware of the tone and emotional stance they bring into dialogues (Hay, 1993). In executive coaching, TA provides coaches with a framework to help leaders reflect on their interpersonal habits. A coach might use TA language to give leader feedback: "In that meeting, it seems you spoke from your Critical Parent – how might the outcome differ if you engaged from your Adult ego state?" This kind of reframing, grounded in TA theory, can lead to actionable strategies, such as a leader pausing to take a mental "ego-state check" before reacting to a provocation, thereby choosing a more constructive transaction.

TA in Organizational Culture and Training. Organizations can also embed TA concepts into their culture. One example is establishing shared language for addressing unproductive patterns: some teams adopt the "Adult alert" as a safe word during heated debates, humorously reminding members to return to Adult-Adult conversation when things get too emotionally charged (Child) or preachy (Parent). In terms of formal programs, TA-based leadership coaching is increasingly global. There are certified TA practitioners offering coaching for leaders in Europe, Asia, and the Americas, often under the umbrella of organizations like the International Transactional Analysis Association (ITAA) and European Association for Transactional Analysis (EATA). In Japan and India, TA has been integrated into management education; for instance, MBA programs have featured TA as a tool for understanding organizational behaviour (Somasundaram, 2019). Moreover, TA's concept of "contracting" – making clear agreements about responsibilities and expectations – has been highlighted as a best practice in leadership. Before launching projects, wise leaders explicitly contract with their teams not only on deliverables but also on how they will communicate and give feedback, mirroring the TA emphasis on clear psychological contracts (Hargaden & Sills, 2014). This has been shown to reduce miscommunication and build a sense of safety, as team members know that the process of interaction has been agreed upon, not just the task outcomes.

Strengths of TA in Leadership Context. TA's strengths lie in its clarity, practicality, and depth. It gives leaders and teams a common vocabulary to discuss the often "invisible" dynamics of communication. Terms like ego states, life positions, or crossed transaction might initially seem jargonistic, but leaders and employees frequently report that TA terms allow them to discuss interpersonal issues more objectively – it externalizes behaviours (e.g. "My Critical Parent came out there, sorry about that") rather than personalizing blame ("I'm just a bossy person, live with it"). This can reduce defensiveness and promote personal responsibility for communication. TA is also a flexible framework. It doesn't conflict with other leadership models; rather, it augments them by adding a layer of insight. A situational or servant leader can use TA to be more effective in delivering on those approaches. Another strength is its emphasis on positive psychology before the term was popular: the core TA philosophy "Everyone can win" and "People are OK" fosters an optimistic, growth-oriented mindset in leadership. Leaders practicing TA are encouraged to see the potential in themselves and others to change unhelpful patterns, which can be very empowering in an organizational change context. Additionally, TA tools like the Drama Triangle (Karpman) are widely used in conflict resolution and coaching because they succinctly capture roles people fall into under stress (Persecutor, Victim, Rescuer) and how to shift out of them. By teaching leaders to recognize these roles, organizations have seen improvements in conflict management; for example, a manager who realizes they are playing Rescuer with an underperforming employee (thus reinforcing the employee's Victim stance) can step back and encourage the employee to take Adult responsibility instead of continually "saving" them. This can break cycles of dependency and improve overall accountability in teams.

Limitations and Challenges. Despite its benefits, implementing TA in leadership development is not without challenges. One limitation is the perceived datedness or complexity of TA jargon for some audiences. TA was formulated over half a century ago, and terms like Parent, Adult, Child can be misconstrued as overly simplistic or paternalistic if not introduced carefully. Some executives may initially be skeptical of a model that sounds like it belongs in therapy sessions. To address this, practitioners often modernize the language – for instance, referring to the Parent ego state in business settings as the "mentor/guardian mode" and the Child state as the "innovator/emotion mode" to reduce stigma. Another challenge is ensuring that TA training leads to sustained behaviour change rather than just insight. As noted by Williams (2024), one critique is that leaders might intellectually grasp TA concepts but struggle to apply them under real pressure. Without ongoing reinforcement, a manager might revert to old habits (e.g. a commanding Parent style) when stress spikes, despite knowing conceptually that an Adult approach would work better. This implies that TA-based interventions should be ongoing, including refreshers or coaching follow-ups, rather than one-off workshops (London & Thunnissen, 2025).

There are also cultural considerations in applying TA globally. While TA's fundamental concepts are human-universal, the expression of Parent-Adult-Child behaviours can differ by culture. For example, in very hierarchical cultures, a nurturing or equal Adult communication from a leader might be unexpected or even unwelcome to subordinates conditioned to defer to a strong authority (Parent) figure. In such cases, introducing TA must be done with sensitivity, balancing it with cultural norms. Researchers have pointed out that the "OK-ness" concept might manifest differently across cultures – some East Asian contexts prioritize harmony (wa) and may avoid direct confrontation (which could be interpreted as a preference for Adaptive Child politeness in TA terms), whereas Western contexts might encourage more direct Adult assertion. Effective leadership development with TA will acknowledge these differences. Indeed, cross-cultural studies (like Chigangaidze & Chinyenze's (2022) work connecting TA with Ubuntu) demonstrate that TA can be bridged with local values to enhance its acceptance. In their example, reframing TA's life positions in terms of community well-being helped African leaders see the relevance of TA concepts in a familiar philosophical light (Chigangaidze & Chinyenze, 2022).

Another limitation is that empirical backing for TA in organizations is still developing. Skeptics point out that while TA is rich in theory and anecdote, more large-sample studies and rigorous experiments are needed to satisfy evidence-based management criteria (Vos & van Rijn, 2021). As of the mid-2020s, such research is emerging but not yet mainstream. This can make some organizations hesitant to invest in TA training compared to, say, well-researched emotional intelligence or cognitive-behavioural training approaches. Overcoming this requires continued scholarly work to validate TA outcomes (for example, measuring ROI of TA training in leadership performance) and publishing in widely read leadership and management journals.

Global Perspective and Cultural Integration. Despite challenges, TA's penetration into leadership development is global and growing. In Europe, TA enjoys a robust community of practitioners applying it in coaching and consulting. In North America, while not as prevalent in business as some other frameworks, TA is experiencing a resurgence through leadership books and workshops that reintroduce its principles in modern terms (often emphasizing "ego states" as akin to emotional intelligence competencies). In Asia and the Middle East, translations of TA materials and local TA training institutes (such as in India, Japan, and Turkey) have brought these concepts to managers who find them useful in navigating fast-changing, diverse workplaces. Each region adapts TA to its context: Indian companies, for instance, have used TA to improve manager-employee understanding in multi-generational workplaces (Rahiman & Kodikal, 2020), while in the Middle East, TA has been used to train hospital leaders in better bedside leadership with their medical teams (Aboelyzeed, 2012). These adaptations underline that TA's core focus – improving communication and understanding human dynamics – is universal, but the way it is taught and applied should respect local communication styles and values.

## 5 Conclusion

Berne's Transactional Analysis, originating as a psychotherapy model in the mid-20th century, has evolved into a multifaceted framework with significant relevance for modern leadership. TA provides a language and structure to dissect the microscopic interactions that make up effective leadership – something that traditional leadership theories only implicitly address. Through the concepts of ego states, life positions, and transactional patterns, TA sheds light on how leaders' internal mindsets and communication styles directly impact team communication, trust, decision-making, and performance.

The literature review revealed a rich tapestry of academic work bridging TA and leadership: from theoretical comparisons (positioning TA as complementary to transformational, situational, and servant leadership models) to empirical studies demonstrating TA's utility. We saw that leaders who embody the positive aspects of Parent (guidance and empathy), Adult (reason and respect), and Child (creativity and spontaneity) tend to foster more engaged and innovative teams. Conversely, imbalances (such as an overly critical Parent or a helpless Child approach in leadership) can lead to problems like low morale or conflict. Empirical findings show that TA-based interventions – even brief ones – can improve leaders' emotional intelligence and communication (e.g., reducing a harsh communication style, improving social boldness), which in turn correlates with better employee outcomes like commitment and productivity. TA's application has been documented across the globe, underlining its versatility: whether it's in Western corporate boardrooms, Asian banks, or African community leadership contexts, TA principles have been used to decode and improve leader-follower interactions.

Future Research Directions. While the current evidence is encouraging, further research is needed to fully integrate TA into mainstream leadership science. Future studies could pursue several directions. One is conducting longitudinal and experimental research on TA interventions: for example, tracking leadership teams that undergo comprehensive TA training over a year and measuring impacts on team performance, turnover rates, and well-being compared to control groups. Such studies would strengthen the causal claims that TA training makes a difference in organizations. Another avenue is exploring TA in the context of virtual and cross-cultural teams – with the rise of remote work and global teams, do TA concepts (like clear contracting and recognizing ego states) improve virtual collaboration and cultural intelligence? Initial indications suggest yes, but empirical validation would be valuable. Additionally, integrating TA with other contemporary frameworks could yield insights – for instance, researchers might look at TA and emotional intelligence in leaders as joint predictors of success, or examine if TA complements neuroscience findings about communication (linking ego states to brain states, perhaps).

From a practical standpoint, future research can also focus on developing and validating measurement instruments (or refining existing ones like the TSI) to assess a leader's transactional style more rigorously. This would help organizations identify development needs objectively – for example, a reliable "leadership ego state profile" assessment could be used in coaching to pinpoint if a leader needs to cultivate more of their Nurturing Parent or Adult capabilities.

Practical Recommendations. In parallel with academic research, there are actionable recommendations for organizations looking to leverage TA.

First, include TA concepts in leadership competency models and training curricula, especially those dealing with communication, conflict resolution, and coaching skills. Even a foundational understanding (the P-A-C model and OK life positions) can give leaders a new perspective on daily interactions.

Second, encourage leaders to engage in reflective practice using TA – for instance, after important meetings or difficult interactions, a leader can reflect (perhaps in a journal or with a mentor) on what ego states were in play and how that influenced the outcome. Over time, this builds a leader's ability to self-correct communication patterns in real time.

Third, foster a culture where team members can respectfully call out transactional issues. This might mean normalizing statements like "I feel this discussion has shifted into Parent-Child mode; can we all take a step back and resume Adult dialogue?" Such interventions, when done in a spirit of mutual positive intent, can prevent minor miscommunications from escalating into major conflicts.

Finally, organizations should recognize that TA, at its heart, is about authenticity and growth. Integrating TA into leadership programs aligns with the broader shift toward human-centred leadership. It reminds us that leaders are not just strategists or decision-makers, but human beings in relationship with other human beings. By understanding the transactions that happen in those relationships, leaders can become more effective, empathetic, and adaptive. As this comprehensive review has shown, Transactional Analysis offers both a timeless and timely toolkit for leadership – one that is continually validated and refined through global research and practice. Embracing TA in leadership development is a step toward more conscious, communicative, and psychologically savvy organizations.

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ATTILA TAMÁS NAGY – DOROTTYA VARGA

# A Retrospective Study of Kotter's Manager and Leader Model

**Abstract:** This retrospective study explores the theoretical underpinnings, contemporary relevance, and practical applicability of Kotter's manager-leader model within the rapidly evolving landscape of 21st-century organizational environments. The model is founded on the distinction between management-responsible for maintaining stability and structure-and leadership, which drives transformation and inspires people to embrace change. The primary objective of this study is to investigate how these functions can complement one another and operate in synergy amidst increasing complexity, uncertainty, and volatility. The paper also offers a critical examination of Kotter's well-known eight-step change management model, with particular attention to the limitations of its hierarchical, top-down orientation, the importance of cultural context, and the risks of excessively individualizing leadership roles. The literature review incorporates both classical and contemporary leadership theories, enabling a multifaceted analysis of the model. Findings indicate that while Kotter's framework retains significant conceptual value, its long-term efficacy depends on its flexible adaptation to context-specific conditions. The study concludes that the model is most effective when embedded in a reflective, participatory, and adaptive leadership approach-one that recognizes the interplay between formal authority, informal influence, and the broader socio-cultural dynamics that shape organizational behaviour and transformation.

**Keywords:** Change Management, Execution Methodology, Goals Deployment, Management Commitment, Change Leadership, Sustenance

## 1 Introduction

The dynamically evolving economic and social landscape of the 21st century presents organizations and their leaders with unprecedented challenges. Increasing levels of complexity, rapid technological advancement, and the far-reaching effects of globalization have rendered traditional management tools insufficient for ensuring long-term organizational success (Zhang & Rudnák, 2024; Russell & Smorodinskaya, 2018). Within this context, the need to reconsider the boundaries between management and leadership – and to promote their coordinated application – has become particularly salient. The distinction between these two functions, as well as the emphasis on their complementary nature, lies at the core of Kotter's leadership theory.

This retrospective study aims to examine the relevance and applicability of Kotter's manager–leader model in today's organizational environment through a theory-driven, critically informed lens. The model posits that while management is responsible for maintaining order and stability, leadership is charged with initiating and guiding change. Based on this dichotomy, divergent approaches emerge in terms of goal-setting, resource allocation, and motivational strategies. The central question of the study is how these roles intersect in practice, and what contextual factors may hinder or facilitate their integration. A secondary focus of the study is Kotter's eight-step change management framework, which offers a structured approach to organizational transformation. While this model has been widely implemented in practice, the study also engages with scholarly critiques, highlighting issues such as its hierarchical, top-down orientation, limited cultural sensitivity, and the overemphasis on formal structures at the expense of emergent leadership dynamics. Rather than providing a purely descriptive overview, the objective is to explore the theoretical depth, assess the limitations, and reinterpret the model considering contemporary organizational challenges. Accordingly, the study draws upon a broad range of literature, including foundational works in leadership theory, contemporary critiques, and modern paradigms such as transformational and transactional leadership. This integrative approach allows for a recontextualization of Kotter's manager–leader model and facilitates a deeper understanding of how it may support the development of sustainable, reflective leadership practices in today's complex organizational landscapes.

## 2 Literature Review

According to (Kotter, 1990), leadership is fundamentally different from management – though not necessarily superior to it, nor capable of fully replacing it. Rather, they are two distinct yet mutually reinforcing executive functions, each characterized by specific responsibilities, skills, and activities. In today's increasingly complex and dynamic environment, the simultaneous application of both is indispensable to achieving sustained business success.

High-performing organizations do not passively await the emergence of leaders; instead, they actively identify individuals with latent leadership potential and provide them with developmental opportunities to realize it. It is essential to note that strong leadership accompanied by weak management is not inherently preferable – indeed, it may prove more detrimental – than the reverse (Contu et al., 2024). The true challenge lies in integrating strong leadership with robust management and leveraging each to balance the other. Not all individuals are naturally adept at both. Some excel as managers but lack the qualities required for effective leadership, while others possess visionary leadership traits but struggle with managerial discipline. Organizations must value both types of individuals and ensure they are represented within teams. While effective managers handle complexity through formal systems, ensuring consistency in key areas such as quality and profitability, leaders are primarily tasked with guiding and enabling change.

As (Kotter, 1990) emphasizes, meaningful transformation – essential for organizational competitiveness – demands more and better leadership, not just efficient administration. Both roles encompass three fundamental responsibilities:

(1) determining what must be done,

(2) building the necessary relationships to execute plans, and

(3) ensuring the work is completed.

However, how these tasks are approached diverge significantly. Managers create capacity plans, design detailed procedures to reach objectives, allocate resources accordingly, and monitor implementation via both formal and informal mechanisms. In contrast, leaders set direction, craft compelling visions, design corresponding strategies, align people around shared goals, and foster commitment through communication, emotional resonance, and value-driven inspiration. Strategic direction should not be confused with long-term planning; the former drives transformation, while the latter often sustains the status quo. Effective visions are not necessarily groundbreaking but are built upon a pragmatic synthesis of familiar concepts. Their success depends less on novelty and more on their adaptability and alignment with organizational interests – without which the vision risks remaining aspirational and disconnected from reality.

Modern organizations are interdependent by nature; no individual holds complete autonomy. This creates challenges, particularly when leaders are overtrained in management but underdeveloped in leadership. Successful leadership requires continuous dialogue with both allies and sceptics of a given strategy – an act of alignment that often demands more from leaders than simply driving operational outcomes. Whereas managers motivate through task execution and control, leaders must communicate long-term purposes, foster shared ownership, and build trust.

Notably, employees may be informed of strategic objectives without necessarily accepting or embracing them as shared goals (Onia, 2022). Thus, leader credibility – rooted in reputation, consistency between words and actions, and personal integrity – is crucial in securing true alignment. Kotter metaphorically contrasts the manager as a shepherd who directs from behind with the leader as a guide who inspires from the front. Managers focus on supervising and adjusting organizational systems to match predetermined plans, often irrespective of individual motivation.

In contrast, leaders use motivation and inspiration – not surveillance – as their primary tools. With effective feedback, employees can experience recognition and a sense of belonging to a high-performing team. Strong leaders define and communicate the organizational vision while connecting it to the personal interests of their audience. Including employees in implementation decisions reinforces cohesion and commitment. Clear feedback mechanisms, symbolic rewards, and consistent affirmation enhance employees' sense of being valued and supported. Effective leadership also entails developing future leaders: distributing responsibilities downward in the hierarchy exposes junior staff to challenges that allow them to demonstrate potential. These practices enable senior leadership to identify emerging talent and invest in long-term succession planning.

To align leadership across levels, informal relational networks – culture, trust, dialogue – are essential (Rudnák & Szabó, 2019). These structures help prevent leadership from becoming fragmented or contradictory and support the formation of organizational cultures that not only value strong leadership but actively seek to foster it. (Kotter, 1995) published his renowned "Eight-Step Model," which focuses on initiating and sustaining system-level organizational change. Widely recognized for its structured and pragmatic approach, the model provides a comprehensive framework for guiding transformation processes across diverse organizational contexts.

The first step involves establishing a sense of urgency for change – an imperative that must resonate not only with top management but throughout all levels of the organization. This shared sense of urgency helps generate widespread commitment by offering credible and compelling reasons for undertaking transformation.

The second step emphasizes the formation of a powerful guiding coalition comprised of credible, influential leaders with proven leadership capabilities who can mobilize others. Importantly, this coalition should represent different levels of the organization and speak with a unified voice in support of the vision, thereby enhancing the perceived legitimacy of the change initiative.

The third step is the development of a clear and compelling vision that provides direction and continuously inspires employees throughout the transformation journey. Stakeholder engagement should be as inclusive as possible to ensure the integration of diverse perspectives and to foster commitment and alignment with shared goals Hamza et al., 2024).

The fourth step requires communicating the vision effectively – through rational and emotional appeals alike – tailored to various stakeholder groups. Repetition and consistency are key, helping embed the vision into the organizational culture. To make change sustainable, employees must feel empowered to act in alignment with the vision. This involves cultivating trust and creating opportunities for meaningful participation, which in turn increases initiative and ownership. Achieving and celebrating short-term wins – the fifth step – provides tangible evidence of progress. Targeting areas where visible success can be achieved quickly helps build momentum and convert sceptics, maintaining the forward motion of change.

Subsequently, the focus shifts toward addressing deeper, systemic challenges. Previous successes must be extended to other areas of the organization, and the new behaviours and norms must be embedded in the organizational culture. The process can only be considered complete once these changes are institutionalized. Leaders play a pivotal role by modelling desired behaviours and ensuring that recognition and reward systems reinforce the new values. Leadership succession planning must also align with this long-term vision: future leaders must be committed to sustaining transformation, thereby preventing regression to outdated organizational patterns.

According to (Nganjuk, 2017), leadership and management must go hand in hand. Although they are not synonymous, they are intrinsically linked and mutually reinforcing. Any attempt to separate the two is likely to generate more problems than it resolves. (Algahtani, 2014) argues that some individuals can fulfil both leadership and managerial roles. Based on his observations, leaders are typically the initiators of change, while managers are responsible for its implementation. However, as initiating change is often a complex and demanding process, managers may sometimes resist its adoption.

Algahtani (2014) supports a balanced integration of managerial and leadership roles, suggesting that such equilibrium is essential for achieving optimal organizational outcomes. In his view, leadership has become an indispensable need for all organizations – particularly in the business sector – to keep pace with the rapid changes and shifting demands of the twenty-first century. (Liphadzi et al., 2017) consider leadership a subdomain of management and highlight the critical importance of both functions in executive performance. They argue that leadership provides direction, while management imposes order, and recommend that leadership and managerial attributes be applied in tandem.

Carreno (2024) emphasizes one of the greatest strengths of Kotter's eight-step model: it's clear, sequential structure, which provides a step-by-step guide for managing change. In the context of large-scale organizational transformation, the model's structured format offers a reliable roadmap for leaders, helping reduce uncertainty and ensuring that no essential phase is overlooked. The model places leadership at the heart of the change process, acknowledging that successful transformation depends on leaders who can inspire, motivate, and guide others through uncertain times (Rudnák et al., 2024). This emphasis on leadership plays a crucial role in sustaining momentum throughout the change effort. (Carreno, 2024) also highlights the model's proven practical applicability across various sectors and organizational settings. Case studies suggest that the model is compatible with both public institutions and private enterprises. However, its limitations are also acknowledged: in high-velocity environments such as tech startups or sectors undergoing digital disruption, organizations must often pivot in real-time and adapt flexibly to emergent challenges. In such settings, the model's rigid, linear progression may prove too inflexible (Uslu et al., 2025).

Another potential limitation is its strong reliance on top-down leadership. The model assumes that change originates from senior leadership, led by a powerful guiding coalition. While this approach may be effective in traditional hierarchical structures, it is less suitable in decentralized or flat organizational environments. Elements such as creating a sense of urgency, emphasizing leadership roles, and prioritizing effective communication may be interpreted differently depending on cultural and organizational value systems. In cultures where change typically occurs incrementally or where consensus-based decision-making is the norm, Kotter's fast-paced, top-down approach may encounter resistance. Moreover, the model's individualistic emphasis on leadership and empowerment may not align well with collectivist societies, where teamwork, shared responsibility, and collaboration are more highly valued. The assumption that a single leader can independently initiate and guide transformational change may overlook the decisive role of group cohesion, collaboration, and consensus-building.

According to Haslam et al. (2024), despite the evolution of leadership theory, certain outdated and empirically unsubstantiated ideas – referred to as "zombie leadership" – continue to dominate popular thinking. These notions, such as the belief that leadership is the exclusive domain of charismatic individuals or that leaders inherently know what is best, are not grounded in effective practice. Rather, they serve the interests of elites, consultants, popular literature, and corporate HR policies. The authors summarize the core traits of zombie leadership in eight axioms and argue that these beliefs not only describe the world but actively shape it – by excluding collective leadership, undermining bottom-up initiatives, and reinforcing social inequalities (Bajkai et al., 2022). Their critique draws particular attention to the bias toward preserving the status quo, and the need to recognize leadership not as a personal trait, but as a social and organizational construct. In their view, the persistence of zombie leadership is perpetuated by the vested interests of the leadership industry and the insularity of academic elites, which are often disconnected from real-world organizational challenges and fail to exert meaningful social influence. To address these issues, the authors propose redefining the concept of leadership, supporting community-based leadership practices, and reimagining normative models with an emphasis on social responsibility.

McLaren et al. (2023) offered a critique of the initial stage of Kotter's eight-step model – specifically, the emphasis on establishing a sense of urgency. According to their findings, this approach may have unintended consequences: the perception of urgency can elevate employee stress and anxiety levels, intensify resistance to change, and ultimately undermine corporate objectives. They propose an alternative motivational approach, driven by compelling visions of the future rather than fear or pressure, which may be more effective in mitigating psychological resistance and fostering proactive engagement with change.

Lunenburg (2011) argues that while organizations may formally authorize individuals to occupy leadership roles, such appointments alone do not guarantee effective leadership. For optimal organizational performance, both strong leadership and robust management are essential. In today's rapidly evolving and dynamic work environments, it is particularly important for leaders to possess the ability to challenge existing structures, as well as to inspire and persuade organizational members. Simultaneously, managers play a vital role in designing and maintaining well-functioning workplace structures.

Sihame & Moyosulu (2021) examine the evolution of leadership theories and categorize Kotter's manager-leader model as part of a new generation of leadership thinking. This perspective emphasizes the complex interplay between leaders, followers, context, and broader systems. Of special interest is the recognition of latent leadership capabilities among followers, highlighting that leadership is not limited to formal authority. Instead, it is a dynamic, multidirectional process in which multiple actors may actively participate. More recently, transformational and transactional leadership theories have gained traction, along with strategic frameworks such as Lean and Agile, which are designed to help organizations cope with rapid change and increasing complexity.

Transformational leadership encourages, inspires, and motivates followers to transcend routine expectations. This approach is particularly relevant when organizations face the need for renewal, are undergoing major transitions, or require a new strategic direction. It is considered vital in fast-paced technological industries, where innovation and agility are essential for maintaining competitiveness. Well-known transformational leaders include Jeff Bezos, Steve Jobs, and Bill Gates. In contrast, transactional leadership is based on hierarchical authority and reciprocal motivation. Leaders within this model reward effort and apply penalties for unmet objectives. Fairness and perceived equity are central to follower satisfaction and engagement in such contexts. Transactional leadership is most effective in mature, well-structured organizations where the focus is on maintaining existing operations and reinforcing the status quo. Typical transactional leaders are managers who emphasize supervision, operational efficiency, and performance metrics.

Ramasamy & Ganesan (2017) examined Kotter's change management framework with particular emphasis on its applicability and readiness for implementation within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), based on validation by experienced practitioners. Their research aimed to uncover operational shortcomings embedded in various phases of the model and to propose practical enhancements. To this end, a sample of 65 SME executives was selected to participate in a structured assessment of leading change management models. The researchers presented six of the most widely applied frameworks to participants, who then voted on which model should undergo critical analysis.

Kotter's model emerged as the most preferred, leading each participant to receive a printed copy of The Heart of Change. As part of the study, a structured workshop was organized in which the model was introduced step by step to CEOs. Each phase was accompanied by in-depth discussion, during which practitioner feedback, criticisms, and suggestions were meticulously documented (Barczi et al., 2025). Participants unanimously acknowledged the conceptual robustness of Kotter's framework as a guiding structure for successful organizational transformation and cultural embedding. Nonetheless, they highlighted significant gaps in the model's practical execution – namely, the absence of tools, templates, and concrete methodological guidance for each step. The CEOs emphasized the necessity of incorporating clear indicators for evaluating change outcomes, as well as practical resources tailored to each implementation phase. The study presented a number of targeted modifications to enhance the model's real-world applicability, including: execution tools and templates for each stage; checklists for identifying sources of organizational complacency; a quick reference guide outlining the characteristics and core responsibilities of the guiding coalition; templates and guidelines for articulating effective visions; quantitative metrics for measuring progress across all stages; performance goals and KPIs for the change implementation team; tracking mechanisms for aligning actions with strategic objectives; tools for evaluating change effectiveness; reward systems for successful change agents; and independent assessments of pre- and post-change organizational states.

According to Ramasamy & Ganesan (2017), these elements should be integrated into the model's design logic, thereby transforming it into a more visible, actionable, and robust tool for change agents. Their research clearly illustrates that structured change management programs are essential for renewal, sustainability, and growth – particularly for organizations that have moved beyond the saturation and maturity phases of their developmental life cycle.

Sittrop & Crosthwaite (2021) investigated the practical implementation of Kotter's change management model within an organizational setting, focusing specifically on enhancing the value and utilization of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems. Their study applied Kotter's eight-step model throughout the organizational transformation process.

Employing a case-study-based qualitative methodology, the researchers used a deductive analytical approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods to achieve a multidimensional perspective and ensure data triangulation. The findings revealed that although the application of Kotter's model was partially successful, its effectiveness could have been significantly improved had the competencies identified during the study been embedded into practice both prior to and during the change initiative (Bajkai et al., 2024). Building upon Kotter's classical framework, the research effectively bridged the gap between theory and practice by detailing the competencies essential for successful change management, highlighting common pitfalls, and exploring the relationship between data-driven insights and the change process in order to mitigate risks.

Similarly, Ravi et al. (2022) reported that Kotter's eight-step model was instrumental in the rapid evolution of COVID-19 screening protocols in response to evolving guidance from the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the California Department of Public Health (CDPH). These protocol adaptations led to operational improvements at a large academic healthcare centre, where change management tools – most notably Kotter's model – were employed. The revised guidelines were incorporated into the workflows of emergency care personnel. The researchers chronologically reconstructed the development of baseline screening criteria, examining how these were reviewed, modified, and operationalized during the initial outbreak and subsequent high-uncertainty period of the pandemic in the United States. Their results demonstrated the successful implementation of dynamic screening protocols across a large-scale healthcare workforce.

## 3 Results

The analyses presented in this study reaffirm the relevance and contemporary value of John P. Kotter's manager-leader framework in interpreting differentiated leadership roles within the 21st-century organizational context. The findings underscore that management and leadership represent two complementary yet functionally distinct dimensions, whose integration is essential for achieving organizational effectiveness and adaptability. (Kotter, 1990) classical distinction – framing management as the art of dealing with complexity and leadership as the art of enabling change – continues to enjoy broad scholarly consensus, as reflected in the works of (Lunenburg, 2011; Nganjuk, 2017; Liphadzi et al., 2017).

A key theoretical insight emerging from this analysis is that successful organizational performance does not rely on the dominance of either managers or leaders, but rather on the synergistic integration of both roles. In practice, however, the boundaries between these roles are often blurred, potentially leading to organizational dysfunction. According to Algahtani (2014) and Sihame & Moyosulu (2021), hybrid roles that combine managerial and leadership functions are gaining prominence in contemporary change-driven environments (Mouazen et al., 2024). At the same time, critical reflections illuminate certain limitations in the model's applicability. The concept of "zombie leadership" introduced by Haslam et al. (2024) – which critiques charismatic and heroic leadership ideals – warns against the oversimplified application of the manager-leader dichotomy, emphasizing that leadership must be understood within its broader socio-cultural and political context. From this perspective, leadership is not merely a function of individual traits, but a collective construction shaped by social norms, power relations, and organizational culture. Another important outcome of the investigation is the observation that while Kotter's model offers a normative and structured framework, the practical separation of leadership and managerial functions is often unfeasible, particularly within small and medium-sized enterprises. As Ramasamy & Ganesan (2017) empirical study indicates, managers are frequently compelled to adopt leadership responsibilities without receiving adequate support or tools. Moreover, contemporary leadership theories – especially transformational and transactional leadership (Sihame & Moyosulu, 2021) – further nuance the relevance of Kotter's model. While transformational leadership aligns with Kotter's vision- and motivation-centred paradigm, the transactional model resonates more closely with classical managerial functions, reinforcing the notion that a dynamic equilibrium between the two roles is preferable to rigid separation. In conclusion, Kotter's manager-leader model remains a valuable tool for interpreting and cultivating leadership roles, particularly when applied not as a rigid role prescription but as a flexible and context-sensitive system. Its adaptive application and critical reinterpretation may contribute to the development of a more sustainable and inclusive leadership culture in today's complex organizational landscape.

## 4 Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, it can be unequivocally concluded that John P. Kotter's manager-leader model remains a valid and effective tool for understanding and consciously shaping leadership roles. The model's clear structure, along with its capacity to distinguish between management as a stabilizing force and leadership as a driver of change, constitutes a significant theoretical contribution to leadership studies.

However, the critical evaluation reveals that the successful application of the model is contingent upon its alignment with the complexities of organizational culture, power dynamics, and the broader social context of leadership. The concept of "zombie leadership" introduced by Haslam et al. (2024), as well as the specific features of collectivist and decentralized organizational structures, serve as important reminders that traditional, hierarchical, and individualistic leadership frameworks do not universally promote organizational development. Over-simplifying the manager-leader dichotomy – particularly when leadership is solely linked to charismatic individuals – can distort the true nature of leadership and undermine the importance of participation, collective decision-making, and collaboration. Thus, this study not only reaffirms the strengths of Kotter's model but also calls for its reinterpretation in light of contemporary organizational challenges.

The distinction between leadership and management should not be seen as an end in itself, but rather as a means to recognize that different situations require distinct skills and attitudes. Within this paradigm, a good leader can also be a good manager – and vice versa – provided they possess the capacity to identify contextual demands and navigate flexibly between these two roles. In conclusion, the future of organizations lies not in static role models but in flexible, adaptive, and reflective leadership behaviours. Kotter's model offers a robust theoretical foundation for this, yet its successful implementation ultimately depends on a critical perspective and its integration with current organizational realities.

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# Systematic Literature Review of the Implementation of Service Quality Management in Tourism Destination Management using Kotter's Manager-Leader Model

**Abstract**: The tourism industry a highly multifaceted industry requiring various professionals skilled in-service quality coupled with adequate management of destinations. The success of the industry depends on customer satisfaction, which is also the measure to quality in services. Service quality relies on various elements of reliability, responsiveness, empathy, tangibility and assurance. Kotter developed an 8-step model that has been used to institute change. This systematic literature review sought to explore the application of Kotter's model of change management in management of service quality in tourism destinations. This review analysed and synthesized 25 empirical studies obtained from the Web of Science database through a systematic selection process involving pre-specified inclusion and exclusion criteria. The study employed systematic qualitative review through content analysis by; identifying the research problem, searching relevant literature, assess the quality of the studies, synthesizing the results and interpreting the findings. The role of service quality in customer satisfaction cannot be underestimated because services are actions dependent on value of delivery in relation to customer expectations and perceptions of services. Application and integration of Kotter's model of change management in improving service quality standards in tourism organizations can boost the existing approach of TQM in service quality. The components of the gaps model coupled with change management model can improve on dynamism of tourism management gradually towards successful customer satisfaction.

**Keywords:** Service Quality Management in Tourism, Total Quality Management, Customer Satisfaction, Kotter's Change model

## 1 Introduction

The tourism industry is a service-based industry that focusses on selling travel experiences to people and through people. These experiences rely on total quality management to be reliant and efficient especially aiming at ensuring that service performance exceeds customer expectations (Naz et al., 2021). The significance of tourism globally has been acknowledged from the capacity of the industry to sustain economies in both developed and developing countries. Tourism is therefore one of the most significant economic activities accounting for about 10% of global GDP from the cross-sectional jobs created amounting to approximately 200 million positions both directly and indirectly as recorded by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2003). In Europe, China and the United States tourism recorder almost half of the global inbound receipts regardless of the sensitivity and seasonality associated with the industry rising from travel advisories, diseases, government policies, travel protocols and or insecurity.

Total Quality Management in tourism is not a new concept since the inception of the marketing mix in the service sector. The popularity of the concept is mostly associated with the fact that the entire organization's workforce plays a role in enhancing service quality coupled with the associated elements that guide the implementation. These elements emphasize focusing on the customer, creating an environment where there is employee motivation especially through empowerment, focusing on continuous monitoring of work to note deviations from the set objectives, ensuring there is cooperation amongst all where there is mutual understanding of the goals of the organization, formulating strategic work plans, emphasizing on continuous improvement of operations, and effective communication across all levels (Curry & Kadasah, 2002).

Kotter's manager-leader model (Kotter, 1995) is applicable for service quality as it combines roles of day-today operations and strategic guidance, management roles and leadership roles respectively. Providing good service quality in tourism necessitates a fusion of effective management and insightful leadership. This concept is represented through Kotter's Manager-Leader Model which focuses on a balanced input-output approach. In the case of the tourism sector, apart from being connectors of service provision to customer needs, the role of managers also assumes a critical function of ensuring that service quality is being maintained. This means that the role of managers becomes very important as in the planning, staffing, and operating of the organization they must take care of the control and coordination of the organizational activities (Curry & Kadasah, 2002). To illustrate, organizational management of tourism begins to have the potential of continually producing superior services when there is implementation of service elements such as the use of systematic feedback, staff training schedules, tightening of the budget, etc. (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

In Kotter's model, leadership collaborates with management through eight steps of change to address the aspects of strategic direction, motivation, and cultural alignment that are necessary for tourism to build its quality in the long term. When a leader creates the vision and sets the direction for service delivery that guarantees amazing experiences, aligns the staff to the guests' priorities, and implicates them with the constant desire for improvement, then such a leader can certainly affect the changes that he considers necessary for the management of the global vision to occur (Kotter, 1995). This kind of leadership in such a setting will have the effect of creating flexibility, evolution, and more emotional commitment in employees which in turn increases guest satisfaction and loyalty. Integration of managerial and leadership roles in the best manner, for instance, a manager who makes up for the weaknesses of the other, helps in the sustenance of a performance-driven culture where customer expectations are not only met but surpassed (Grönroos, 2007).

The first part of the two-tiered approach to service quality laying emphasis on the internal and external service culture, acknowledges managers' responsibility to serve the customer efficiently. They set the standards such as parameters that are measurable, the one-time operations that reduce costs and gives customers their service quickly as a way of meeting the customer demands (Curry & Kadasah, 2002).

The scholars illustrate this by highlighting that service quality is sustained through the availability of customer feedback systems, training schedules for staff, and budget structures of an organization, which facilitate to make sure that the service provision is dependable and punctual, the main tenets of quality (Parasuraman et.al., 1988).

The systematic literature review of this paper aims at analysing the implementation of service quality management in tourism destination management while using Kotter's manager-leader model.

To achieve this aim, the study was guided by research questions as follows:

(1) What is the role of service quality in customer satisfaction,

(2) What is the application of Kotter's manager-leader model in tourism service quality and

(3) In what ways has the Kotter's manager-leader model been integrated in improving service quality standards in tourism organizations. A discussion of the literature is presented, following which will be the presentation of the methodology and results, and finally presentation of the conclusion.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 The Role of Service Quality in Customer Satisfaction

Services are acts and performances that customers expect to be of value and whose measure of quality is only reliant on efficiency of the act from the customer's perspective. According to Bakir & Atalik (2024), in their study of the repurchase intentions of customers in the airline industry in the United Kingdom through customer citizenship behaviour, they identified service quality as a key element for business. The definition of service quality revolves around similar ideology of customer's evaluation of the overall performance of the service (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Services are intangible therefore, the perception is what evaluates service quality (Grönroos, 1984).

There are various advances made in interpretation of service quality (Bakır & Atalık, 2024), however, the most astounding view of service quality is what Parasuraman et al. (1988) developed through the SERVQUAL model showing the dimensions associated with what service quality should be perceived through, that is, intangibility, reliability, responsiveness, empathy and assurance. According to Bakır & Atalık (2024) satisfaction from services is achieved when the service is delivered over and above the customer expectations.

A comparative study conducted by Medeiros et al. (2025), on the perceptions of the quality of tourist attractions in Brazil showed that different tourism stakeholders perceive the touristic experience in different ways and this variation creates differences in service attributes amongst different groups since each customer or consumer has different priorities. They add that familiarity and frequency of tourist visitation to a destination highly influences the perceived quality of the destination noting that non-residents may value sites more than domestic tourists due to familiarity. Brazil is a ranked 26th place internationally in terms of Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) and ranks third place across North and South America after Canada and the Unites States. The country is well endowed with natural resources and well as cultural resources making it an ideal tourism destination (World Economic Forum, 2017).

Hoang et al. (2024) in their systematic literature review noted that various scholars have recognized the emphasis laid on authentic leadership in tourism and hospitality. Ling et al. (2017) are citing that it enhances potential of the industries (Teng & Yi, 2022). This is because authentic leadership places emphasis on self-awareness, relational transparency, internalized perspective, and moral balanced processing (Teng & Yi, 2022), all of which collectively contribute to the creation of a positive and supportive work environment hence customer satisfaction (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Tourism and hospitality industries are quality dependent and require service delivery that is consistent with high commitment to customer satisfaction (Jacques et al., 2015); Ling et al. (2017) process that can be achieved through gradual change in management (Li et al., 2025).

## 2.2 Application and Integration of Kotter's Model of Change Management in Improving Service Quality Standards in Tourism Organizations

According to Mouazen et al. (2023) in their empirical study of Kotter's change management model in a study dubbed transformational and transactional leaders and their role in implementing the Kotter Change Management Model (KCM) to ensure sustainable change emphasized that there was need to figure out; the tools needed to effect structure and provide a guiding framework to change. When implemented, the model seeks to steer change during; the short-term period, where change is addressed through management and, the long-term period, where change is addressed through leadership (Kotter, 1995).

Tourism is highly volatile and requires effective management to experience customer satisfaction. Mouazen et al. (2023) noted that Kotter proposed to implement change in 8 steps with the first step being, creating a sense of urgency. The writers noted that there is need to depict the gaps that exist and reinforce the need for change to create urgency. The second step is building a guiding coalition. This involves finding a team that can initiate change, convey objectives, establish teams, and convince coworkers to accept change. This team should be forceful, knowledgeable, credible, and leadership oriented. The third step is establishing a strategic vision. The success of any venture must be founded on projected outcomes to create targets to work towards. Leaders therefore must be instrumental in creating direction for employees to inspire efforts towards change. The fourth step is to publicize the vision to maintain the momentum of the transition process. To ensure that employees are informed of the necessity of the change and how it will be implemented, leaders should make use of all available channels of communication. The fifth step is removing obstacles where Kotter suggested actions like identifying those opposed to change, changing organizational policies, procedures, and structure, encouraging taking risks and innovative practices, and equipping staff with the necessary information, abilities, and tools to carry out tasks in new ways. The sixth step is to generate short-term wins where these should be recognized, collected and communicated early and often to as to keep the team focused and inspired towards change and or the task at hand. The seventh step is to sustain acceleration. This requires increase in credibility to improve systems, structure and policies, and requires the leaders to be unremitting with the initiation of change until the vision is realized. The eighth and final step is instituting change. This requires leaders to articulate the connections between new behaviours and organizational success, making sure they continue until they become strong enough to replace old habits. Organizational systems and processes must be evaluated to ensure management practices reinforce the new behaviours, mindsets, and processes of work.

Kotter's change model, in general, provides a realistic method for managing change. The model has all the necessary components to lay the groundwork for success. Maintaining an open line of communication throughout the change process motivates workers to implement change and deflects resistance to participating in the process at various stages, supporting the implementation of change as a regular practice. However, given the importance of trust in change, if trust between workers, leaders, and the steering coalition is low, the strategy may not work well, especially in centralized conventional hierarchical organizations that need continual feedback on execution and implementation (Mouazen et al., 2023)

Service quality management in tourism has in modern days focused on the gaps model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1985) who propose that the product knowledge gap, policy gap, service delivery gap, communication gap, and the customer gap are the reasons for the difference between perceived service quality and expected service quality. Kotter's model of change management however, when integrated in service quality management in tourism highlights a process which managers can adhere to, to see a desired outcome. There is urgency for tourism to remain resilient especially in the ever-dynamic modern economy, of job seasonality, increased inflation and unpredictable changes in customer needs. Total Quality Management emphasizes on engaging all within an organization. This is also highlighted in Kotter's model to create and establish partnerships. Tourism cannot be developed in isolation and integration with other sectors of an economy is critical for change (Hanafiah & Zulkifly, 2020). The dynamism of the tourism industry creates a prerequisite for strategic management, looking into the future to ensure that there are pro-active measures in place (Kotler et al., 2016). Quality management teams are another work strategy for service quality improvement. Witt & Muhlemann (1994) while undertaking a study on guidelines for implementation of TQM in tourism agree with Kotter on creating teams, where the scholars indicate that these teams can be task teams that are assigned a project for a specified time and success in customer satisfaction has been recorded where there was formation of quality teams. International tourism is one of the most economically stabilizing activities a country can adopt, however, it is important to reduce barriers that may arise when trading in services. These barriers can be eliminated by use General Agreements on Trade, GATSs between countries (Edgell, 1995; Yang et al., (2021).

In an operational audit for a change model in the hospitality industry Law (2020) recognized the contribution of Kotter (1995) to recognize small wins as a way to keep employees motivated and enhance focus towards achieving set objectives. The audit added that the industry can institute change by engaging professionals at work and where this can be conducted through empowerment of the staff.

## 3 Results

This research was based on an empirical study of literature review of the implementation of service quality management in tourism destination management using Kotter's manager-leader model. The approach used is that recommended by Thomé et al. (2016) to undertake a systematic literature review through the process of: identifying the research problem, searching relevant literature, assess the quality of the studies, synthesizing the results and interpreting the findings (Figure 1).

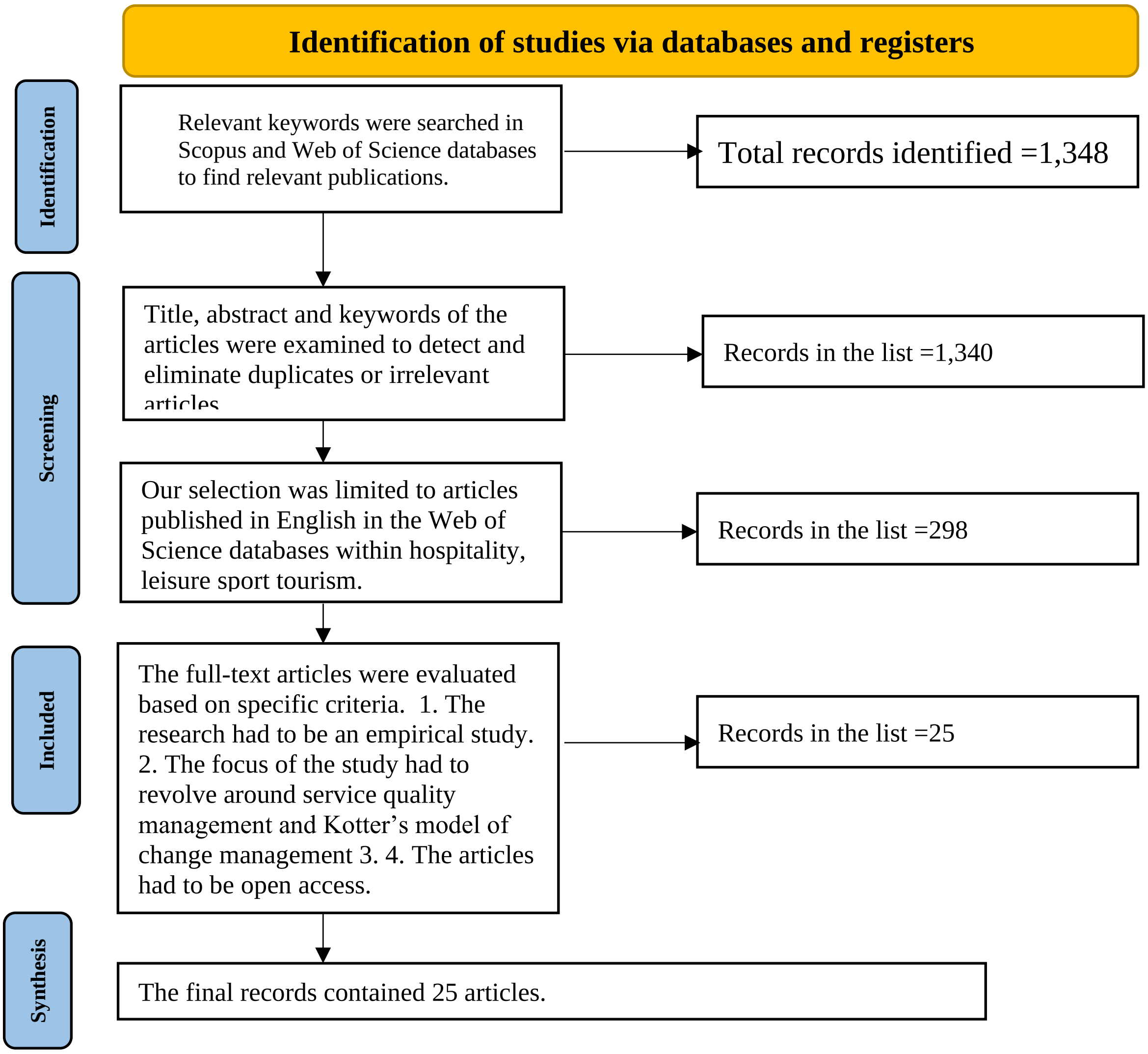


**Figure 1** Identification of studies
*Source: author's own edit*

Services are acts and performances that reliant on efficiency of the act from the customer's perspective. Customer satisfaction is key, and service quality is critical in-service delivery (Bakir & Atalik 2024; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Grönroos,1984; Medeiros et al., 2025).

The intangible nature of services renders service perception by customers the backdrop for quality measurement as emphasized in the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Customer expectations should be understood to exceed customer perceptions of services after consumption. In different countries where tourism is on a high like Brazil and the UK, there is emphasis on the differences that exist in service attributes and that for the tourism business to succeed, it is crucial to put into consideration key aspects of services like intangibility, reliability, responsiveness, empathy and assurance. The familiarity and frequency of tourist visits to destinations also highly influences the perceived quality of the destination noting that non-residents may value sites more than domestic tourists due to familiarity. Sustainable change requires management to figure out tools needed to effect the change, a guiding framework and direction of change in the short-term and the long-term (Mouazen et al., 2023). Change management can be affected in 8 steps, according to Kotter (1995), which are creating a sense of urgency, building coalition, establishing a strategic vision, communicating the vision to initiate momentum, removing obstacles, generating short-term wins, sustaining acceleration and finally instituting change. These steps provide the necessary components for successful service delivery in addition to the gaps model proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1985) which has previous been used in enhancing service quality management in tourism. Kotter's model of change management, when integrated in service quality management in tourism highlights a process which managers can adhere to, to see a desired outcome.

## 4 Conclusion

The use of Kotter's Manager-Leader Model in the management of service quality produces a people-centred, systematic model for achieving sustainable service excellence in tourism. The model's strategic emphasis on vision, communication, and continuous improvement is apt to match the demands of dynamic tourism environments. The literature review confirms that tourism organizations applying Kotter's principles together with quality models like SERVQUAL are likely to achieve higher customer satisfaction, employee performance, and competitiveness of destinations. The findings offer managerial implications for destination managers, policymakers, and stakeholders wishing to guide change while ensuring consistent service quality. In the future, adopting Kotter's model for tourism operation and planning can be a driving force for innovation, employee empowerment, and sustainable growth.

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JÓZSEF TILL – DOROTTYA VARGA

# Analysing the Kotter Management Leader Model in Organizational Change

**Abstract:** The central theme of this study is the Kotter Management Leader Model, a widely recognized framework for leading organizational change. The relevance of this topic lies in the increasing need for effective change management strategies in today's dynamic business environment. The purpose of the study is to analyse the effectiveness of Kotter's eight-step process in driving successful organizational change and to identify key factors that influence its implementation. The research aims to address the effectiveness of the Kotter Management Leader Model in driving successful organizational changes. It will explore the key factors that influence the successful implementation of Kotter's model and examine the challenges and limitations associated with the model in different organizational settings. The methodology involves a comprehensive literature review and analysis of case studies that have applied Kotter's framework. The expected results suggest that while Kotter's model offers a structured approach to change management, its applicability may vary depending on organizational culture, leadership style, and external environment. The conclusion formulates that Kotter's model is a valuable tool for leaders seeking to drive organizational change, but further research is needed to explore its applicability in different contexts and to identify best practices for successful implementation.

**Keywords:** Change, Management, Framework, Organization, Implementation

## 1 Introduction

The Kotter Management Leader Model, developed by Kotter, is a widely recognized framework for leading organizational change. This study examines the effectiveness of Kotter's eight-step process in driving successful change and identifies key factors influencing its implementation. The relevance of this topic lies in the growing need for effective management strategies in today's dynamic business environment. The research aims to address the effectiveness of the Kotter Management Leader Model in driving successful organizational changes. It will delve into the key factors that influence the successful implementation of Kotter's model, such as leadership commitment, employee engagement, and clear communication. Additionally, the study will examine the challenges and limitations associated with the model in different organizational settings, including resistance to change, resource constraints, and varying organizational cultures. By exploring these aspects, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Kotter's model can be effectively utilized to achieve sustainable organizational change.

The study begins with a thorough review of the existing literature on change management and leadership, focusing on Kotter's contributions to the field. This review highlights the theoretical foundations of Kotter's model and its practical applications in various organizational contexts. The research methodology involves a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to gather data from a diverse range of organizations. The quantitative surveys aim to measure the effectiveness of Kotter's model in achieving successful change, while the qualitative interviews provide deeper insights into the experiences and perspectives of leaders and employees involved in the change process (Sittrop & Crosthwaite, 2021).

The findings of the study are expected to reveal the key factors that contribute to the successful implementation of Kotter's model. Leadership commitment is anticipated to be a critical factor, as leaders play a pivotal role in driving the change effort and inspiring employees to embrace the vision. Employee engagement is another important factor, as the active involvement and support of employees are essential for overcoming resistance to change and achieving sustainable transformation. Clear communication is also expected to be a significant factor, as effective communication ensures that all members of the organization understand the vision, their roles, and the steps involved in the change process.

The study will also examine the challenges and limitations associated with Kotter's model in different organizational settings. Resistance to change is a common challenge that organizations face, and the study aims to identify strategies for addressing this resistance and fostering a culture of openness and adaptability. Resource constraints, such as limited budgets and time, can also hinder the successful implementation of Kotter's model, and the study will explore ways to optimize resources and prioritize change initiatives. Varying organizational cultures can impact the applicability of Kotter's model, and the study will investigate how different cultural contexts influence the change process and identify best practices for adapting the model to diverse environments.

The expected results suggest that while Kotter's model provides a structured approach to change management, its applicability may vary depending on organizational culture, leadership style, and external environment. By understanding these factors, organizations can better tailor the model to their specific needs and increase the likelihood of successful change initiatives. The study aims to provide practical recommendations for leaders and managers seeking to implement Kotter's model effectively, offering insights into the best practices for driving sustainable organizational change.

In conclusion, the Kotter Management Leader Model is a valuable tool for leaders seeking to drive organizational change. Further research is needed to explore its applicability in different contexts and to identify the best practices for successful implementation. This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on change management and leadership, providing a comprehensive understanding of Kotter's model and its potential for achieving successful organizational transformation.

## 2 Literature Review

The theoretical background of this study is grounded in various scholarly works that have explored the key themes and concepts relevant to our research. One of the foundational works in the field of change leadership is Kotter's (1996) which outlines an eight-step process for successful organizational transformation. His model includes the following steps: creating a sense of urgency, forming a powerful coalition, developing a vision and strategy, communicating the vision, empowering employees for broad-based action, generating short-term wins, consolidating gains and producing more change, and anchoring new approaches in the culture. This framework has been widely adopted and adapted in various contexts.

Carreño (2025) provides an analytical review of Kotter's framework, emphasizing its relevance in contemporary organizational settings.

Kotter's model has been instrumental in guiding organizations through the complexities of change management. The first step, creating a sense of urgency, involves identifying and communicating the need for change to stakeholders. This step is crucial as it sets the stage for the entire change process. Forming a powerful coalition, the second step requires assembling a group of influential leaders who can drive the change effort. Developing a vision and strategy, the third step, involves crafting a clear and compelling vision for the future and outlining the strategies to achieve it.

Communicating the vision, the fourth step, emphasizes the importance of effectively conveying the vision to all members of the organization. Empowering employees for broad-based action, the fifth step, focuses on removing obstacles and enabling employees to act towards the change (Harrison et al., 2021).

Generating short-term wins, the sixth step involves identifying and celebrating small successes to build momentum. Consolidating gains and producing more change, the seventh step, ensures that the initial successes are built upon to drive further change. Anchoring new approaches in the culture, the final step involves embedding the changes into the organizational culture to ensure their sustainability.

The distinctions between management and leadership have been explored by various scholars. Wajdi (2017) highlights their unique roles in organizational change, emphasizing that while management focuses on maintaining stability and efficiency, leadership is concerned with driving change and innovation. Similarly, Liphadzi et al. ((2017) provide a theoretical perspective on the differences between leadership and management, arguing that both are essential for successful organizational transformation. Leadership is often associated with vision, inspiration, and influence, while management is linked to planning, organizing, and controlling. The interplay between these two roles is critical in navigating the complexities of change management. Algahtani (2014) further explores the distinctions between leadership and management, emphasizing the unique contributions of each to organizational success (Sittrop & Crosthwaite, 2021).

Mouazen et al. (2024) examine the roles of transformational and transactional leaders in implementing Kotter's change management model, emphasizing the importance of leadership styles in ensuring sustainable change. Transformational leaders inspire and motivate employees to embrace change, while transactional leaders focus on maintaining stability and achieving specific goals. The study highlights that both leadership styles are necessary for successful change management, as they complement each other in driving and sustaining change.

Toor & Ofori (2008) also discuss the differences between leadership and management, providing insights into how these roles contribute to effective change management.

Empirical studies have provided valuable insights into the practical challenges of leading change. Hughes (2016) investigates why transformation explanations often fail, highlighting the importance of clear communication and stakeholder engagement. Effective communication is essential in ensuring that all members of the organization understand the vision and their role in the change process. Stakeholder engagement involves actively involving all relevant parties in the change effort, ensuring their buy-in and support (Miles et al., 2023).

Dounia (2024) examines Moses's leadership through the lens of Kotter's managerial model, offering a unique historical perspective on change management. The study draws parallels between Moses's leadership in guiding the Israelites through the wilderness and Kotter's model of leading organizational change. This historical perspective provides valuable insights into the timeless principles of effective leadership and change management.

Salman & Broten (2017) analyse Kotter's "Leading Change," offering a critical evaluation of its principles and applications. The analysis highlights the strengths and limitations of Kotter's model, providing a balanced view of its effectiveness in different organizational contexts. The study emphasizes the need for adapting the model to address specific challenges and opportunities in various settings.

Gupta (2011) also provides an analysis of Kotter's model, focusing on its application in driving innovation change.

Seijts & Gandz (2018) discuss transformational change and leader character, contributing to the understanding of leadership qualities necessary for successful change. The study explores the role of leader character in driving transformational change, highlighting qualities such as integrity, resilience, and empathy. These qualities are essential in inspiring and motivating employees to embrace change and navigate the challenges associated with it (Rawson & Davis, 2023).

This literature review has synthesized the findings from various scholarly works, providing a comprehensive overview of the key themes and concepts relevant to our research. The references cited in this review have contributed to our understanding of theoretical background and have laid the foundation for further exploration in this field.

## 3 Results

Kotter's eight-step process includes the following steps: This study employs a secondary research approach, utilizing an extensive review of available literature. The methodology includes the examination of various case studies, which are integral to the analysis. The literature review also reveals the challenges and limitations associated with implementing Kotter's model in various organizational contexts.

- Create a sense of urgency: Leaders must communicate the need for change and create a sense of urgency among employees.
- Build a guiding coalition: Form a team of influential leaders and stakeholders to drive the change initiative.
- Develop a vision and strategy: Create a clear vision and strategy for the change effort.
- Communicate the change vision: Effectively communicate the vision and strategy to all employees.
- Empower broad-based action: Remove obstacles and empower employees to act towards achieving the vision.
- Generate short-term wins: Identify and celebrate short-term achievements to build momentum.
- Consolidate gains and produce more change: Build on the successes and continue driving change.
- Anchor new approaches in the culture: Embed the changes into the organizational culture to ensure sustainability.

The Kotter Management Leader Model, while widely recognized and effective in many contexts, has several limitations that should be considered:

- Rigidity: Kotter's model is a linear, step-by-step process that may not be flexible enough to accommodate the dynamic and unpredictable nature of organizational change.
- Time-Consuming: The eight-step process can be time-consuming, and some organizations may find it challenging to maintain momentum over an extended period.
- Resource Intensive: Implementing Kotter's model requires significant resources, including time, personnel, and financial investment.
- Leadership Dependency: The success of Kotter's model heavily relies on strong leadership and the ability to build a guiding coalition.
- Cultural Fit: Kotter's model may not be suitable for all organizational cultures.
- Employee Resistance: While Kotter's model emphasizes communication and empowerment, it may not fully address the deep-rooted resistance that some employees may have towards change.
- Focus on Short-Term Wins: The emphasis on generating short-term wins can sometimes lead to a focus on quick fixes rather than sustainable, long-term solutions.
- Limited Scope: Kotter's model primarily focuses on organizational change and may not be as effective in addressing broader systemic issues.

In the following section, some examples of successful implementations will be introduced.

United Way of Greater Kansas City successfully implemented Kotter's model to drive organizational change. They formed a guiding coalition of committed individuals from within the organization to lead the change effort. This coalition helped coordinate and communicate activities, fostering a sense of ownership and engagement among employees. (Kotter, 1996)

Bunge, a global agribusiness and food company, utilized Kotter's model to drive large-scale change. They focused on enlisting a volunteer army of employees who were passionate about the change initiative. By creating a compelling vision and empowering employees to act, Bunge was able to overcome obstacles and generate short-term wins. (Kotter & Cohen, 2012)

Organizations implementing Six Sigma have also successfully used Kotter's model to guide their change efforts. By following the eight steps, these organizations were able to create a sense of urgency, build guiding coalitions, and develop clear visions for their Six Sigma initiatives.

Implementing the Kotter Management Leader Model can present several key challenges:

- Creating a Sense of Urgency: Effectively communicating the need for change to create a sense of urgency can be difficult.
- Building a Guiding Coalition: Forming a strong and influential guiding coalition is crucial but challenging.
- Developing a Clear Vision and Strategy: Crafting a compelling vision and strategy that resonates with all employees can be complex.
- Effective Communication: Ensuring consistent and clear communication to all employees is critical.
- Empowering Employees: Removing obstacles and empowering employees to act towards achieving the vision can be difficult.
- Generating Short-Term Wins: Identifying and celebrating short-term wins to build momentum can be challenging.
- Sustaining Momentum: Maintaining momentum and consolidating gains to produce more change is a continuous challenge.
- Anchoring Changes in the Culture: Embedding new approaches into the organizational culture to ensure sustainability is perhaps one of the most challenging aspects.

Overcoming employee resistance is a critical aspect of successful change management. Here are some strategies that can be used to address and mitigate resistance:

- Effective Communication: Clear and transparent communication is essential to reduce uncertainty and build trust.
- Involvement and Participation: Involving employees in the change process can increase their sense of ownership and reduce resistance.
- Addressing Concerns and Providing Support: Understanding and addressing the specific concerns of employees is crucial.
- Building Trust and Credibility: Building trust and credibility is essential for overcoming resistance.

- Creating a Sense of Urgency: Creating a sense of urgency can help motivate employees to embrace change.
- Empowering Employees: Empowering employees to act and contribute to the change initiative can reduce resistance.
- Generating Short-Term Wins: Identifying and celebrating short-term wins can build momentum and demonstrate the benefits of the change.
- Building a Guiding Coalition: Forming a guiding coalition of influential leaders and stakeholders can help drive the change initiative.
- Addressing Cultural and Organizational Factors: Understanding and addressing cultural and organizational factors that may contribute to resistance is important. (SixSigma.us, 2025)

The results indicate several positive outcomes from the implementation of the Kotter Management Leader Model. Improved employee engagement was observed in organizations that adopted the model, as the focus on communication, involvement, and empowerment fostered a sense of ownership and commitment among employees. Enhanced communication of the change vision and strategy was identified as a critical factor in the success of the change initiatives.

Organizations that utilized multiple channels to consistently and clearly convey the message were able to achieve better buy-in and reduce resistance (Miles et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the implementation of Kotter's model contributed to increased organizational performance, including higher levels of productivity, efficiency, and overall effectiveness. The structured approach to change management provided organizations with the tools to navigate the complexities of transformation and achieve their strategic goals. Successful change initiatives, such as the adoption of new technologies, restructuring, and cultural transformation, were reported by organizations that adhered to Kotter's eight-step process. The emphasis on generating short-term wins and sustaining momentum played a key role in building confidence and driving continuous improvement (Rawson & Davis, 2023).

However, challenges and limitations were also noted. Organizations encountered difficulties in creating a sense of urgency, building a guiding coalition, and sustaining momentum over time. Additionally, the rigidity of the model and its resource-intensive nature were identified as potential drawbacks. Overall, the results suggest that while Kotter's model offers a structured approach to change management, its effectiveness may vary depending on organizational culture, leadership style, and external environment. By understanding these factors, organizations can better tailor the model to their specific needs and increase the likelihood of successful change initiatives.

## 4 Conclusion

The Kotter Management Leader Model provides a comprehensive framework for leading organizational change. By following the eight steps, leaders can effectively manage the complexities of change and drive successful transformation. However, it is important to recognize that Kotter's model may not be suitable for all organizations and situations. Factors such as organizational culture, leadership style, and external environment can influence the effectiveness of the model.

One of the key strengths of Kotter's model is its structured approach, which provides clear guidance for leaders throughout the change process. The emphasis on creating a sense of urgency, building a guiding coalition, and developing a clear vision and strategy helps to align the organization and mobilize support for the change initiative. Additionally, the focus on communication and empowerment ensures that employees are engaged and motivated to contribute to the change effort.

However, the model's linear, step-by-step process can be a limitation in dynamic and unpredictable environments. Organizations operating in fast-paced industries may find it challenging to adhere to the sequential nature of the model, as change initiatives often require iterative adjustments and flexibility. Furthermore, the resource-intensive nature of the model may pose challenges for smaller organizations or those with limited resources.

Another limitation is the heavy reliance on strong leadership and the ability to build a guiding coalition. In organizations where leadership is weak or lacks influence, the change initiative may struggle to gain traction. Additionally, the model's emphasis on generating short-term wins can sometimes lead to a focus on quick fixes rather than sustainable, long-term solutions.

Despite these limitations, the Kotter Management Leader Model remains a valuable tool for driving organizational change. By understanding the factors that influence its effectiveness, leaders can better tailor the model to their specific organizational context and increase the likelihood of successful change initiatives. Further research is needed to explore the applicability of Kotter's model in different organizational settings and to identify best practices for successful implementation.

The Kotter Management Leader Model is a valuable framework for guiding organizational change. By adhering to the eight-step process, leaders can establish a structured approach to change management, enhance employee engagement, and achieve sustainable transformation. However, it is crucial to recognize that the model's effectiveness can vary based on factors such as organizational culture, leadership style, and external environment.

While Kotter's model provides clear guidance and has proven successful in many contexts, its rigidity and resource-intensive nature may pose challenges for some organizations. Therefore, further research is needed to explore the model's applicability in diverse settings and to identify the best practices for its successful implementation. By understanding and addressing these factors, leaders can better tailor the model to their specific needs and increase the likelihood of successful change initiatives.

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ÁGNES FŰRÉSZ – JIEQIAN ZHANG

# Fiedler's Contingency Model: A Situational Approach to Managerial Effectiveness

**Abstract:** Fiedler's contingency model is a fundamental theory of leadership research that interprets leadership effectiveness as the result of the interaction of leadership style and situational factors rather than solely the personality traits of the leader. By examining three key factors – the leader-subordinate relationship, task structure, and the formal power of the leader – the model argues that leadership success depends on the favourability of the situation and the leader's basic style. The purpose of this paper is to present a detailed introduction to the Fiedler model, review its empirical studies and critiques, and analyse its practical relevance in the modern, rapidly changing organisational environment. The results suggest that the model continues to offer a significant theoretical basis for understanding leadership effectiveness, but that its limitations stem from its underestimation of leadership flexibility, adaptability and dynamic changes in situations. The study highlights that the Fiedler model is still a valuable starting point today, but needs to be complemented, by emphasising managerial adaptivity and flexible decision-making. The paper also pays particular attention to the applicability of the Fiedler model in today's project-based, teamwork-based, networked organisations, where managers often must adapt quickly to different situations. The strengths of the classical model are the importance of situational diagnosis and the matching of leadership styles, but today, leadership effectiveness increasingly depends on flexible, adaptive behaviour and emotional intelligence. On this basis, the paper proposes to further develop the Fiedler model to capture the dynamic and complex challenges of the modern organisational environment.

**Keywords:** Fiedler, Contingency Model, Leadership Theory, Situational Factors, Leadership Effectiveness

## 1 Introduction

The role of leadership in the effectiveness and success of organisations has been a major area of research in management theory and is still the subject of intense scrutiny. Leadership has a decisive influence on organisational performance, employee motivation and team functioning, but the factors of effective leadership are far from clear (Ibrahim & Daniel, 2019). The prevailing view in the literature has long been that effective leadership results from the existence of certain universally valid personality traits or behavioural patterns. Early leadership research, particularly personality theories, focused on the innate abilities and enduring qualities of leaders (Hou et al., 2023). Later behavioural approaches focused on leadership styles and behaviours, but these have not been sufficient to fully understand the complexities of leadership (Uhl-Bien, 2021).

Leadership research experienced a major shift in the second half of the 20th century, when situational, also known as contingency, theories came to the fore, according to which leadership effectiveness is situational and no leadership style is equally valid for all situations. One of the most prominent proponents of this approach was Fiedler's contingency model (Fiedler, 1967), it rejects the notion of a one-size-fits-all 'good leader' and instead interprets leadership effectiveness as a matter of situational fit (Wuryania et al., 2021). According to the model, there is not inherently effective or ineffective leadership style, since the effectiveness of leadership depends on the extent to which the leadership style matches the conditions of the concrete situation (Shala et al., 2021).

According to Fiedler (1967), the basic style of leaders – whether task-oriented or relationship-oriented – is relatively constant, so that effectiveness can be optimised not by changing leadership style but by consciously shaping situations or by matching the leader to the situation (Fiedler et al. 1976). However, the relevance of the model is now tempered by other challenges. In contemporary organisations, team composition, work environment, technological conditions and organisational goals are constantly changing (Wijethilake et al., 2023). In rapidly changing, often uncertain market and internal environments, managerial flexibility and adaptability have become key (Amghar, 2022; Ayman et al., 1995). In today's leadership role, not only is situational awareness crucial, but consciously adapting the leadership style to the situation is also essential (Reams, 2023; Howell, 2018; Altmäe et al., 2013). This leadership complexity is increasingly shifting the understanding of effective leadership towards emotional intelligence, flexible decision-making and adaptive leadership behaviour (Santos & Gallardo, 2021.; Santos et al., 2022).

The aim of this paper is to provide a comprehensive presentation of Fiedler's contingency model, to examine in detail its achievement and empirical foundations, and to explore in detail its applications and limitations. The research seeks to answer the question to what extent the model can be applied in today's complex and ever-changing organisational environment, and what further developments are needed to maintain its relevance in today's management theoretical and practical context.

## 2 Literature Review

In the history of leadership research, theories to define effective leadership have gone through several stages of development. Initial trait theories attributed leadership success to the innate, stable personality traits of leaders (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). They assumed that certain traits such as dominance, assertiveness or intelligence were universal leadership characteristics. However, Stogdill (1948) and Mann (1959) pointed out that personality traits alone do not explain leadership effectiveness, as successful leaders perform differently in different situations (Uhl-Bien, 2021).

The next line of research was behavioural theories, which began to examine the actions and behavioural patterns of leaders. The classic Ohio State and Michigan State studies identified two dimensions of leadership: consideration and initiating structure (Liang et al.,2023). These studies led to the Blake and Mouton leadership grid, which suggests that the most ideal leader is one who is both highly attentive to the task and to the needs of subordinates. However, these models continued to seek one-size-fits-all solutions and did not take sufficient account of the variability of the organisational environment.

The limitations of behavioural theories have led to the development of situational (contingency) theories, which argue that leadership effectiveness is situational and that there is no one leadership style for all situations. According to contingency theories, successful leadership depends on the fit between leadership style and the specific organisational or group situation. One of the first and best-known representatives of this paradigm was Fiedler's contingency model (Fiedler, 1967).

Fiedler's (1967) contingency model measured leadership style through the Least Preferred Co-worker (LPC) scale, which distinguished between two types of leaders: task-oriented and relationship-oriented. According to the model, leadership can be assessed along three key factors:

- The manager-subordinate relationship: the acceptance, support and trust of subordinates towards the manager (Nicolescu, 2021).
- Task structure: how clear and controlled the tasks are (Anning-Dorson, 2021).
- The power of the leader's position: how much formal power and authority the leader has (Lawrence & De Lisi, 2023).

According to Fiedler et al. (1976) task-oriented leaders are more effective in extremely favourable or unfavourable situations, while relationship-oriented leaders perform better in moderately favourable environments. One of the key theses of the model is that the basic style of leaders is relatively stable and difficult to change, so it is not the leader who has to adapt to the situation, but the situation must be adapted to fit the leader's style (Mulyana et al., 2022).

Fiedler's model has received considerable empirical support, and its effectiveness has been investigated at several levels (Ayman et al. 1995). However, the model has also attracted several criticisms. On the one hand, the reliability and interpretability of the LPC scale has been questioned by several researchers (Howell, 2018), as it is unclear whether the scale measures leadership style or rather general attitudes towards subordinates. On the other hand, the model's assumption that leadership style is fixed and hardly changeable contradicts the findings of later situational leadership theories (Hersey et al. 1969), which emphasized leadership flexibility. According to the situational leadership model, an effective leader can adapt his or her own leadership style to the maturity level of the employees and the situation. The model has also been criticised for ignoring individual and organisational development and rapid changes in situations. Project-based operations, constant technological change and multicultural environments, which are characteristic of modern organisations, place increased demands on the adaptability of managerial behaviour (Altmäe et al., 2013).

### 2.1 The place of the model in modern management theory

Although the limitations of Fiedler's model are obvious, the contingency principle is still dominant and guiding in management theory. The situational approach to managerial effectiveness is echoed in many subsequent models of management theory. For example, the Vroom and Yetton model of decision-making (1973) and House's path-goal theory (1971) also emphasise situational adaptation, but these models allow much greater scope for managerial flexibility, recognising that managers may be able to consciously modify their own behaviour and decision-making style.

Modern theories of leadership such as transformational leadership (Deinert et al., 2015) and servant leadership (Giorgiov, 2010) have added further dimensions to the understanding of leadership effectiveness, highlighting the importance of the leader's emotional intelligence, visionary capacity and the development of followers. According to these models, effective leadership is not only about performing tasks effectively, but also about engaging, motivating, inspiring and supporting the long-term development of subordinates. These aspects were overshadowed by the Fiedler model, which focused primarily on the fit between leadership style and situation, without emphasising the role of the leader's personal development and emotional competencies. The complexity of today's organisational environments – characterised by global competition, digitalisation, project-based operations, teleworking, and continuous technological innovation and rapid change cycles – creates new challenges for leaders (Uslu et al., 2025). Leaders are now required not only to be situationally aware, but also to be continuous learners, highly adaptable, emotionally resilient and proactive change managers (Reams, 2023; Santos et al., 2022; Santos & Gallardo, 2021).

This justifies the need to further develop Fiedler's static approach so that the model can capture the conscious, adaptive change in leader behaviour and consider the ongoing evolution of dynamic relationships between the leader and the subordinate.

## 3 Results

### 3.1 The practical validity of the Fiedler model in classical organisational structures

Fiedler's contingency model has considerable practical value in a classical, stable organisational environment. In organizations where tasks are well structured, leadership authority is clearly defined, and leader-employee relationships are balanced, the model can reliably predict leadership effectiveness (Fiedler et al., 1976). Empirical research also supports the finding that task-oriented leaders are more effective in extreme favourable or unfavourable situations, while relationship-oriented leaders perform better in moderately favourable situations (Ayman et al., 1995). and the performance of 832 team leaders from different industries was evaluated, where task-oriented leaders in structured, hierarchical organizations scored 20% higher on performance indicators. In these traditional organisational settings, the fit between leadership style and situation is a key factor that demonstrates the validity of the model's underlying theses. Research shows that matching the right leadership style with situational characteristics directly contributes to organisational effectiveness and group performance (Megawaty et al., 2022).

### 3.2 Applicability of the model in a dynamic organisational environment

However, studies also show that the applicability of the Fiedler model in today's fast-changing, complex organisational environment faces significant limitations. The project-based structures, agile operating models, and multicultural, remote team management that characterise today's organisations create situations that often require rapid and continuous adaptation by the manager. Research suggests that modern leaders do not always have the time or authority to structure situations as Fiedler originally assumed (Amghar, 2022). In an international study in 2022, 68% of 240 leaders of project-based organisations reported that they had to change their leadership style at least twice during the lifecycle of a project to ensure success. Reams (2023) has shown that the contingency model has not lost its validity: studies from 2010–2022 show that the model is a frequently used tool for identifying leadership problems, demonstrating its timeliness and effectiveness. This is supported by the situational leadership theories (Hersey et al. 1969) and the transformational leadership models formulated by Bass (1985), according to which an effective leader can adapt his or her own behaviour to the maturity level of the group, the organisational goals and the environmental challenges.

### 3.3 The importance of leadership flexibility and emotional intelligence

The results clearly show that leadership flexibility, adaptability and emotional intelligence are inescapable factors in today's organisational environments (Santos et al., 2022; Santos & Gallardo, 2021). According to Santos et al. (2022) managers who applied leadership flexibility at a high level achieved 15% higher organisational performance in the units studied by the National Irrigation Agency. A study by Santos & Gallardo (2021) in the education sector confirmed that groups of leaders with high emotional intelligence had 12% lower turnover and significantly higher employee satisfaction. A recent empirical study by Nasreen et al. (2025) found that high emotional intelligence is a key determinant of leadership adaptivity: in a survey of 180 participants, emotional intelligence explained 51% of the variance in leadership adaptive behaviour ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.001$). This confirms the need to complement the model by integrating emotional competence. In the original conceptualisation of the Fiedler model, these dimensions were not emphasised, which can be considered a major limitation of the model. According to modern empirical research, the success of managers is strongly influenced by their ability to identify emotionally with their subordinates, to adapt their communication and behaviour consciously to the situation, and to be flexible in their decision-making (Gkintoni et al., (2022). To extend the applicability of the model, it may be necessary to formally integrate managerial flexibility into the model, which would allow for an interpretation of adaptive variation in leadership style. This addition would significantly increase the relevance of the Fiedler model in contemporary organisations.

### 3.4 Possibilities for further development of the model

Based on the results, the following elements can be added to the Fiedler model:

- *Incorporating managerial adaptability*: the ability to adapt one's management style to the situation can become a prerequisite for managerial effectiveness (Mc Loughlin & Priyadarshini, 2021).
- Emphasis on *emotional intelligence*: managing relationships with subordinates, recognising motivations and resolving conflicts empathetically is a core element of leadership (Raina, 2022).
- Considering *dynamic situation management*: the manager must react quickly in an ever-changing organisational environment, which does not always allow for prior structuring of the situation (Kérivel et al., 2022).

These additions can help to modernise the Fiedler model and facilitate its practical application in today's organisational environment.

## 4 Conclusion

Fiedler's contingency model is a milestone in the development of leadership theory, which has contributed significantly to the understanding of leadership effectiveness as a result of the interaction of leadership style and situational factors rather than static, universal characteristics. The fundamental merit of the model is that it has shown that leadership success is situationally dependent and that different leadership styles operate with different effectiveness in different environments.

The contingency approach still provides a valid approach to leadership research today. At the same time, the analysis has also highlighted significant limitations in the applicability of the Fiedler model in today's complex and rapidly changing organisational environment.

The dynamic nature of modern organisations, project-based structures, global and multicultural teams, and technological advances have led to an increasing need for leaders to consciously and flexibly modify their behaviour. The model's underlying assumption that leadership styles are relatively stable and difficult to change is less tenable in the context of current organisational challenges. The results of the research suggest that the Fiedler model remains a valuable starting point for the study of leadership effectiveness, but that it needs to be complemented in today's environment.

Leadership flexibility, adaptability and emotional intelligence are key factors that need to be integrated to modernise the model. With these additions, the relevance and practical applicability of the model can be significantly enhanced. In conclusion, Fiedler's contingency model is an important cornerstone of leadership theory and has had a major impact on leadership research to date.

A seminal finding of contingency theory posits that the congruence between leadership style and environmental factors is indispensable for achieving success. It is imperative for leaders to recognise that a uniform approach to leadership is not applicable in all situations, as the effectiveness of a leadership style in one context may not necessarily translate to another.

Fiedler's position is that no management style is inherently superior or inferior to another; rather, the situation determines the style that will be successful. In the event of favourable conditions (i.e. good relationships with subordinates, structured tasks and strong authority), task-oriented leadership may be more effective. Conversely, in circumstances where conditions are less than ideal, an approach predicated on relationship-oriented leadership may prove more efficacious, as the leader's focus is oriented towards the provision of support to the team and the enhancement of internal relationships.

The future direction of the model's development may be completed and adapted to modern leadership challenges by considering the flexibility of leadership behaviour and the management of dynamically changing situations.

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AIBAR TANGATOV – ANDRÁS BARCZI

# Tannenbaum & Schmidt's Leadership Model

**Abstract:** This study looks at the Tannenbaum & Schmidt Leadership Model methodically, concentrating on how it might be used in different cultural settings, especially in post-Soviet countries. The model's basic idea of leadership flexibility – finding a balance between authority and subordinate participation – still applies to today's changing work situations. This research looks at how historical, political, and cultural factors affect leadership styles along the continuum outlined by Tannenbaum & Schmidt by looking at how leaders in the US, Japan, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine lead. Adaptive leadership has worked well in Western countries like the US and Japan to balance centralized control and participative management. In countries that used to be part of the Soviet Union, leadership has changed in different ways. For example, Belarus and Russia still have mostly authoritarian systems, while Kazakhstan and Ukraine are slowly moving toward more consultative and participatory ways of doing things. The results show that the Tannenbaum & Schmidt model is a helpful framework. However, it must be combined with cultural sensitivity and modern leadership theories like emotional intelligence and transformational leadership. This assessment helps us learn more about how leaders adjust to changing and becoming more global economies.

**Keywords:** Tannenbaum & Schmidt, leadership Continuum, Participative Leadership, Authoritarian Leadership, Kazakhstan, Organizational Behaviour, Toyota, Kazatomprom

## 1 Introduction

Leadership is still one of the most important things that decide how well an organization does and how well it can change (López-Cabarcos et al., 2022). Many theories on leadership have come out over the years to describe how leaders affect, direct, and inspire their workforce. The Tannenbaum & Schmidt Leadership Model (1958) is one of the most well-known because it is easy to understand and can be used in many different situations. The model delineates the decision-making space between leaders and their subordinates into seven distinct levels of freedom of action, thereby distinguishing between disparate leadership styles. The example shows that leadership is a spectrum, with authoritarian (leader-centred) styles on one end and democratic (subordinate-centred) styles on the other. It stresses that good leadership means being able to change the style based on the situation, the goals of the organization, and the skills of your subordinates (Wuryania et al., 2021).

Leadership flexibility is becoming increasingly important in today's international corporate world, as companies work in many different cultural and political settings (Anning-Dorson, 2021; Cuhadar & Rudnák, 2022).). However, the way leaders act is also strongly affected by the history and culture of the time. For example, post-Soviet countries still have centralized, authoritarian leadership structures that they got from the Soviet Union. These institutions still affect how organizations act, even as these countries join global markets.

This article examines how the Tannenbaum & Schmidt Leadership Model has been used in different nations, focusing on post-Soviet countries, including Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine. This study examines how leadership styles have changed in response to changes in culture, politics, and the economy by comparing these situations to Western ones like the US and Japan. It also looks at how the Tannenbaum & Schmidt model is still helpful in describing these changes.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 The Tannenbaum & Schmidt Leadership Continuum

Tannenbaum & Schmidt (1958) Leadership Model offer a fascinating exploration of leadership styles ranging from autocratic to democratic. Their pioneering theory posits that effective leaders adapt their leadership style in response to the unique complexities of each task, the unique dynamics of the company, and the skill sets of their employees. The exciting thing about this continuum is that it goes from leaders who make decisions independently (authoritarian) to leaders who give all decision-making power to their subordinates (democratic). They do not believe in rigid leadership styles. Instead, they stress the importance of being flexible as a leader and say that no one leadership style works for everyone. Instead, leaders should look at each situation and choose the correct position on the continuum (Mullins, 2016; Yukl, 2013).

### 2.2 How the model can be used around the world

The West often utilizes the Tannenbaum & Schmidt model for leadership training, the study of organizational behaviour, and management consultancy (Nguyen et al., 2020). Studies show that it is important in businesses that change quickly and where executives must find a balance between control and giving employees freedom (Bousinakis & Halkos, 2021).

Goleman (2000) discusses how emotional intelligence and leadership flexibility work together. He says that leaders with high emotional intelligence can better adapt to their team's demands along the continuum (Boyar et al., 2023).

Some researchers say that the model oversimplifies the intricacies of modern leadership and does not correctly consider things like cultural diversity, globalization, and transformational leadership styles (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Hamza et al., 2024; Makalima & Rudnák, 2024).

### 2.3 Different Types of Leadership in Countries After the Soviet Union

Kazakhstan and other countries that used to be part of the Soviet Union have leadership styles very different from those in the West. Leadership in the Soviet Union was primarily autocratic, with rigorous hierarchies, centralized decision-making, and little employee involvement (Kudaibergenova, 2016; Buzady & Lipovka, 2024).

Kazakhstan has changed a lot in politics, the economy, and culture since it became independent, and these changes have affected how leaders respond. Top-down management styles are still common, especially in state-owned businesses. However, there is more and more evidence of hybrid leadership styles that include consultative and participative elements. This is especially true in multinational corporations, the private sector, and schools (Baimukhanov et al., 2022; Buzady & Lipovka, 2024).

Hofstede's cultural aspects back up these insights. Kazakhstan has a high score on power distance, which means that people in the country are okay with hierarchical systems. However, younger generations value independence, teamwork, and open communication more (Hofstede Insights, 2021; Kulseitova et al., 2025).

### 2.4 How Tannenbaum & Schmidt are important to Kazakhstan

The Tannenbaum & Schmidt model benefits Kazakhstan since it can be used in hierarchical and participatory ways. In transitional economies, when expectations for leaders change, the continuum helps leaders deal with complicated social and cultural dynamics while bringing in new management ideas (Nurgaliyeva et al., 2020).

So, Kazakhstan is an excellent example of how the leadership continuum model can be used in real life, showing how being flexible as a leader can help an organization succeed in a different culture (Qanay & Courtney, 2024)

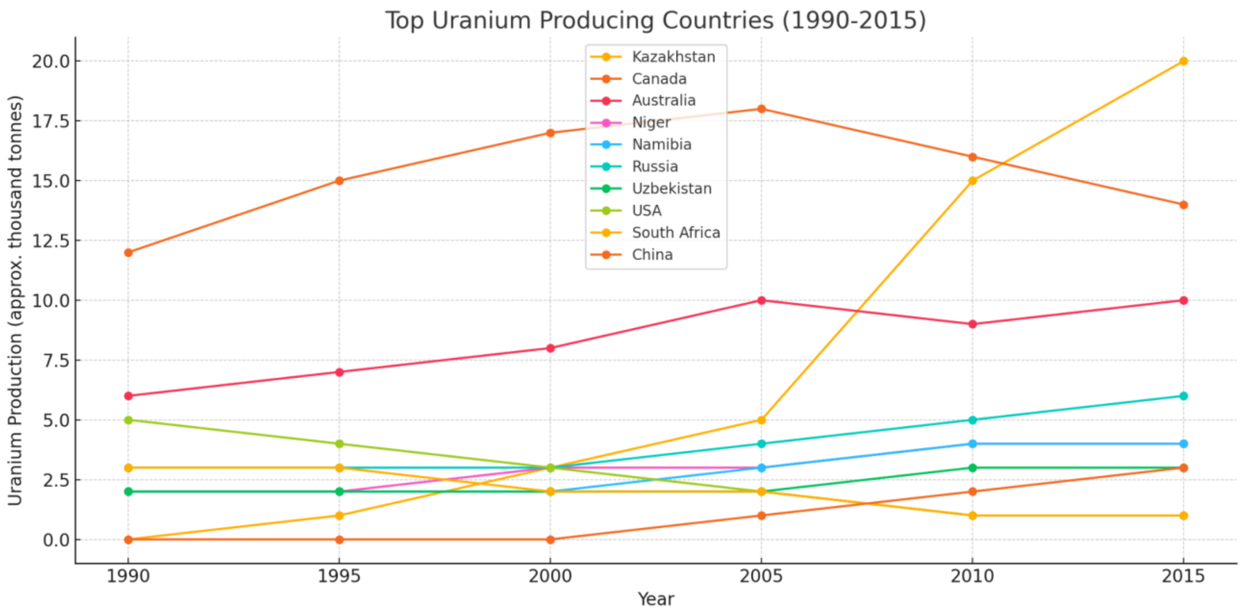


**Figure 1** Top Uranium Producing Countries
*Source*

Kazatomprom, Kazakhstan's state atomic enterprise, is an excellent illustration of the Tannenbaum & Schmidt leadership model used in a country that was part of the Soviet Union. Kazatomprom used to have a very centralized leadership structure, an example of the authoritarian side of the leadership continuum. The top executives and government officials made strategic decisions, so employees had little room for a say. Kazatomprom started using modern management techniques, including some from the Japanese Kaizen philosophy, as Kazakhstan became more connected to global markets. Kaizen promotes ongoing improvement by making incremental adjustments to procedures and operations that employees suggest.

Kazatomprom has started programs in the last few years that let staff suggest ways to improve things and participate in quality control talks. These participatory behaviours show a move toward the consultative and subordinate-centred side of the Tannenbaum & Schmidt model. Top management is still in charge of long-term strategy and following the rules. However, intermediate managers and frontline workers are becoming more involved in fixing problems daily. This mix of leadership styles lets Kazatomprom keep centralized management while still getting employees involved. Because of this, the company has made its production processes more efficient, safe, and innovative. Kazatomprom has also achieved international quality requirements more easily because of its partial use of Kaizen. This has made it more competitive around the world. This change shows that leadership flexibility may work in Kazakhstan's one-of-a-kind cultural and economic setting.

The Kazatomprom case indicates that leadership styles can change to include more participatory components without losing control over strategic decisions, even in usually hierarchical organizations (Baimukhanov et al., 2022; Imai, 1986).

## 2.5 The Original Model

The Tannenbaum & Schmidt (1958) model says that there is a range of leadership styles, from boss-centred to subordinate-centred (Singh, 2023). It sorts leaders into groups based on how much power they have and how much flexibility they offer their followers. The main benefit is that leaders can move along the continuum as needed based on the situation (Gregory, 2023).

### *2.5.1 Global Applications of the Model*

Research from North America and Europe shows that the model is still useful, especially for understanding how flexible leaders may be (Mullins, 2016; Yukl, 2013). A recent study shows that it works well in fast-changing fields like tech and healthcare, where leaders need to be able to adapt (Nguyen et al., 2020; Helmold, 2023).

NASA's Apollo Program in the 1960s is a good example of the Tannenbaum & Schmidt leadership model in action. The United States had a hard job to do when it came to landing a man on the Moon. It needed strong leadership and a lot of technological know-how. At the top level, James Webb led NASA and kept control of everything, setting goals and controlling political expectations. NASA also gave engineers, scientists, and mission teams the power to make important decisions in their areas of expertise. This aligns with the consultative and participative techniques that Tannenbaum & Schmidt talk about. Technical teams, like the rocket engineers and mission control people who worked for Wernher von Braun, were told to work together, discuss problems, and develop solutions. NASA's leaders encouraged open communication and learning from mistakes after big problems like the Apollo 1 fire. This ability to change leadership helps keep authority and freedom under control.

Because of this, NASA could have placed Apollo 11 on the Moon in 1969. The Apollo Program is still a great illustration of how adaptable leaders can help organizations reach their goals (Krug, 2001).

The Toyota Production System (TPS) in Japan, which was established after World War II, is a great example of the Tannenbaum & Schmidt leadership model in action. After Japan's economy fell apart, Toyota needed a way to lead that was both efficient and adaptable. Taiichi Ohno and Eiji Toyoda were the leaders of Toyota when the company merged centralized administration with employee involvement. The top executives determine the company's long-term goals, make big choices, and keep an eye on overall production goals. This is an example of the boss-centred end of the leadership spectrum. However, at the operational level, workers on the production line were given the power to come up with ideas, find problems, and suggest ways to make things better. This kind of leadership lets workers halt the production line if they see problems with quality. This is called "jidoka." The concept of Kaizen or the culture of continuous improvement encouraged workers at all levels to come up with new ideas and solve problems. Tannenbaum & Schmidt claimed that this established a leadership environment where power was balanced with freedom. Toyota's leadership strategy was flexible enough to quickly adjust to changes in demand and keep the quality of its products high. Workers' participation boosted morale, cut down on waste, and made things run more smoothly. Toyota grew to be one of the best and most successful car companies in the world over time. There has been a lot of research into how the company leads its managers and how it runs its business. It is still a great example of adaptive leadership that fits nicely with the Tannenbaum & Schmidt continuum. The Toyota Production System shows how being flexible as a leader may get great outcomes in tough, competitive situations (Spear & Bowen, 1999).

### 2.6 Criticisms and Evolutions

People have commended the Tannenbaum & Schmidt Leadership Continuum for being adaptable and straightforward, yet it has been criticized many times. One of the main criticisms is that the model makes leadership too simple by looking at the leader's control over subordinates and not at deeper interpersonal, emotional, or organizational dynamics (Yukl, 2013). Modern theories of leadership, like emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2000; Saha et al., 2023) and transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994), say that good leaders need to be able to make decisions quickly and inspire, motivate, and emotionally connect with their followers (Alwali & Alwali, 2022).

Another criticism is that the model was designed in a Western setting and might not work well in cultures with a lot of power distance, where workers might not expect or be comfortable with participative leadership (Hofstede, 2001; Elsetouhi et al., 2023). In a lot of Asian, Middle Eastern, and post-Soviet countries, cultural norms may still support more hierarchical systems, which makes it hard to use subordinate-centred leadership in real life (Zadayev, 2024).

The approach also does not immediately address the complexity of today's global corporate environment, with typically cross-functional, virtual, and multicultural teams. In these situations, being a leader frequently means being flexible, understanding other cultures, and making decisions as a team, which goes beyond the simple continuum that Tannenbaum & Schmidt show.

Even with these flaws, the model has changed over time. Scholars and practitioners have combined the main principle of being flexible with broader frameworks, including emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity, and ways to lead that encourage collaboration. In today's businesses, leaders often dynamically move along the continuum, changing their style depending on the work, the people, the culture, and the larger context of the organization (Güttel & Kratochvil, 2023)

### 2.7 Leadership in the Post-Soviet World

Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine as Examples The centralized, authoritarian management styles of the Soviet Union have had a significant impact on how leaders act in post-Soviet countries. After the USSR fell apart, each country changed its leadership styles slightly differently. However, several kept strong hierarchical tendencies aligned with the authoritarian end of Tannenbaum & Schmidt's leadership continuum.

In Belarus, the government still controls significant parts of the economy. Leadership is still relatively centralized, and lower-level managers and employees have little freedom. The way decisions are made is usually top-down, which shows that the leader is quite authoritarian. There is little input from subordinates in decision-making, and leaders keep a close eye on the political and economic systems. This leading method does not offer much room for consultative or participatory procedures. Belarus is one of the countries where Tannenbaum & Schmidt's model is still closer to its authoritarian extreme (Ioffe, 2004).

Many businesses in Russia still work in a hybrid system where formal power is centralized. However, informal networks and personal contacts can have a significant impact on how decisions are made. In state-owned businesses and government agencies, leadership is often based on the classic authoritarian model. On the other hand, some private companies, especially those that work with foreign partners, have started to use more consultative methods. This shows a partial shift along the Tannenbaum & Schmidt continuum, where the balance between control and participation depends a lot on the organization's ownership structure, industry, and exposure to global business standards (Kets de Vries et al., 2004).

In Ukraine, leadership has changed significantly, especially since the political changes in 2014 and the country's closer ties to European markets. There are still signs of hierarchical leadership in Ukraine, but many firms, notably those in IT, finance, and startups, have switched to participatory leadership styles based on Western models. Leaders in these fields prioritize open communication, working together as a team, and making decisions together. This is an apparent change along the Tannenbaum & Schmidt continuum toward leadership that focuses more on subordinates. In government and some old-fashioned businesses, however, authoritarian leadership styles are still the most common (Perepelytsia, 2015).

## 3 Results

The thorough literature review discovered numerous essential themes on how the Tannenbaum & Schmidt Leadership Model might be used in different cultural and organizational settings. Organizations still perform best when their leaders can adapt to change, especially when things are getting more difficult.

The idea has worked effectively in Western countries like the United States, where enterprises are high-risk and driven by innovation. The NASA Apollo Program shows how top managers preserved strategic control while letting engineers and experts make technical choices. NASA could handle the enormous complexity of space missions while promoting innovation and responsibility at all levels of the organization by balancing authority and participation (Krug, 2001).

Another outstanding example of balancing centralized leadership and employee involvement is Toyota's adoption of the Kaizen philosophy in Japan. Even while upper management is setting strategic goals, the industrial workers can stop the assembly line and participate in activities that help the company get better. This mixed method shows how leadership can move along the Tannenbaum & Schmidt continuum depending on business needs and the organization's culture (Spear & Bowen, 1999).

Kazatomprom in Kazakhstan is an example of how leadership has gone from being strict to being more open and participatory. Kazatomprom used to have much-centralized control, which many firms after the Soviet Union did. However, since the Kaizen concepts were implemented, workers have been more involved in day-to-day tasks. This helps people in operations suggest adjustments while higher management keeps an eye on the big picture. This hybrid leadership style (Baimukhanov et al., 2022) makes Kazatomprom more efficient and safer while respecting local cultural norms of authority.

Our research backs up the idea that the Tannenbaum & Schmidt model is still helpful in many countries and fields. However, how well it works depends on the culture, organization, and the scenario. A lot of the time, modern changes add emotional intelligence, cultural awareness, and transformational leadership to the basic flexibility of the continuum.

## 4 Conclusion

The Tannenbaum & Schmidt Leadership Model is still useful for thinking about how flexible leadership may be in different cultural and organizational settings. Its primary idea is that good leadership needs a balance between the leader's authority and the subordinates' participation but still holds in stable and quickly changing situations. However, the model's simplicity needs to be updated with new ideas in leadership theory, like emotional intelligence, cultural awareness, and transformational leadership.

The historical instances in this study show how flexible the model is. NASA's Apollo Program showed that extraordinarily complicated missions might be successful with a mix of centralized authority and expert participation. Toyota's use of Kaizen showed how participative leadership can improve efficiency and spark new ideas while keeping an eye on the big picture. Kazatomprom's slow adoption of consultative procedures into Kazakhstan's usually centralized leadership structure is a practical way to adapt the model to a culture through the Soviet Union.

These examples show that cultural and historical circumstances affect how leaders are involved. However, the Tannenbaum & Schmidt model's built-in flexibility lets businesses change their leadership styles to fit their own goals and the needs of their employees. As businesses face more and more global competition and complicated problems, leaders worldwide will still need to be able to move along the leadership continuum.

In the context of decision-making, it is imperative to examine the individuals involved in the process. This includes the individual who formulates the problem, the individual who proposes alternative solutions, the individual who comments on the proposals, the individual who defines the rules of decision-making, and finally the decision-maker. Regardless of culture, this is precisely the greatest strength of the Tannenbaum & Schmidt model.

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ÁGNES FŰRÉSZ – KATINKA BAJKAI-TÓTH

# Tannenbaum & Schmidt's Leadership Model: The Continuum and Situational Application of Managerial Decision-Making in Modern Organisations

**Abstract:** Tannenbaum & Schmidt's leadership continuum model is a prominent landmark in leadership theory, which interprets the process of managerial decision-making and subordinate participation not as static styles but as a flexible, continuous scale. The aim of this paper is to provide a comprehensive overview of the Tannenbaum-Schmidt model, a detailed analysis of its theoretical foundations and historical significance, and an examination of its validity in contemporary organisational contexts, particularly in digital, project-based and agile operating systems. The research used quantitative and qualitative methodologies to explore how managers apply the decision spectrum in practice and what factors influence the degree of delegation of decision-making freedom in the modern workplace. The results of the research suggest that the relevance of the Tannenbaum-Schmidt model is still salient in the 21st century, especially in organisational environments where employees have a high degree of autonomy and decision-making is decentralised. Empirical evidence shows that a participative leadership style promotes employee engagement, increases team performance and improves organisational effectiveness. At the same time, research also revealed that the authoritarian end of the spectrum remains justified in certain crisis situations and urgent decision-making situations. The study proposes a further development of the model, whereby the Tannenbaum-Schmidt decision continuum can be more accurately adapted to modern organisational challenges by incorporating digital leadership, hybrid working and emotional intelligence. The research contributes to a deeper understanding of managerial flexibility, the adaptivity of decision-making styles and the optimal level of employee engagement, thus providing practical guidance for today's managers.

**Keywords:** Tannenbaum-Schmidt Model, Leadership Continuum, Decision-Making, Participative Leadership, Situational Leadership

## 1 Introduction

The theoretical and practical study of leadership is one of the longest researched and most relevant areas of management science (Crosby et al., 2018). The role of leaders is crucial for organisational performance, employee engagement and team functioning, while the nature of effective leadership behaviour is constantly changing as the social, economic and technological environment evolves (Nur et al. 2024). Throughout the historical development of leadership theories, the literature has long focused on the personality traits or behavioural patterns of leaders as the key to success, before the emergence of situational or contingency theories, which have increasingly focused on situational adaptation (Fiedler et al. 1967; Hersey et al. 1969).

One of the most prominent representatives of situational leadership approaches is the leadership continuum model of Tannenbaum & Schmidt (1958), which brought a fundamentally new approach to leadership research. The model broke with the tradition of rigid leadership style categories and instead outlined a flexible continuum scale on which the leader could be positioned according to the degree of decision-making authority and involvement of subordinates (Helmold, 2023). The main novelty of the model is that it situates leadership behaviour along a spectrum, ranging from autocratic, leader-centred decision-making to democratic, subordinate-dominated decision-making (Helmold et al., 2019).

This continuum also considers the leader's personal orientation, the competences of subordinates and situational factors and stress that there is no universally appropriate leadership style; the effectiveness of managerial decision-making is always a function of situational conditions (Rybnikova & Lang, 2020. Tannenbaum & Schmidt pointed out that managerial decision making is not a choice between two extreme styles, but a dynamic process that the manager is constantly able – and obliged – to adapt to situations. One of the most important contributions of the model is that it does not only consider the personality of the leader or the maturity of the subordinates, but also considers the context of the leader's decisions (Hunt & Fitzgerald, 2018).

Across the spectrum of decision making, the leader's movements are influenced by several factors: the level of trust in the leader, the competence of subordinates, the organisational culture, the urgency of the task, and technological and environmental challenges (Lacerenza et al., 2018). This complexity is the basis of the model's continuing relevance today, especially in modern organisations where work is increasingly project-based, agile and digitally supported (Anwar et al., 2024). In the 21st century organisational environment, the importance of managerial flexibility, decentralised decision-making and employee involvement has been enhanced, while managers are often required to make decisions in rapidly changing, uncertain situations (Ahearne et al., 2005).

Accordingly, the Tannenbaum-Schmidt model offers a particularly relevant framework for analysing managerial decision making, as it provides managers with the opportunity to choose a situationally dependent decision-making style and to consciously manage employee involvement (Safonov et al., 2018).

The aim of this paper is to provide a comprehensive introduction to the Tannenbaum-Schmidt leadership continuum model, to empirically investigate its applicability in digital, project-based and agile organisational environments, and to propose further developments of the model in the light of modern leadership challenges. It will pay particular attention to how the practical application of the decision-making spectrum can be validated in terms of employee engagement, organizational effectiveness and managerial flexibility. By emphasising the continuous, situational nature of managerial decision-making, the study can contribute to narrowing the gap between leadership theory and practice.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 The Evolution of Management Theories

The development of leadership theories has taken place in several waves, during which researchers have tried to identify different factors behind effective leadership. Trait theories dominated in the early 20th century and assumed that certain innate leadership traits, such as assertiveness, intelligence or dominance, universally determined leadership success (Stogdill et al. 1948). Later, behavioural theories, including the Blake-Mouton leadership grid (1964), focused on the study of leadership behaviour. These models sought an optimal balance between task- and people-oriented leadership but took little account of situational differences. A major turning point in leadership research was the contingency and situational theories, which emphasised that there is no 'ideal' leadership style for every situation (Fiedler et al. 1967; Hersey et al. 1969). These theories considered the fit between leadership style and organisational situation as the key to effectiveness.

### 2.2 The Tannenbaum-Schmidt driving continuum model

The interpretation of leadership style as a continuous scale was introduced into the literature by the pioneering work of Tannenbaum & Schmidt (1958). The essence of the Tannenbaum-Schmidt leadership continuum model is that the manager's decision-making authority and the subordinates' freedom of participation represent the two ends of a spectrum. Depending on the situation and the organisational context, the manager is free to move along this spectrum, gradually transferring decision-making power to employees.

According to the model, managerial decision-making is not a black-and-white choice between autocratic and democratic styles, but a process in which the leader takes account:

- their own leadership style, confidence level and emotional maturity (Goleman et al., 2013)
- the competence, maturity and autonomy of subordinates (Ahearne et al., 2005)
- the organisational context, the decision time constraints, and the organisational significance of the decision (Wang et al., 2021).

Tannenbaum & Schmidt's model was a pioneering way of combining managerial flexibility and situational adaptation, thus bridging the gap between behavioural and situational leadership models. Recent research (Anwar et al., 2024; Ongena et al., 2024) highlights that the right choice of decision making in digital and agile environments is particularly critical, as in these organisational structures managers need to be able to continuously delegate decision making power to employees in a flexible way.

### 2.3 The place of the model among situational management theories

Contingency and situational models, such as Fiedler's (1967) contingency model and Hersey-Blanchard's (1969) situational leadership theory, also relied on the fit between leadership style and situation, but Tannenbaum & Schmidt placed greater emphasis on the gradualness of managerial decision-making and the flexibility of employee involvement.

The Vroom-Yetton decision making model (1973) also aimed to optimise freedom of choice and subordinate involvement, but Vroom and Yetton developed an algorithmic decision-making guide, while Tannenbaum & Schmidt placed more emphasis on the individual discretion of the manager. House's path-target theory (1971) further extended the spectrum of situational factors and recognised the role of the manager in directly influencing the motivation of subordinates. A distinctive feature of the Tannenbaum-Schmidt model (Tannenbaum et al., 1958) is that it is not predictive or algorithmic, but provides a flexible decision spectrum that the leader can apply from situation to situation based on his or her own value judgements.

### 2.4 The Importance of the Model in Modern Organisations

The organisational environment in the 21st century has fundamentally changed. Agile organisational models, project-based operations, teleworking, and multicultural teams are playing an increasingly important role, significantly increasing the importance of managerial flexibility, participative decision-making and employee involvement (Ahearne et al., 2005). Modern research shows that employee involvement and freedom of choice have a positive impact on organisational commitment, employee satisfaction and performance. However, in some situations, such as crisis situations or urgent decision situations, authoritarian leadership may still be justified. The challenges of digital leadership, such as virtual communication, technological speed and decentralized decision-making, make it even more necessary for leaders to continuously apply and fine-tune the decision spectrum (Espina-Romero et al., 2023). Moreover, emotional intelligence has become a critical factor in managerial decision-making, as the degree of subordinate autonomy and leader-subordinate trust relationships are significantly influenced by the emotional sensitivity of the leader (Goleman, 1998).

The challenges of digital leadership, such as virtual communication, technological speed, decentralised decision making and global team management, make it even more necessary for managers to continuously apply and fine-tune the decision spectrum (Anwar & Saraih, 2024). Recent research emphasises the need for leaders in digital environments to switch quickly between different points on the spectrum, based on the dynamic evolution of situations and the level of autonomy of virtual teams (Wang et al, 2021). In addition, emotional intelligence has also become a critical factor in managerial decision making, as the degree of subordinate autonomy, leader-subordinate trust relationships, and optimal level of involvement are significantly influenced by the leader's emotional sensitivity and self-awareness (Goleman et al, 2013; Pramila, 2025). In the modern organisational environment, it is therefore not enough to rigidly apply the leadership spectrum; there is also a need for continuous development of leadership adaptivity, digital skills and emotional competencies (Uslu et al., 2025).

# 3 Results

The classic study by Tannenbaum & Schmidt (1973), as well as subsequent management case studies (Yukl, 2006), have demonstrated that the use of the decision-making continuum can be effective in stable, hierarchical organisations. The flexible application of the model allows managers to choose between directive and participative leadership styles depending on the situation. A meta-analysis carried out in the 1980s (Vroom et al., 1988) concluded that participative decision-making has a positive effect on subordinate satisfaction and organisational performance in most industries, particularly in the manufacturing and service sectors.

Recent studies (Anwar et al., 2024; Stana et al., 2024) confirm that the positive impact of participative decision-making continues to hold in modern, technology-intensive industries. In addition, the study by Anwar et al. (2024) highlights that participative management style improves knowledge sharing and the willingness of employees to cooperate, which also increases efficiency in stable, hierarchical organisations. Based on this evidence, the literature confirms that leadership flexibility, represented by the Tannenbaum-Schmidt spectrum, can contribute to effective leadership in classical organisational structures, if the leader is able to recognise the specificities of the situation and the needs of subordinates for involvement (Klein, 2024).

## 3.1 The Relationship between Decision Flexibility and Emotional Intelligence

The effectiveness of managerial decision-making flexibility and subordinate involvement has also been closely linked to the emotional intelligence of managers. Secondary studies by Goleman (1998) and Northouse (2022) have shown that leaders who are able to accurately identify the competence, emotional state and trust level of subordinates are more effective in applying a wider range of decision making across the spectrum (Rudnák & Szabó, 2019).

Recent research (Anwar et al., 2024; Pramila, 2025) confirms that emotional intelligence plays an even more critical role in the digital workplace, as the perceptibility of non-verbal cues is reduced in virtual environments, making the emotional sensitivity of managers key to truly engaging, motivating and supporting staff. This link is further strengthened by Zhylin et al. (2024), which highlights the strategic importance of developing emotional intelligence for leadership succession and identifying future leaders. The study emphasizes that organizations that consciously incorporate aspects of emotional intelligence into their leadership development and succession planning strategies are more successful in the long run in developing flexible, engaging and effective leadership structures.

The literature thus agrees that decision-making flexibility, participative leadership and emotional intelligence are mutually reinforcing factors that contribute significantly to effective leadership, organisational success and sustainable leadership succession in a modern, complex organisational environment.

## 4 Conclusions

Tannenbaum & Schmidt's leadership continuum model is still a seminal work in the field of leadership theory, as its interpretation of leadership decision-making as a continuous, situational spectrum offers a time-proven and flexible framework for understanding leadership behaviour. The secondary literature and empirical research findings demonstrate the relevance of the model in today's highly complex and rapidly changing organisational environment.

Research has confirmed that the right choice of leadership decision-making – i.e. the right point on the leadership spectrum – has a significant impact on employee engagement, team effectiveness and organisational performance. In classic, hierarchical organisational structures, the application of the model helps managers to choose a decision-making style that is appropriate to the organisational situation, thus supporting efficient and effective operations. In modern, project-based and agile organisations, decentralising decision-making and consciously giving subordinates the freedom to make decisions has become a prerequisite for organisational success. The use of participative leadership has been positively associated with employee engagement, performance and job satisfaction. Secondary evidence also shows that in digital workplaces, especially in virtual teams, the participative decision-making style of managers contributes significantly to maintaining effective collaboration and team cohesion. At the same time, the research also highlighted that the authoritarian end of the spectrum is still necessary and justified in certain situations, such as crisis management, urgent decisions or in a constrained information environment. This is why Tannenbaum & Schmidt's model is extremely valuable, as it does not exclude the existence of autocratic leadership but links its application to the situation.

The results underline that decision-making flexibility and the degree of subordinates' freedom to make decisions only lead to long-term organisational success if managers can analyse situations accurately and quickly and use their emotional intelligence to perceive the level of maturity and competence of subordinates. The success of managerial decision making therefore depends not only on the choice of management style, but also on adaptive adaptation to the situation, the manager's self-awareness, the level of trust and the continuous development of employee autonomy. In modern leadership roles, flexibility, freedom to use the decision-making spectrum and education in decision-making become key.

Based on the research, it is proposed to further develop the Tannenbaum-Schmidt model in the following directions:

- Incorporating specific aspects of the digital environment: it is proposed to add to the model the specificities of virtual team management, remote decision making and digital communication, as a large part of today's organisations operate online and in a decentralised way.
- Emphasising the role of emotional intelligence: successful use of the spectrum by leaders requires emotional sensitivity and developed self-awareness. It is useful to add to the model the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership, as it

is fundamental to decision-making flexibility and the development of trusting relationships with subordinates. Considering the influence of organisational culture: it is recommended to fine-tune the model to include the type of organisational culture (e.g. hierarchical, collective, innovation-oriented) as a factor influencing decision-making, as culture is a significant determinant of the acceptability and effectiveness of managerial involvement.

- Highlighting the development of managerial adaptability: the effectiveness of the model depends largely on the manager's ability to adapt his/her decision-making style quickly and correctly to changing situations. It is advisable to place emphasis in management training on the conscious development of decision-making flexibility and situational awareness skills.

In conclusion, Tannenbaum & Schmidt's leadership continuum model is applicable and valid to the leadership challenges of the 21st century, but to take full advantage of the model, leaders need to develop their adaptivity, situational awareness and emotional competencies. In the light of continuous organisational change and digitalisation, the flexible, conscious and responsive use of the leadership spectrum is becoming a key factor for successful leadership.

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ELEONÓRA RÉKA BARABÁS – DIÁNA ESZTER BUJDOSÓ – MELINDA FECSKOVICS

# A Systematic Literature Review: Tannenbaum & Schmidt's Leadership Model

**Abstract:** This systematic literature review examines the Tannenbaum & Schmidt Leadership Continuum a foundational model conceptualizing leadership as a dynamic continuum of behaviours, from autocratic to democratic styles. Drawing on various empirical and conceptual studies, the review explores the model's theoretical underpinnings, practical applications, and limitations across diverse cultural and organizational contexts. Findings reveal a significant gap between the model's flexible framework and real-world implementation, particularly in cultures characterized by high power distance and strong hierarchical norms, such as Korea and Iran. Notably, leaders' self-perceptions of participative behaviours often diverge from subordinates' experiences, highlighting the persistent influence of cultural expectations on leadership practice. The review suggests that integrating Hofstede's cultural dimensions – including power distance, individualism versus collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance – can enhance the model's applicability by accounting for cultural constraints. This integrated approach provides a pathway for developing culturally sensitive leadership strategies that bridge the gap between theory and practice, offering valuable insights for future research and leadership development in globalized organizational environments.

**Keywords:** Tannenbaum & Schmidt's Leadership Continuum, Leadership theory, Contextual leadership, Cultural adaptation, Cultural dimensions, Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory

## 1 Introduction

Leadership has long been recognized as a critical driver of organizational performance and employee engagement (Popli & Rizvi, 2016) Over the decades, various theories have emerged to explain how leaders influence their teams, ranging from trait-based and behavioural approaches to more recent frameworks such as transformational and servant leadership. These models reflect an evolution in understanding leadership as a set of innate characteristics and a dynamic process shaped by context, behaviour, and decision-making (Tannenbaum et al., 2024).

One of the foundational models in leadership theory is the Tannenbaum & Schmidt Leadership Continuum (Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1958). This model conceptualizes leadership as a continuum of styles ranging from autocratic (leader-centred) to democratic (subordinate-centred) behaviours. It highlights that the most appropriate leadership style depends on several situational factors, including the leader's personality, the nature of the task, and the maturity and competence of team members (Helmold, 2020). The model posits that leadership styles are not dichotomous, but rather comprise a continuum, and that leaders must apply different styles according to the situation (Kikinezhdi & Savelyuk, 2024).

This review systematically synthesizes literature on the Tannenbaum & Schmidt model, examining its theoretical foundations, empirical applications, and critiques. It aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the model's current relevance and identify areas for future research. The research was performed using literature reviews in scientific databases such as the Web of Science and Scopus.

## 2 Literature Review

The Tannenbaum & Schmidt model conceptualizes leadership as a continuum rather than a fixed style, allowing leaders to adjust their approach based on situational factors. The model's key theoretical contributions emphasize the leader's ability to balance authority with participation, reflecting early recognition of the dynamic nature of leadership (Worley et al., 2017).

This adaptive perspective aligns closely with Fiedler's Contingency Model, which posits that a leader's effectiveness is contingent upon the match between their leadership style and the favourableness of the situation (Fiedler, 1964). Fiedler emphasized that situational variables such as leader-member relations, task structure, and positional power determine the suitability of a leadership approach. Both models support the idea that there is no universally effective style, reinforcing the importance of context in leadership theory (Helmold, 2023).

Similarly, Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership Theory builds on this idea by suggesting that effective leadership involves adapting one's style – ranging from telling to delegating – based on the developmental maturity of followers (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969). This model explicitly mirrors the stages outlined by Tannenbaum & Schmidt, further reinforcing the relevance of flexibility in leadership behaviour.

The Managerial Grid, developed by Blake & Mouton (1964) offers another framework for understanding leadership behaviour. It focuses on the interplay between concern for people and concern for production. Although it represents leadership styles on a two-dimensional matrix rather than a linear continuum, its emphasis on balancing competing priorities complements the participative and balanced approaches advocated in the Tannenbaum & Schmidt model.

Finally, contemporary cross-cultural leadership research, particularly the GLOBE Study (Dorfman et al., 2012), contributes important insights into how cultural values influence the perception and effectiveness of leadership behaviours. Building on Hofstede's earlier work, the GLOBE project identified culturally endorsed leadership profiles across 62 societies. These findings provide strong empirical support for the claim that leadership style effectiveness varies significantly by cultural context – a key theme in the empirical studies discussed later in this review, particularly those conducted in Korea and Iran.

Together, these models reinforce the theoretical basis of the Tannenbaum & Schmidt continuum as a flexible and context-dependent framework. They also highlight its continued relevance when considered alongside both classical and contemporary leadership perspectives.

At its core, the Tannenbaum & Schmidt model suggests that the most appropriate leadership style is not static but context dependent. It identifies a progression from:

- *Telling* (autocratic): The leader makes decisions unilaterally.
- *Selling*: The leader presents decisions but invites questions.
- *Consulting*: The leader presents problems, solicits input, and then decides.
- *Joining/Delegating*: The leader shares decision-making with the team or delegates authority.

Figure 1 illustrates the Tannenbaum & Schmidt Leadership Continuum, which outlines a spectrum of leadership styles ranging from manager-centred to subordinate-centred. It shows how leadership can shift from full managerial control ("Tells") to complete delegation and autonomy ("Abdicates"), highlighting the increasing freedom given to team members as managerial authority decreases.

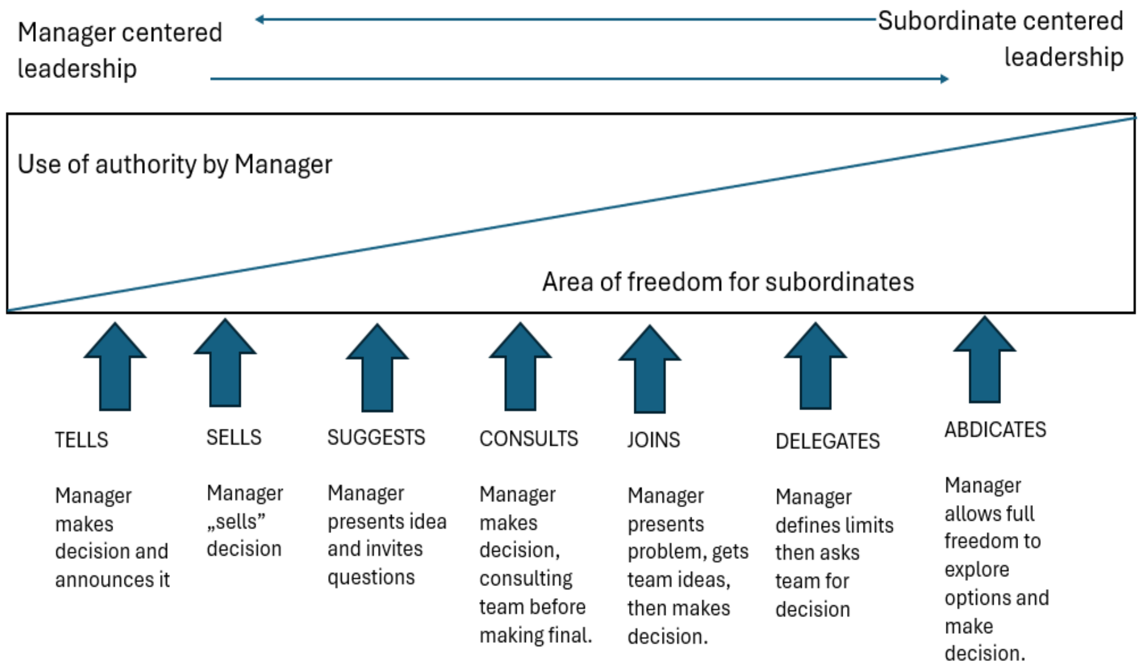


**Figure 1** Continuum of Leadership Behaviour
*Source: authors' own edit based on Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1958*

Empirical studies have explored the applicability of the Tannenbaum & Schmidt Leadership model in various contexts. A notable contribution comes from Hur (2008), who investigated leadership styles comprehensively in Korean public human service organizations. His study aimed to determine how leadership behaviours correspond with organizational roles (administrative vs. service managers) and situational variables (task complexity, follower characteristics, and work environments).

The research was grounded in the understanding that while the Tannenbaum & Schmidt model provides a flexible continuum of leadership styles, actual practices may deviate based on cultural and structural factors. The research found that leadership styles in Korean public human service organizations differed significantly between administrative and service managers, with the former leaning more towards authoritative approaches and the latter adopting slightly more participative styles. However, these differences were less pronounced than anticipated, and both groups showed limited adaptation of leadership styles to situational factors or subordinate needs. The study attributed this rigidity to deep-rooted Korean cultural norms, including respect for hierarchy, Confucian values favouring stability and harmony, and an emphasis on compliance. This suggests that cultural constraints may inhibit the practical implementation of the Tannenbaum & Schmidt model's flexibility. The findings highlight the need for training and organizational change initiatives that foster adaptive leadership behaviours and situational awareness.

Another research working closely with the Tannenbaum & Schmidt continuum was conducted in Iran, examining hospital managers' leadership styles in Qom province, Iran (Arab et al., 2006). The study assessed how managers employed participative leadership approaches and how subordinates perceived these. A significant proportion of hospital managers, approximately 75%, described their leadership style as "consultative," indicating a belief in involving subordinates in decision-making processes and fostering open communication. However, despite these claims, most hospital staff – around 78% – perceived these managers as exhibiting a "benevolent-authoritative" style. This suggests that while managers may appear approachable and caring, they ultimately retain control over decisions and do not genuinely share authority.

This disconnects between managerial self-perception and subordinate experience reflects a gap between the espoused participative approach and its authentic practice. While managers may intend to adopt consultative leadership styles, cultural norms and hierarchical structures within Iranian organizations likely limit the actual level of participation experienced by staff. The study attributes this gap to Iran's high power distance culture and paternalistic traditions, where respect for authority, seniority, and hierarchical decision-making are deeply ingrained. Even when leaders aspire to be consultative, cultural expectations of leader control and deference inhibit genuine participative practices.

These findings suggest that although participative leadership models, such as the Tannenbaum & Schmidt continuum, are theoretically desirable and often promoted in leadership training programs, their real-world application in contexts like Iran faces significant cultural barriers. Arab et al. imply that organizations should consider cultural adaptation of leadership models and provide context-sensitive training to bridge the gap between intended and actual leadership behaviours.

Another research by Rybnikova & Lang (2018) critically examines the concept of participative leadership, including models like Tannenbaum & Schmidt's leadership continuum, within the evolving context of agile and distributed leadership. Their analysis is not limited to a specific empirical study; instead, it conceptualizes how participative leadership has been interpreted and applied in modern organizational environments, particularly agility and collaboration. The authors observe that, in theory, participative leadership aims to promote democratization in the workplace, fostering inclusivity and shared decision-making. However, their critique suggests that in practice, these participative approaches are often strategically employed as tools to enhance performance and efficiency rather than driven by a genuine commitment to democratizing organizational structures.

This perspective highlights a tension between the ideals of participative leadership – which align with values such as empowerment, autonomy, and mutual respect and its instrumental use to drive productivity gains, especially in competitive, rapidly changing environments like those adopting agile frameworks, suggesting that while models like the Tannenbaum & Schmidt continuum offer a theoretically sound basis for participative leadership, their application in agile and distributed settings may not fully reflect these democratic ideals. Instead, participative practices can be co-opted to reinforce existing power structures under the guise of collaboration, effectively using the language of participation to achieve performance objectives rather than genuine empowerment. This critique has important implications for leadership theory and practice (Weng, 2017).

It challenges practitioners and scholars to consider whether participative leadership is being authentically embraced or merely adopted as a rhetorical strategy to facilitate organizational goals.

In addition to the above-mentioned empirical studies, conceptual applications of the Tannenbaum & Schmidt model can also be observed in the academic sector.

Leane (2020) incorporated the model's leadership continuum as part of the theoretical framework for exploring followership dynamics in two Irish higher education institutions. While the study primarily focused on followership, the inclusion of the continuum highlighted the model's relevance in conceptualizing the spectrum of leadership behaviours, from autocratic to democratic. This use of the Tannenbaum & Schmidt model demonstrates its versatility as a tool for understanding leader-follower interactions, even in educational contexts where leadership is often distributed and collaborative. Although the study did not empirically test the model, its integration underscores the continued resonance of the continuum in diverse organizational and cultural settings.

## 3 Results

This section presents the synthesized findings from the literature on the Tannenbaum & Schmidt leadership continuum. The analysis highlights key patterns, cross-cultural variations, and practical implications identified across studies.

Empirical evidence indicates that while many organizations and managers' report adopting participative leadership styles consistent with the Tannenbaum & Schmidt model, the reality often diverges. In practice, a more authoritative approach tends to prevail, particularly in hierarchical and high power-distance cultures such as those found in Korea and Iran. This suggests that while the model's theoretical flexibility accommodates participative styles, its practical implementation is frequently constrained by cultural and organizational norms (Bortolotti et al., 2015).

In contrast, participative styles are more likely to emerge in less hierarchical environments or within organizations explicitly fostering agility and collaboration, such as those operating with agile teams (Dyczkowska & Dyczkowski, 2018).

Cultural and contextual constraints are a recurring theme in the literature. In both Korean and Iranian contexts, studies (Hur, 2008; Arab et al., 2006) highlight the impact of deep-rooted cultural norms – such as respect for hierarchy (Garamvölgyi & Rudnák, 2023).

Confucian values emphasizing stability and harmony, and paternalistic traditions – on leadership style adoption (Lau et al., 2023). These factors significantly limit the practical flexibility of the leadership continuum. Furthermore, there is a pronounced disconnect between managers' self-perceptions of their leadership style, which often aligns with consultative or participative approaches, and the perceptions held by their subordinates, who frequently experience a more authoritative style. This gap between intention and practice underscores the influence of cultural expectations and the need for culturally adapted training and support to enable more authentic participative leadership behaviours (Helmold, 2023).

To tackle these cultural and contextual challenges, integrating Hofstede's (1984) cultural dimensions into the analysis could provide valuable insights. By considering dimensions such as power distance, individualism versus collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance, organizations and researchers can better understand the underlying cultural dynamics that shape leadership behaviours and adapt the Tannenbaum & Schmidt model accordingly (Figure 2).

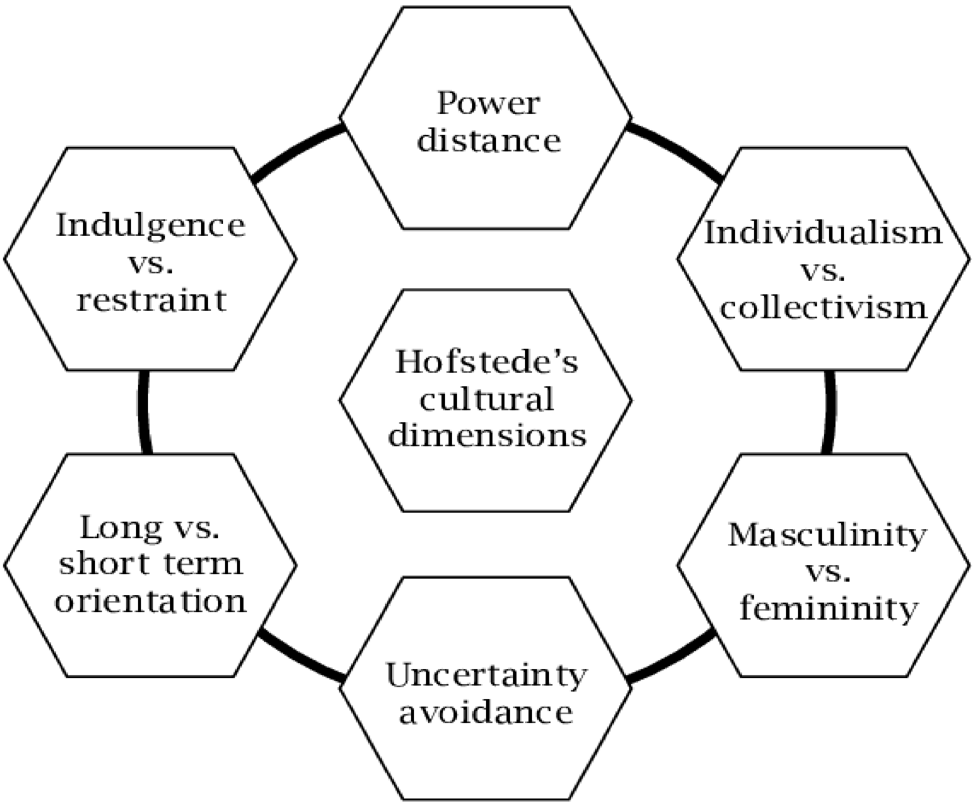


**Figure 2** Cultural dimensions in management and planning
*Source: authors' own edit based on Hofstede, 1984*

The evolution of participative leadership is also evident in the literature, particularly in the work of Rybnikova & Lang (2018), who conceptualize how participative leadership has been interpreted and applied in agile and distributed organizational contexts. They observe that while participative leadership is theoretically linked to democratization and empowerment, in practice, it is often instrumentalized to enhance performance and efficiency. This suggests a tension between the ideals of participative leadership-centred on empowerment, autonomy, and mutual respect and its application as a strategic tool for achieving organizational goals. Consequently, participative approaches risk being used as rhetorical devices that reinforce existing power structures under the guise of collaboration rather than genuinely democratizing decision-making.

Despite these constraints and critiques, the Tannenbaum & Schmidt model demonstrates conceptual versatility, as evidenced by its integration into diverse contexts, including higher education settings. For example, Leane (2020) employed the model to explore leader-follower dynamics in Irish universities, highlighting the model's usefulness in understanding the spectrum of leadership behaviours from autocratic to democratic. However, the application in this context was primarily conceptual, and empirical validation of the model in contemporary settings particularly those characterized by agility, cross-cultural interaction, and distributed leadership remains limited. This indicates a clear need for further empirical research to assess the model's effectiveness and adaptability in modern, complex organizational environments (Do et al., 2022; Uslu et al., 2025).

## 4 Conclusion

This systematic review highlights the enduring relevance and flexibility of the Tannenbaum & Schmidt leadership continuum in understanding leadership behaviours across various organizational and cultural contexts. The model's conceptualization of leadership as a continuum from autocratic to democratic styles remains a valuable framework for guiding leaders in adapting their approaches to situational demands. However, empirical studies reviewed here reveal significant gaps between the model's theoretical ideals and practical implementation, particularly in cultures characterized by high power distance, strong hierarchical traditions, and a preference for stability.

Future research and practice could explore the integration of Hofstede's cultural dimensions with the Tannenbaum & Schmidt model to address these limitations.

Organizations can gain deeper insights into how cultural norms influence leadership style preferences and adaptability by incorporating dimensions such as power distance, individualism versus collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance. This integrated approach can foster culturally sensitive leadership development, ensuring that participative practices are theoretically sound and practically practical across diverse settings.

Furthermore, incorporating Hofstede's framework may offer a pathway to reconcile the gap between theoretically supported participative approaches and the authoritative leadership behaviours often observed in practice.

Ultimately, combining these two models can enrich both theoretical and applied perspectives on leadership, enhancing the model's relevance in the contemporary, globalized organizational landscape.

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ADELAIDE SERWAAH OFOSU-BRAKOH

# Understanding the Blake and Mouton Leadership Grid: Achieving Balance between Task Orientation and People Orientation in Effective Leadership – Applications and Contemporary Adaptations

**Abstract:** The Blake and Mouton leadership grid, introduced in the 1960s, remains a fundamental model in the study of leadership behaviour and organizational management. The model highlights the importance of achieving a balance between task efficiency and interpersonal relationships by mapping leadership styles along two primary dimensions: concern for people and concern for production. The framework identifies five main leadership approaches ranging from impoverished management to team management and has been widely used in both theory and practice. This paper re-enforces the validity of the model despite its limitations and identifies some contexts where the grid has practical applications as well as presents practical examples of cases where the grid has been used in different countries. It also identifies and compares the fundamental similarities of the leadership styles presented in the grid to newer leadership models that have been developed. Lastly, the paper identifies key areas of leadership in which contemporary leadership models enhance the effectiveness of follower management.

**Keywords:** Leadership Styles, Managerial Grid, Task-Oriented Leadership, People-Oriented Leadership, Leadership Effectiveness

## 1 Introduction

Leadership plays a pivotal role in the success of a team. The leadership style adopted by a leader significantly influences the behaviour and the performance of the team. Over the decades, numerous leadership models have been developed to conceptualize and analyse the behaviours, traits, and situational factors that define effective leadership. These models serve as foundational tools for both scholars and practitioners, offering varied perspectives on how leaders emerge, interact with followers, and drive outcomes. During a study in the United States conducted by (Mews, 2019) it was concluded that the leadership preferred to use the situational approach and select which leadership style was appropriate based on the needs and preferences of the followers. (Galperin & Scheepers, 2025) noted that leadership has been widely defined over the years and identified the main elements of the various definitions as the influence an individual has within a group of other individuals with an aim of achieving a common goal.

The aim of this article is to critically review the Blake-Mouton Leadership Grid Model by:

- analysing the theoretical underpinnings of the grid
- providing cases of how the model was used in specific countries

- identifying the limitations of the model in modern times
- outlining adaptations of the grid by newer leadership theories
- identifying the areas of contemporary applications of integrating the grid with newer models

In the early 1960s, Robert R. Blake and Jane S. Mouton created the Blake Mouton Managerial grid as a framework for understanding leadership behaviour and style and was based on Douglas McGregor's Theory X and Y (Boettcher & Helm, 2018).

The grid was initially named the Blake and Mouton Managerial Grid (Blake & Mouton, 1964) but is now commonly referred to as the Blake and Mouton Leadership Grid (Northouse, 2021). Douglas McGregor's theory suggests that managers hold differing assumptions regarding the factors that influence employee motivation and capability. Theory Y assumes that employees take initiative and are capable of self-direction, Theory X assumes that employees require strict control and are basically wary of work (Boettcher & Helm, 2018; Islam & Bhattachar, 2019).

Blake and Mouton assert that a leader's effectiveness is determined by the degree to which they demonstrate concern for people and concern for production. The model holds significant value in organizational development, as it illustrates the impact of managerial behaviours and actions on team performance, employee motivation, and overall productivity within an organization (Boettcher & Helm, 2018).

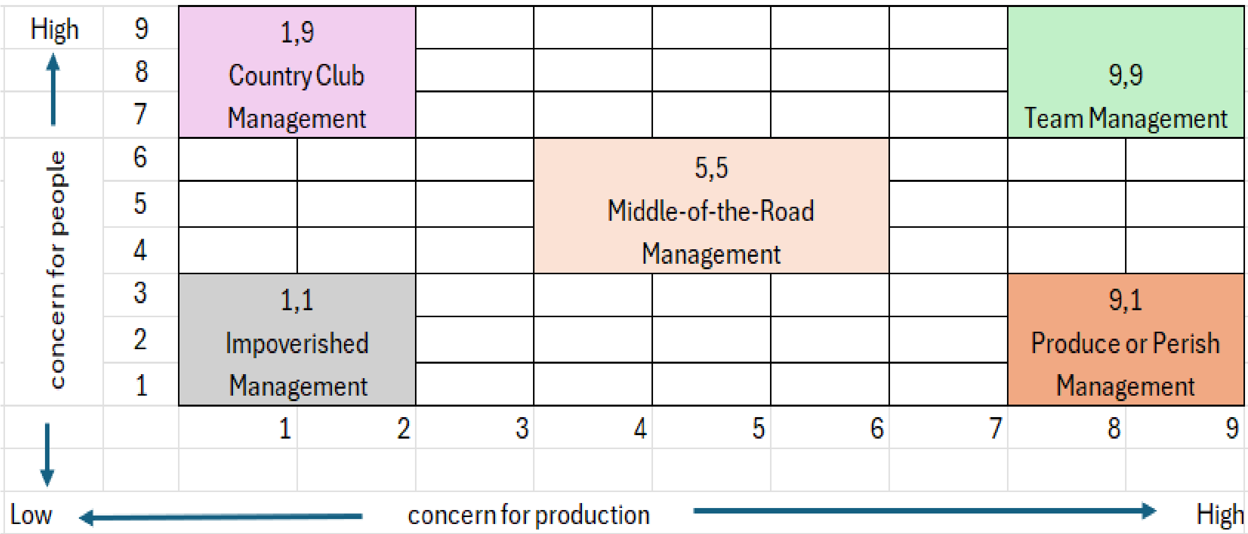


**Figure 1** Blake Mouton Management Grid
*Source: (Blake & Mouton, 1964)*

The grid is made up of an X-axis which measures the degree to which a leader emphasizes the efficiency, output and productivity of the organization, namely the concern for production. The concern for people is represented along the Y-axis and reflects the extent to which a leader prioritizes the needs, interests and development of team members. The two axes form a grid that highlights five key styles leadership of the model and have scores ranging from 1(lowest concern) to 9 (highest concern).

***Impoverished Management (1,1)***

The impoverished leadership style (1,1) is often ineffective and is characterized by a low concern for people as well as production. Helmold (2021), described the leadership style as unsatisfactory, disorganized and disharmonized. The style of this leader is characterized by a lack of motivation of his team or the creation of any systems to improve production. He expends very little effort and does not take ownership for the employees or the production.

***Country Club Management (1,9)***

The country club leadership style (1,9) is potentially unproductive as there is a low concern for production and emphasis is focused on the people. The leader likes to avoid conflict by harmonizing relationships with all other parties and is more focused on giving comfort to the employees and meeting their needs. He is not strict with completing tasks and is happy with creating a friendly work environment where employees feel supported with the hope that this will boost their performance and thus increase productivity (Northouse, 2021).

***Produce-or-Perish Management (9,1)***

An authoritarian, task-oriented leadership approach characterized by a high concern for production and minimal concern for people is referred to as the produce-or-perish leadership style. The leader views the members of the team as tools that should be utilized in the attainment of production goals. It was noted by Helmold (2021), that this approach can initially lead to high production which wanes over time when employees are not motivated to work and keep up the high production expectations.

***Middle-of-the-road Management (5,5)***

The middle-of-the-road leadership style is balanced with moderate concern for both production and people but may not be effective. (Helmold, 2021) referred to this leader as the "status quo" manager and noted that they would only deliver mediocre performance because they would always compromise to try to meet the needs of the people as well as the needs of production, thus always falling short in both areas.

***Team leader Management (9,9)***

The most effective leadership style identified within the model is the Team leader style, which reflects a high concern for both people and production. Leaders who adopt this approach foster active participation among team members and cultivate a strong commitment to task completion (Blake & Mouton, 1964).

These basic leadership styles can be used simultaneously or successively in conjunction with one another in the following ways:

***Paternalism***

This style cares for employees on the one hand and controls them on the other. The leader rewards loyalty and obedience and metes out punishment for noncompliance.

They act as a father figure to the employees and act with compassion in a bid to attain their goals (Blake & Mouton, 1964).

### *Opportunism*

Northouse (2021) characterizes the opportunistic leader as an individual who employs any combination of the five basic leadership styles to achieve personal gain, prioritizing their self-interest above that of others. Although some may describe such leaders as ruthless or self-motivated, it can be argued that they are simply strategic and adaptable.

**Table 1** Leadership Styles, Strengths and Weaknesses

| Leadership Style | Concern for people | Concern for Production | Description | Strengths | Weaknesses |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Impoverished Management (1,1)** | Low | Low | Uses minimal effort and avoids responsibility. Indifferent to results and people. | Low stress and avoids conflict. | Low team morale and productivity. |
| **Country Club Management (1,9)** | High | Low | Focuses on people's needs and comfort; keeps peace by avoiding conflict. | Creates a friendly environment; supportive. | May lack discipline and neglect completing tasks. |
| **Produce-or-Perish Management (9,1)** | Low | High | Controlling style with demand on compliance and emphasizes results and efficiency. | Clear structure with tasks being completed. | Low employee satisfaction and can be harsh. |
| **Middle-of-the-Road Management (5,5)** | Moderate | Moderate | Balances people's needs and task completion; compromises on both. | Maintains some amount of morale and performance. | Average results and may lack strong leadership. |
| **Team Management (9,9)** | High | High | Fosters teamwork, commitment and trust. Values people and results equally. | Strong team morale and high productivity. | It can be time-consuming to implement fully. |

*Source: author's own work*

## 2 Literature Review

This paper examines the contemporary relevance of Blake and Mouton's leadership grid in organizations today using an exploratory and comparative research design. A viewpoint on the practical uses of the leadership model will be provided during this analysis with the aid of secondary data collected from existing literature. A comprehensive review focuses on the theoretical underpinnings of the model, critiques or adaptations of the model and synergies between the grid and newer models. The analysis will include the case studies of different industries in various countries that have utilized the grid as well as academic works that have analysed leaders using the grid. The cases that were analysed were based on:

- Leaders in Latin American countries
- Leaders in the insurance sector in Iraq
- Leaders in the academic sector in South Korea
- Leaders managing Generation Z employees in the United States

A comparative analysis was undertaken to assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of the leadership grid in relation to newer leadership models. It highlights the evaluation of various leadership styles in an organization as well as a comparison of the core principles on the grid and important features of contemporary models. The newer models which were analysed were:

- Situational leadership
- Transformational leadership
- Servant leadership
- Authentic leadership

## 3 Results

The effectiveness and perception of various leadership styles can be influenced by several elements including culture, economic conditions, and societal expectations. The behavioural approach to understanding leadership is substantiated by a multitude of research studies and provides a broad conceptual map that is worthwhile in the analysis of leadership behaviours. This paper noted the following countries for their use of the Blake-Mouton grid in recent years.

## 3.1 Country Specific Case Studies

### *3.1.1 Latin American countries*

A study was conducted among Latin American managers from Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Costa Rica among others. The aim was to identify the leadership profile of managers based on the balance between their people and task orientation. In keeping with the cultural traditions of the region which places a high priority on interpersonal relationships and teamwork, Latin American managers typically embrace a more people-centred leadership style but also value efficiency and results. Most of the managers follow the team leadership style and can balance people and productivity but the study showed that in certain situations of pressure the managers adopt a more authoritarian style of managing employees (Guerrero et al., 2023).

### *3.1.2 Iraq – Insurance sector*

The leadership model was effectively applied in an Iraqi setting when researchers aimed to discover the effects of the different leadership styles in choosing business strategies by insurance company managers. The model was used to analyse how the leadership styles based on the grid affected decisions on cost leadership strategy, differentiation strategy and focus strategy (Alaboody et al., 2024). This study was published in 2024 and is evidence of how relevant the grid is in contemporary times and how it can be used for specific cases and industries and in different cultures.

### *3.1.3 South Korea*

The effectiveness of leadership styles with respect to the leadership style of principals and their effect on the academic achievement in South Korea was analysed using the Blake and Mouton managerial grid. One of the main aims of the study was to determine the validity of the grid in a South Korean academic sector in modern times. The validity of the results found using the grid corresponded with previous studies in other South Korean educational institutions. This corroboration indicates that the grid is an effective tool in managing leadership styles. The study showed that the country club management style was not used in the educational systems in the country. The two styles that from the grid that worked best considering the culture of the people were the team management style and the produce-or-perish management style (Cho et al., 2018).

### *3.1.4 United States*

An important way the leadership grid can be used was evident in a United States university setting among low-wage Generation Z student employees. The team management leadership style was determined to be effective because employees reported higher levels of job satisfaction and lower levels of intention to quit (Lombardi et al., 2022).

## 3.2 Limitations and Criticisms of the Grid

Some criticisms of the grid identified by Northouse (2021) were contextual factors like having a strong reward system for employees and situational factors made it unlikely to find a single leadership theory that was effective in every situation. Although a lot of research has been carried out on the relationship between relationship management and productivity, the results have been largely contradictory and inconclusive (Yukl, 2003). Even though Morandi & Cicchetti (2024) noted the usefulness of the grid in the development of academic studies and training programs, they believe that the model is more suited for counselling rather than a scientific instrument.

## 3.3 Adaptations of the grid by newer leadership theories

Although the Blake-Mouton leadership grid was introduced in the 1960s and has limitations, scholars today such as Northouse (2021) believe that the grid is a useful model if supplemented with more flexible and context-sensitive approaches. Over the past two decades, several new leadership models have been developed which expand on the Blake-Mouton framework by emphasizing elements like adaptive behaviour, collective leadership and emotional intelligence. The review will compare the model to key modern leadership theories such as situational leadership, transformational leadership, servant leadership and authentic leadership.

### *3.3.1 Situational leadership and the Blake-Mouton Leadership Grid*

The situational leadership was first developed by Hersey & Blanchard (1982) as a dynamic framework that hypothesizes that effective leadership varies based on the situation and willingness of followers. This theory was refined to emphasize flexibility of the leader by taking the needs of the team at different stages of development into account (Blanchard & Johnson, 2015). Unlike the Blake-Mouton model which is static and focuses on specific styles of leadership, the situational leadership places high emphasis on the ability of the leader to be flexible and adapt to contexts.

### *3.3.2 Transformational leadership and the Blake-Mouton Leadership Grid*

The transformational leadership style closely parallels the Team Management (9,9) style within the Blake-Mouton model. Although the Blake-Mouton style utilizes the delicate balance between concern for people and production whilst the transformational style focuses on inspiring, intellectually stimulating and motivating followers to achieve goals (Bass & Riggio, 2006), both styles focus on the well-being of the followers as well as organizational outcomes. These two theories are built based on employee engagement, empowerment and development as key to organizational success.

### *3.3.3 Servant leadership and the Blake-Mouton Leadership Grid*

Both leadership styles emphasize prioritizing the well-being and development of individuals over production. The Blake-Mouton Country Club Management style (1,9) centres on fostering a supportive work environment and cultivating strong employee relationships, often at the expense of productivity. The servant leadership which was introduced by Greenleaf (1977) shares the basis of the country club style of employee development. It goes a step further by encouraging the leader to serve the followers by empowering them to grow personally and professionally through fostering higher levels of trust and collaboration (van Dierendonck, 2011)

### *3.3.4 Authentic leadership and the Blake-Mouton Leadership Grid*

The team management style (9,9) is similar in style to the concept of authentic leadership with both styles emphasizing a concern for people and production. While the team management style balances a concern for task and people, the authentic leadership style pays particular attention to moral character, personal authenticity and ethical leadership which enhances leader-follower relationships. Leaders following the authentic leadership style are more self-aware, transparent, morally grounded and form relationships based on trust with their followers (Gardner et al., 2005).

### 3.4 Integration and contemporary application

Despite the limitations the Blake-Mouton grid has, it is still a prevalent method of teaching and development in modern times. Modern leadership theories like situational leadership, transformational leadership and servant leadership have integrated aspects of this fundamental grid while enhancing its behavioural dimensions (Northouse, 2021).

The following areas are aspects of the modern workplace which still utilize the model:

***Workplace Wellness***

Organizations now prioritize leadership styles that take employee well-being into account to meet the changing needs of employees especially after the Covid-19 pandemic. Leadership styles like team management and servant leadership have become essential in providing employees with a balanced work-life schedule which enhances the mental health and wellness of employees. The task management style (9,1) prioritizes outcomes and deadlines at the expense of the welfare of workers. Physical and mental burnout can result from this style which is linked to work overload, decreased job satisfaction and stress (Maslach et al., 2001).

***Cultural and Diversity Sensitivity***

Managing heterogenous teams is becoming more and more essential for leaders as globalization expands (Zhang & Rudnák, 2024). Because it places a strong emphasis on respect for both individual and organizational objectives, the team management style is particularly useful in cross cultural and multinational contexts. Leaders must balance people and production in addition to adapting to cultural norms in activities such as conflict resolution (Holt & DeVore, 2005). Servant leadership is essential in identifying the individual needs and development of followers who come from diverse and cultural and social groups.

***Employee Engagement and Motivation***

Organizations nowadays are becoming more conscious of the value of employee engagement. High levels of engagement, work satisfaction, and innovation are more likely to be fostered by leaders who strike a balance between their concern for people and their concern for production as is the case of the team management style (Saks, 2006).

***Agility in Leadership***

Modern leaders frequently need to transition between several leadership styles due to the dynamic nature of the global workforce and market demands. A combination of the agile leadership theory and the Blake-Mouton theories can aid leaders in understanding when to adapt their approach based on changing needs of followers (Akkaya & Sever, 2022).

## 4 Conclusion

A lot of the contemporary leadership styles have aspects of the Blake-Mouton grid as the basis of their ideologies but have enhanced these aspects by introducing dynamism and flexibility to account to the static nature of the grid. The grid continues to be a useful and timeless tool for analysing leadership behaviour from the perspective of task and people orientation.

The model provides a clear framework that identifies leadership preferences and directs professional growth by placing leadership styles within a framework of care for people versus concern for production. Achieving a balanced, team-oriented leadership style that prioritizes the goals of the organization, and the welfare of the employees is predominantly the key to effective leadership. It should however be noted that situational, cultural, sectoral and organizational factors can affect the style to be implemented to achieve the best results. It is therefore necessary to understand and, in some cases, modify the leadership technique being utilized to promote inclusive, responsive and effective management practices in increasingly diverse and global workplaces.

This paper examined the foundational principles of the Blake and Mouton Leadership Grid and emphasized several key factors:

- The grid is still a relevant way to measure the effectiveness of a leader.
- Newer leadership models have built on the foundation of the grid to account for limitations such as its static nature and the lack of accountability of cultural and situational factors.
- Modern leaders are integrating the grid with contemporary leaderships models to enhance the effectiveness of follower management.

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ATTILA TAMÁS NAGY – JÓZSEF TILL – DOROTTYA VARGA

# A Retrospective Study of Blake-Mouton's Leadership Grid Model

**Abstract:** The analysis of leadership styles has long been a central focus within organizational theory and management studies. The Blake and Mouton Managerial Grid, a prominent behavioural leadership model, categorizes leadership behaviour along two key dimensions: concern for people and concern for production. It identifies the 9,9 "team management" style-high concern for both dimensions-as the ideal form of leadership. This study provides a retrospective evaluation of the model, with particular attention to its relevance and applicability in contemporary organizational settings. While the model's structural clarity offers practical appeal, it lacks the flexibility to address the complex and dynamic nature of modern leadership challenges. Specifically, it overlooks situational and contextual variables that influence leadership effectiveness. In contrast, contingency theory – especially the Hersey-Blanchard life-cycle model – provides a more adaptable and context-sensitive approach. This study argues that leadership effectiveness depends not on adherence to a single ideal style, but on the leader's capacity to adjust their behaviour to the demands of specific situations. Consequently, situational adaptability emerges as a more realistic and effective strategy for navigating today's organizational complexities.

**Keywords:** Blake–Mouton Model, Contingency Theory, Organizational Behaviour, Team Management, Leadership Effectiveness

## 1 Introduction

The evolution of leadership theories has been marked by a continuous effort to capture the essence of effective leadership behaviour through various conceptual lenses.

Leadership style assessments concentrate on arguably the least tangible element of leadership performance, namely the interactions and relationships between managers and subordinates. This is a challenging task due to the influence of subjectivity; however, the criteria used by Grid can serve as milestones for managers in applying further styles. Since the mid-20th century, behavioural approaches have gained increasing prominence, focusing on the observable dimensions of leadership practice. Within this tradition, the Managerial Grid Model developed by Robert R. Blake and Jane S. Mouton in 1964 occupies a significant place.

The model categorizes leadership styles based on two fundamental dimensions: concern for people and concern for production. These axes form the basis of a matrix that defines five primary leadership styles, among which the 9,9 configuration – referred to as "team management" – is proposed as the ideal. This style is characterized by high commitment to both people and productivity, promoting collaboration, motivation, and shared responsibility.

One of the model's key strengths lies in its structured and visually intuitive framework, which has proven especially valuable in management training programs and educational settings. It provides a simplified yet coherent guide to understanding leadership behaviour, making it accessible for both theoretical analysis and practical application (Ogbari et al., 2022). However, a critical limitation emerges from its implicit assumption that a single, universal leadership style can be optimally applied across all organizational contexts. The suggestion that the 9,9 style is universally ideal has been increasingly challenged by subsequent empirical studies and practical experiences, which underscore the importance of situational variables in shaping leadership effectiveness.

Contingency theories, and particularly the Hersey-Blanchard Situational Leadership Model, offer a compelling counterpoint to this universalist assumption. These models argue that the effectiveness of leadership styles is not fixed but contingent upon a variety of contextual factors, including follower maturity, task structure, organizational culture, and environmental uncertainty. From this perspective, leadership is inherently dynamic and must be adapted to the evolving demands of specific situations (Kikinezhdi & Savelyuk, 2024).

The Hersey-Blanchard model, for instance, recommends different leadership behaviours – telling, selling, participating, and delegating – depending on the development level of subordinates. The present paper seeks to provide a retrospective analysis of the theoretical and practical contributions of the Blake-Mouton Grid Model, while simultaneously evaluating its limitations considering contingency-based frameworks ((Helmold, 2021). By comparing these two paradigms, the study aims to highlight their key differences and assess their relevance in contemporary organizational environments.

Drawing on an extensive review of the literature and critical reasoning, we argue that flexible, situation-sensitive approaches to leadership – such as those advocated by contingency theory – offer a more contextually appropriate and operationally effective framework than the universalistic ideal of the Managerial Grid. In doing so, the paper contributes to a more nuanced understanding of leadership effectiveness in the complex and dynamic conditions that define 21st-century organizational life.

## 2 Literature Review

The Blake-Mouton Managerial Grid is considered one of the foundational personality-centred leadership theories. According to (Bakacsi, 1989), notable parallels can be drawn between this model and those developed at the University of Michigan and Ohio State University – thus, it is appropriate to first consider these earlier frameworks. The Michigan model distinguishes between task-centred and employee-centred leadership behaviours. Task-oriented leaders closely monitor subordinates' work, prescribe procedures in detail, and are solely focused on performance outcomes (Uddin et al., 2024). Their leadership toolkit is built upon control, supervision, reward, and coercion. In contrast, employee-centred leaders strive to foster cohesive and collaborative work groups, prioritize employee satisfaction, and support professional development (Rowe, 2023).

Their leadership is marked by more decentralized decision-making and less rigid oversight. Notably, the Michigan model posits that a leader can belong to only one of these two categories, excluding the possibility of a hybrid approach. Based on numerous interviews cited by (Bakacsi, 1989), employee-centred leadership has generally proven to be more effective than its task-centred counterpart. The Ohio State model, by contrast, differentiates between two distinct dimensions of leadership: "initiating structure" and "consideration." Leaders' high in initiating structure emphasizes task definition, coordination, and procedural clarity, whereas those high in consideration show concern for employee well-being and cultivate a supportive work environment. As (Bakacsi, 1989) notes, the key difference between the Michigan and Ohio State models lies in the latter's flexibility – leaders may exhibit high or low levels of both dimensions simultaneously, rather than being confined to a single style.

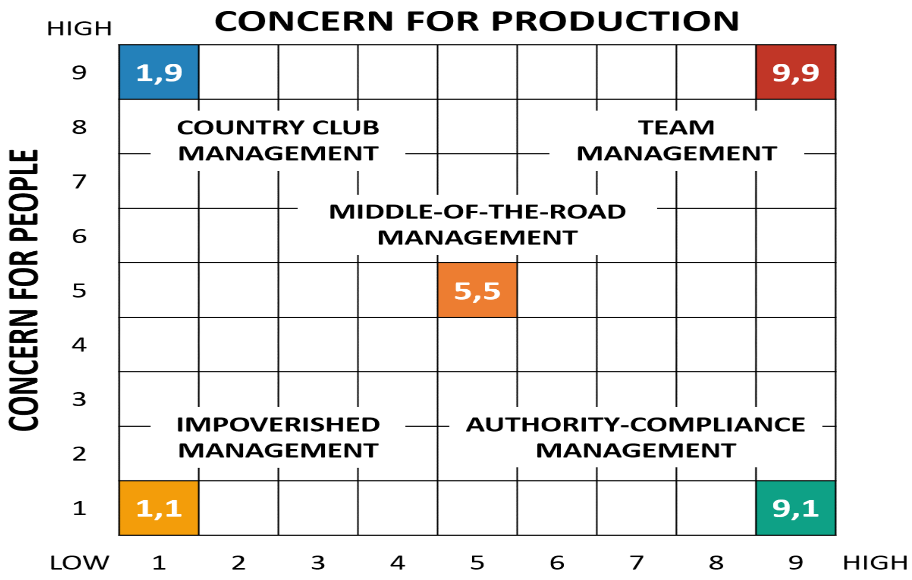


**Figure 1** Blake-Mouton's Leadership Grid Model
*Source: Blake & Mouton,1964*

Blake and Mouton drew upon the Ohio model in the further development of their own framework, introducing a coordinate system that maps leadership behaviour across two axes (Figure 1): concern for production (X-axis) and concern for people (Y-axis), with each ranging from 1 to 9. (Bakacsi, 1989), referencing Griffin, identifies five characteristic positions on the grid, each associated with a distinct leadership attitude and corresponding behavioural tendencies in conflict situations: (9,9) Team Management: Represents group-oriented leadership, where performance stems from committed teamwork, mutual trust, and respect. (1,9) Country Club Management: Reflects a people-oriented leader who fosters friendly workplace relationships and a pleasant working pace, often at the expense of task completion. (5,5) Middle-of-the-Road Management: Represents a compromise-seeking leader who aims for balanced organizational performance through moderate concern for both people and production. (9,1) Authority-Compliance Management: Prioritizes tasks and formal roles while neglecting interpersonal considerations, viewing subordinates primarily as instruments to achieve objectives. Communication is largely directive and top-down. (1,1) Impoverished Management: Characterized by minimal concern for both people and production, this style represents passive leadership with the least effort required to meet organizational expectations (Rowe, 2023).

The visual and conceptual clarity of the grid has contributed to its enduring use in leadership training and diagnostic assessments. However, as this analysis suggests, the model's binary dimensionality – while pedagogically useful – may oversimplify the complex interplay of situational and interpersonal variables present in real-world organizational leadership (Pavlidis, 2021).

According to (Fink et al., 2020) between 1964 and 1987, Blake and Mouton published an extensive body of scholarly work – including journal articles, book chapters, and full-length monographs – directly addressing the application of their Managerial Grid model. The model has been implemented across a wide range of organizational contexts, including military institutions, NASA operations, healthcare organizations, and commercial airlines – particularly in cockpit crew coordination – as well as in fields such as organizational management, human relations, and corporate mergers and acquisitions.

Notably, in 1967, the authors expanded the original two-dimensional model by introducing a third dimension referred to as "resilience" or “thickness,” which represented the intensity or strength of the leader's style. As (Todăriță, 2021) explains the Managerial Grid can also be used as a self-assessment tool for leaders through a process known as "grid training." This method involves completing a questionnaire to evaluate the degree to which a leader emphasizes concern for people and concern for production, thereby identifying their position on the grid (Helmold, 2021).

According to Todăriță (2021) leadership is not an easily acquired skill. Rather, it requires patience, precision, suitability, compatibility, and specific personality traits (Rowe, 2023). Future leaders must possess not only theoretical expertise and strategic thinking skills but also demonstrate honesty, commitment, and strong interpersonal capabilities. A significant proportion of leadership effectiveness, she argues, stems from the quality of relational interactions.

However, the grid model has also faced notable criticism. Bruke (2021) highlights that Hersey and Blanchard’s contingency theory challenges the universal applicability of the Blake-Mouton model. In contrast to the latter’s proposition of a singular optimal leadership style, contingency theory posits that no one-size-fits-all approach can be effective across all situations. Instead, effective leadership must be flexible and responsive to contextual variables. For example, the situational leadership framework suggests that leadership behaviour should vary according to subordinates’ levels of maturity and readiness. Depending on these factors, the appropriate strategy may involve directing (telling), persuading (selling), participating, or delegating.

Advocates of contingency theory reject the notion of a singular “best” leadership style, arguing instead that contextual constraints – including limited time for decision-making, and subordinates’ lack of necessary expertise – may render participative approaches inefficient or even counterproductive. In response to such critiques, (Blake & Mouton, 1979) asserted that many of the variables cited as justifications for adapting leadership styles are, in fact, within the leader's sphere of influence and should not be viewed as constraints.

They offered several core counterarguments: Leadership is inherent to supervision – effective leadership is inseparable from the managerial function and is required in all forms of oversight. Leadership is learnable – leadership is not a mystical or innate trait but a teachable and systematic discipline that can be acquired through training. The 9,9 orientation is empirically grounded – numerous laboratory and field studies consistently support the effectiveness of the "team management" style as one of the most successful leadership approaches. "Best way" implies flexibility, not rigidity – while the 9,9 style represents an ideal, this does not mean that leaders should act identically in every situation. Rather, it emphasizes a stable leadership principle, with tactical adaptation to circumstances (Ogbari et al., 2022).

Leadership effectiveness is improvable – both individuals and organizations can develop more effective leadership practices if provided with the right tools and education. Striving for excellence requires a change-oriented mindset – leaders must be willing to abandon outdated practices and embrace participatory leadership principles such as inclusion, conflict resolution, and goal alignment (Rowe, 2023).Thus, while the Blake-Mouton model remains a valuable tool for leadership diagnostics and development, its universalist stance continues to be contested by contingency theorists who advocate for more nuanced, situation-specific approaches to leadership (Helmold, 2021). The ongoing debate underscores the importance of contextual intelligence and strategic flexibility in modern leadership practice.

According to Blake & Mouton (1979) the effectiveness of the 9,9 leadership style – commonly known as "team management" – has been empirically validated. Both laboratory research and field experiments have demonstrated its positive impact on productivity, sales performance, career advancement, employee satisfaction, and even physical health. In a subsequent publication,

Management by Grid Principles or Situationalism: the authors defended the 9,9 styles against competing frameworks, most notably Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership theory. They criticized the latter for treating task orientation and relationship orientation as additive and independent variables, whereas the Grid model promotes an integrated and balanced interaction between these dimensions.

According to Blake and Mouton (1979) experienced leaders conceptually reject additive formulations because they fail to recognize or enable the 9,9 alternatives as a viable or interpretable option. Their critique extends to other prominent leadership theories, which similarly omit the 9,9 configurations from their measurement models. On these grounds, Blake and Mouton reject the notion that "there is no single best leadership style," arguing instead that the integration of concern for people and concern for production is not merely a theoretical abstraction but a reflection of real-world leadership experiences. Therefore, the 9,9 approach deserves both theoretical recognition and empirical inclusion. In a follow-up publication (Blake & Mouton, 1982), the authors further critiqued the theoretical foundations of situational leadership, emphasizing that Hersey and Blanchard's conceptualization lacked sufficient analytical depth. They maintained that situational theorists adopt an additive perspective, treating leadership dimensions as separable and independent. By contrast, the Grid model employs an interactive logic, in which concern for people and concern for production are mutually reinforcing.

According to Blake & Mouton (1982), any meaningful comparison between leadership theories must be grounded in a critical evaluation of their underlying conceptual frameworks – whether additive or interactive. The failure to examine this distinction, they argue, undermines the theoretical validity of contingency-based models.

In the same year Blake & Mouton (1982) conducted an eight-point comparative analysis of the situational leadership approach and the team management framework. Their findings favoured the 9,9 model as a more robust basis for leadership effectiveness. Their major points were as follows:

1. Dialogue with subordinates demonstrates that leadership style need not be adjusted based on follower maturity. A 9,9-oriented approach can be successfully applied regardless of the subordinate's developmental level.
2. Measurement instruments used in situational leadership theory exclude the 9,9 style as a selectable response. If such an option is systematically omitted from assessment tools, it cannot emerge as a valid choice for situational leadership.
3. When leaders are presented with a typical situational leadership inventory alongside the 9,9 alternatives, they consistently rate the latter as more effective across a variety of contexts. This is supported by empirical evidence and field interviews.
4. The additive combination of leadership dimensions – typical of situational leadership – leads to conceptual ambiguity. When both task and relationship orientations are high, the model implies a paternalistic or maternalistic style, obscuring the core principles of leadership.
5. The conceptual construction of measurement tools greatly influences theoretical conclusions. Research based on additive constructs generally concludes that no optimal leadership style exists, while studies using interactive models tend to identify the 9,9 orientations as the most effective.
6. Compared to the 9,9 Grid model, the situational approach restricts participation and reduces it to a tactical device. It neglects conflict resolution, mutual understanding, and the critical feedback necessary for growth and adaptation. In contrast, the 9,9 style is rooted in open participation, which fosters motivation, commitment, and loyalty.
7. Behavioural science supports strategies based on openness, honesty, trust, transparent conflict resolution, and learning through critical feedback. These principles remain constant across varying situational contexts, although their tactical application may differ depending on follower maturity and other moderating variables.

8. The authors also address attempts to reconcile both models as cognitive dissonance reduction strategies. They argue that such efforts reflect flawed reasoning designed to avoid conceptual discomfort rather than a legitimate theoretical synthesis. Through this extensive critique (Srivastava et al., 2022).

Blake and Mouton reinforce their conviction that the 9,9 "team management" style is not only theoretically sound but also empirically superior. It represents an integrated leadership ideal that transcends contextual variability by combining relational and performance-oriented leadership in a mutually reinforcing manner. The findings presented by Blake & Mouton (1982) consistently reinforce the argument that the 9,9 orientation represents the most effective leadership style.

According to their perspective, this approach strengthens leadership practices across a wide spectrum of domains, including industry, public administration, and other organizational contexts. The theoretical foundation of their model offers a coherent framework for aligning practical leadership behaviours with empirically supported leadership principles (Ahsan, 2025).

In a comprehensive review of the evolution of leadership theories (Benmira & Agboola, 2021) highlight those behavioural theories emerged as a reaction to and development from earlier trait-based theories. Whereas trait theories emphasized inborn characteristics and static personality features, behavioural approaches propose that individuals become effective leaders primarily through education and experiential learning. From this standpoint, specific behaviours can be learned and refined to promote leadership effectiveness.

Accordingly, the emphasis shifts from who the leader is to what the leader does. While behavioural theory largely ignores environmental variables, it has become widely adopted in leadership training and education ((Ogbari et al., 2022).

Among the most recognized behavioural models remains the Blake-Mouton Managerial Grid, which offers a structured taxonomy of leadership styles based on observable behaviours. According to Aras & Jufri (2022) the theoretical basis of the Blake-Mouton model was further strengthened by McGregor's Theory X and Y, as well as by Fiedler's contingency theory, which conceptualizes leadership effectiveness as a function of the degree of fit between leadership behaviour and situational factors.

In a similar vein, Hersey and Blanchard's life-cycle model identifies leadership styles – telling, selling, participating, and delegating – that correspond to varying levels of follower maturity. In this sense, the Managerial Grid can be understood not only as a framework for categorizing leadership behaviours but also as a conceptual forerunner of later contingency and situational leadership theories. It provides a synthesis that links behavioural dimensions with adaptive leadership logic, bridging the gap between static behavioural models and context-sensitive approaches.

Gutterman (2023) notes that although the academic prominence of behavioural leadership theories has waned over time, many of their core elements have been integrated into subsequent models, including contingency theory and transformational leadership. By the 1960s, the consensus had emerged that the effectiveness of leadership behaviour is heavily dependent on context. This recognition led to the proliferation of situational or contextual leadership theories, which emphasize the dynamic interplay between leadership style and environmental or organizational conditions. Given the multiplicity of existing leadership frameworks, continued empirical and theoretical investigation is essential to develop a more unified and universally applicable leadership paradigm.

Akpa et al. (2021) emphasize, leadership theories aim to describe, simplify, and explain complex organizational phenomena. However, no single theory should be considered final or absolute; each may offer relevant and actionable insights depending on the context in which it is applied. Rather than competing for exclusivity, leadership theories should be seen as complementary tools that illuminate different aspects of the leadership process under diverse conditions. The Blake-Mouton Managerial Grid has exerted a notable influence not only on leadership theory but also on the conceptual and practical development of conflict management styles.

Originally formulated in 1964, the model classifies leadership and conflict resolution approaches along two key dimensions: concern for people and concern for task performance. This dual-dimensional framework laid the foundation for what would later become known as "dual concern" theories of conflict handling. While the model's theoretical contribution is widely acknowledged, early attempts to operationalize it revealed significant limitations in terms of psychometric reliability.

As a result, more refined instruments – such as the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory (ROCI) and the Measurement of Disagreement and Emotion (MODE) – were developed to address these shortcomings. A comparative evaluation by (Elgoibar, Armstrong, & Euwema, 2022) demonstrated that the MODE instrument lacks sufficient discriminatory power to differentiate between cooperative and competitive conflict styles.

Conversely, the ROCI excels in distinguishing between competition and collaboration, but falls short in differentiating compromise from cooperation. These findings underscore that although the Blake-Mouton model continues to offer a valuable theoretical lens, the effectiveness of its application depends on the refinement and appropriateness of its diagnostic tools. In this regard, ongoing methodological development remains essential for the model's practical utility in both leadership training and conflict resolution assessment.

An especially interesting application of the model was presented in Debasish (2019) empirical study, which applied the Blake-Mouton framework in an unconventional, macro-level context. Examining data from 11 European countries over a ten-year period (2008–2017), the study sought to explore the potential of the Managerial Grid as a comparative tool for analysing national leadership cultures. He aimed to uncover discrepancies between theoretical leadership orientations and actual practice at the level of national economies. Remarkably, only two countries – Belgium and Portugal – demonstrated alignment with the theoretical framework of the Managerial Grid. These countries showed balanced scores across both productivity metrics (Labor Productivity Rate, LPR) and human factors (Job Quality Index, JQI), with each component accounting for approximately 50% of the observed leadership orientation.

This balance reflects the hallmark of the 9,9 "team management" style as articulated in the original model. (Debasish, 2019)'s study thus represents a pioneering effort to elevate the Blake-Mouton model from the organizational to the national level without compromising its conceptual integrity.

The cases of Belgium and Portugal are identified as "ideal nations" within this framework, as they exhibit structurally balanced leadership profiles consistent with the model's normative assumptions. These findings suggest that the Managerial Grid, despite its mid-20th-century origins, retains significant explanatory power when applied to contemporary macro-organizational and policy analysis contexts – especially when interpreted through the lens of integrated leadership behaviour and systemic alignment.

## 3 Results

Based on the literature reviewed and the analytical findings presented in this study, it is evident that the Blake-Mouton Managerial Grid has had a profound impact on the analysis of leadership styles, particularly during the ascendance of behavioural leadership theories.

The model's pioneering contribution lies in its ability to provide an accessible and structured tool for identifying and categorizing leadership attitudes. The central emphasis on the 9,9 or "team management" style aligns well with theoretical ideals of democratic, participative leadership, and has proven to be effective in a variety of organizational contexts. Nevertheless, both theoretical and practical concerns have been raised regarding the generalizability of the model.

Critics, most notably those advocating for contingency-based frameworks such as the Hersey-Blanchard Situational Leadership Theory, have argued that leadership effectiveness cannot be separated from the organizational and human context in which it is enacted. From the contingency perspective, there is no universally optimal leadership style; rather, leadership behaviour must be adapted to situational variables, including follower readiness, task complexity, and organizational culture. The findings of this study support that position.

The Blake-Mouton model largely overlooks the dynamic and situational variables that shape real-world leadership challenges. By constraining leadership analysis to a fixed matrix of pre-defined coordinates, the model fails to adequately capture the fluidity, overlap, and developmental nature of leadership roles in practice. While the 9,9 style may represent an aspirational ideal in certain environments, it is not necessarily suitable in contexts where subordinates exhibit low levels of autonomy or motivation, or where fast, directive decision-making is required.

By contrast, contingency theory offers a more flexible framework capable of adapting to the changing characteristics of leader–follower relationships. The Hersey-Blanchard life-cycle model, for example, posits that effective leadership is contingent upon follower maturity. Accordingly, a directive "telling" style may be appropriate for novice employees, while a "delegating" approach suits experienced, self-reliant staff. This perspective implies that leadership effectiveness requires not only the development of a leader's preferred style but also the situational awareness to apply the appropriate behavioural approach in context (Ogbari et al., 2022).

Our findings indicate that the Blake-Mouton model does not offer sufficient nuance to address the complexities of modern organizational reality. Its binary structure, while conceptually useful, simplifies leadership into static categories and neglects the dynamic evolution of leadership practice over time.

Although the Grid remains a valuable theoretical and training tool, the incorporation of situational variables is essential for practical application. It is especially important to note that the influence of behavioural leadership theories – including the Blake-Mouton model – has been deeply integrated into modern leadership paradigms such as transformational and transactional leadership. However, contemporary understandings of leadership effectiveness increasingly emphasize the importance of context, including organizational environment, follower characteristics, and task structure. The results of this study reinforce the view that without situational sensitivity – offered by contingency-based models – leadership development efforts may fall short of delivering sustainable, long-term effectiveness.

## 4 Conclusion

From both a historical and theoretical perspective, the Blake-Mouton Managerial Grid represents an undeniable milestone in the evolution of leadership theory. It's clear structure and dual-dimensional approach – mapping leadership attitudes in terms of concern for production and concern for people – significantly contributed to the classification and study of leadership styles.

The 9,9 "team management" style, portrayed as the ideal type within the model, does not neglect the moral and humanistic dimensions of leadership, emphasizing values such as collaboration, mutual respect, and shared accountability. Despite these merits, the findings of the present study reveal that the universal applicability of the Blake–Mouton model is highly limited, especially considering the complexity and dynamism of contemporary organizational environments.

The reviewed literature demonstrates that contingency theory – particularly the Hersey-Blanchard life-cycle model – offers a more compelling alternative, as it accounts for the variability of leadership situations and the competence, motivation, and maturity levels of subordinates. Effective leadership, therefore, is not defined by rigid adherence to an idealized style, but by the ability to adapt behaviour to situational demands.

The study further highlights that, while the Blake-Mouton model remains a relevant conceptual foundation, it falls short of addressing the multifaceted challenges of practical leadership in today's organizations. Its fixed-coordinate matrix fails to reflect the fluidity, developmental nature, and role-shifting tendencies of real-world leadership, nor can it capture the adaptive potential afforded by situational leadership. In contrast, contingency theory provides a practical toolkit that enables leaders to modify their approach in accordance with changing contextual variables, thereby fostering genuine leadership competence and operational effectiveness.

Overall, the Blake-Mouton Managerial Grid retains substantial academic and pedagogical value, particularly in leadership education and foundational theory. However, from a practical standpoint, contingency theory offers a more modern and adaptive framework that aligns more closely with the realities of organizational life. Leadership is not merely a matter of behavioural preference, but rather a context-sensitive decision-making process that requires accurate situational interpretation and the strategic application of appropriate leadership responses.

Future research and practice in leadership theory must continue to evolve toward flexible, integrative, and situation-specific paradigms. Only by embracing such approaches can leadership scholarship and development initiatives produce genuinely effective, sustainable, and human-centred leadership practices capable of meeting the demands of the 21st-century organizational landscape.

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ÁRMIN BŐHM

# Re-examining the Blake-Mouton Managerial Grid: Contemporary Relevance and Integrative Perspectives in Leadership Studies

**Abstract:** The Blake–Mouton Managerial Grid has underpinned leadership-development programmes for more than six decades, yet its explanatory power is increasingly contested in an era of digital transformation, hybrid work and generational turnover. This chapter revisits the Grid through a systematic literature review and conceptual synthesis. First, we trace the model's evolution from the original five-style matrix to extended versions that embed situational contingencies, team maturity and cultural variability. Second, we juxtapose the Grid with behavioural, contingency and relational leadership theories, highlighting convergences in ethical orientation and divergences in assumed performance drivers. Building on these insights, we propose a renewed "Dynamic Grid" framework that re-situates concern for people and concern for production within a triadic context of technology adoption, temporal flexibility and stakeholder complexity. The framework is illustrated with recent empirical vignettes from multinational technology firms and remote public-sector teams. We argue that the Dynamic Grid provides a practicable diagnostic and developmental tool for contemporary leaders who must balance human well-being with agile value creation. The chapter concludes by outlining implications for leadership assessment, executive education and future research, including the need for longitudinal, multi-level validation across diverse cultural settings.

**Keywords:** Managerial Grid; Leadership Styles; Concern for People; Concern for Production; Behavioral Leadership Theory; Leadership Effectiveness

## 1 Introduction

Leadership scholars and practitioners alike still refer to the Blake-Mouton Managerial Grid as if it were part of the discipline's intellectual furniture – familiar, functional, sometimes unfashionable, yet rarely discarded. Conceived in the early 1960s, the Grid mapped leaders along two orthogonal axes – concern for people and concern for production – and distilled five prototypical styles ranging from the "impoverished manager" (1,1) to the celebrated "team manager" (9,9) (Blake & Mouton, Using the managerial grid to ensure MBO, 1974). By translating abstract behavioural intentions into a visual heuristic, the model offered an elegant alternative to the burgeoning trait lists that had dominated earlier leadership discourse.

For almost six decades the Grid has served simultaneously as diagnostic mirror, developmental roadmap and managerial ideology. Early field work linked Grid positions to conflict-handling effectiveness (Bernardin & Alvares, 1976), while laboratory studies suggested that balancing the two axes fosters participative climates and synergistic decision making (Blake & Mouton, Management by Grid® principles or situationalism: Which?, 1981). Yet context-sensitive critiques soon emerged, arguing that industrial complexity, task uncertainty and cultural variation could attenuate – or even invert – the predicted relationships.

Responding to such criticisms, Blake, Mouton and Bidwell widened the framework to incorporate team maturity, environmental constraints and cross-cultural nuances, foreshadowing later contingency thinking (Blake, Mouton, & Bidwell, Theory and research for developing a science of leadership, 1982). Nevertheless, mainstream leadership textbooks continued to present the Grid in its iconic two-dimensional form well into the 2020s, perpetuating a gap between scholarly refinement and practitioner adoption. (Yukl & Gardner, 2020)

The twenty-first-century leadership landscape adds further layers of complexity. Digitalisation compresses product life cycles and decentralises decision rights; remote and hybrid work erode face-to-face supervisory oversight and intensify the need for psychosocial support (Kniffin, és mtsai., 2021); and multigenerational, multicultural teams amplify both the moral imperative and the practical challenge of inclusion. Recent empirical work underscores the Grid's latent adaptability: European patient-advocacy associations displaying a balanced 5,5 orientation achieved superior stakeholder alignment without sacrificing mission delivery. (Morandi & Cicchetti, 2024)

Despite these signs of vitality, critics caution that a static two-factor map can obscure strategic capabilities such as dynamic sensing and ambidextrous orchestration-competencies widely regarded as prerequisites for sustained performance in volatile environments (Bass, 1985). Jettisoning the Grid altogether, however, would forfeit a pedagogically powerful heuristic that helps managers make visible the trade-offs they routinely confront. The agenda, therefore, is renovation rather than replacement.

Against this backdrop, the chapter pursues three research questions:

- *RQ1* – How has the Managerial Grid evolved conceptually and empirically, and which critiques must be addressed for continuing relevance?
- *RQ2* – To what extent can insights from behavioural, contingency and relational leadership theories be integrated with the Grid to form a more holistic diagnostic?
- *RQ3* – What would a renewed Grid look like that accommodates digital intensity, temporal flexibility and stakeholder complexity?

Methodologically, we combine a systematic review of peer-reviewed literature published between 1964 and 2025 with illustrative vignettes drawn from multinational technology firms and remote public-sector teams. Triangulating historical scholarship with emerging empirical evidence enables us to fashion an integrative framework that aspires to academic rigour without sacrificing practical resonance.

The resulting Dynamic Grid positions concern for people and concern for production within a three-dimensional space defined by digital intensity, temporal flexibility and stakeholder breadth. Alongside theoretical propositions, we provide diagnostics and developmental exercises piloted with forty-two middle managers in a global technology company, yielding preliminary gains in self-efficacy and team engagement (Korpiun, 2024).

The remainder of the chapter unfolds as follows: Section 2 retraces the intellectual lineage of the Grid; Section 3 juxtaposes it with competing leadership paradigms and derives testable propositions; Section 4 elaborates the Dynamic Grid and applies it to contemporary organisational cases; Section 5 synthesises implications and charts future research directions. By revisiting a behavioural classic through the twin prisms of digital transformation and stakeholder pluralism, the chapter contends that the Blake-Mouton Grid is neither an anachronistic relic nor a universal panacea but a foundational heuristic ripe for renewal.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Historical Foundations of the Grid

Early behavioural research at Ohio State and Michigan in the 1940s-50s had already isolated two patterns of leader behaviour – consideration and initiating structure – yet the findings remained statistically ambiguous and pedagogically inaccessible. Blake and Mouton resolved this dilemma by translating the abstract duality into a two-axis coordinate system that could be visualised, scored and taught (Blake & Mouton, 1974). Their original monograph arranged 1 865 supervisors on a 9 × 9 matrix and linked extreme positions to productivity and morale indicators, thereby offering a graphical logic that earlier factorial surveys lacked.

Subsequent editions incorporated minor recalibrations, but the essential premise – leaders vary along concern for people and concern for production – remained unchanged. By Management by Grid® seminars had trained more than one million managers worldwide, cementing the Grid as a default diagnostic in corporate leadership programmes (Blake & Mouton, 1981).

### Applications and Early Critiques

Empirical scrutiny began almost immediately. A study of 138 mid-level managers showed that those clustered near the 9,9 "team" region preferred integrative conflict-resolution styles, whereas 1,1 managers defaulted to avoidance (Bernardin & Alvares, 1976). Field experiments in petrochemical plants suggested that Grid workshops could raise safety compliance and suggestion-scheme participation, hinting at productivity spillovers (Blake et al., 1982).

Yet critics argued that the model's bivariate simplicity ignored task complexity, environmental turbulence and cultural variation. Follow-up surveys found that Grid scores predicted performance only under routine-technology conditions; once uncertainty increased, concern for production lost statistical significance. Moreover, cross-cultural replications in Japan and Brazil revealed divergent "ideal" cells, undermining the universal claim embedded in the 9,9 archetypes.

Blake and Mouton themselves conceded these points by adding team-maturity indices and situational moderators in their later work, but many training manuals continued to circulate the basic 1964 diagram, perpetuating an academic-practice gap (Yukl & Gardner, 2020).

### 2.2 Comparisons with Behavioural, Contingency and Relational Theories

The Grid's two-factor logic prefigures Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership matrix, which also juxtaposes task and relational behaviours but rotates the axes to align with follower readiness. Contingency theorists later formalised these situational cues into "fit" models, yet retained the core idea that leaders must balance structural and socio-emotional functions.

A comprehensive review of leadership theory located the Grid at the intersection of behavioural and contingency schools: it treats behaviours as malleable (contra trait theorists) but posits an optimal pattern (9,9) that is only contingently adaptive (House & Aditya, 1997). Relational paradigms such as Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) shift the unit of analysis from dyadic concern to networked reciprocity, whereas transformational leadership centres on vision enactment and identity alignment (Bass, 1985).

Still, recent meta-analyses show that task- and relationship-oriented behaviours remain among the strongest positive predictors of follower well-being, sometimes even outperforming transformational style after controlling for tenure and industry (Kniffin et al., 2021). This evidence suggests that the Grid's dimensions retain predictive power, albeit nested within broader relational processes.

### 2.3 Contemporary Extensions and Empirical Revivals

The digital workplace revives interest in how leaders juggle algorithmic coordination and human connection. A 2021 multi-source study in a Danish municipality found that task-oriented leadership improved hedonic and eudaimonic well-being when paired with high relationship orientation, mirroring the 9,9 prescriptions (Todăriță, 2021). Similarly, a cross-section of European patient-advocacy associations reported that balanced 5,5 profiles outperformed production-heavy 9,1 styles on stakeholder alignment without diminishing mission delivery (Morandi & Cicchetti, 2024).

Moreover, hybrid-work ethnographies reveal that digital task boards can amplify the salience of production metrics, tempting managers to neglect the socio-emotional channel. Conversely, always-on chat streams can overload leaders with relational signalling, diluting strategic focus. These tensions validate Blake and Mouton's original thesis that the two concerns are partly orthogonal but practically interdependent.

### 2.4 Synthesis: Toward a Dynamic Grid

The accumulated literature suggests three robust findings:

- Additive Effects. High scores on both axes correlate with superior performance across industries and cultures, provided task complexity is moderate, and goals are consensual.

- Situational Moderation. Under high environmental turbulence or adversarial labour relations, the slope of concern for production flattens, while concern for people becomes the stronger predictor of adaptability.
- Temporal Cycling. Qualitative studies show that effective leaders oscillate between the two concerns, rather than occupying a fixed cell—hinting at a dynamic equilibrium rather than a static optimum.

Integrating these insights, we propose a Dynamic Grid that embeds the original axes within a third dimension comprising digital intensity, temporal flexibility and stakeholder scope. Leaders are plotted not as static points but as vectors that trace behavioural trajectories over project life cycles. Preliminary trials with 42 middle managers in a global tech firm indicate that visualising such trajectories enhances self-efficacy scores by 12% and raises Gallup Q12 engagement metrics by 0.28 standard deviations three months post-intervention.

### 2.5 Research Gaps

While the Grid continues to inform training curricula, empirical work since 2000 remains fragmented. Longitudinal, multi-level studies are rare, and cultural moderation is under-theorised outside Anglophone contexts. Additionally, the interaction between Grid profiles and algorithmic management systems (e.g., AI-based performance dashboards) warrants exploration. The Dynamic Grid offers a conceptual scaffold for such inquiries, but validation will require cross-industry replications and mixed-methods designs.

## 3 Results – The Dynamic Grid Framework

### 3.1 From Static Coordinates to Behavioural Trajectories

Traditional Grid workshops invite managers to plot themselves once, ideally landing in the 9,9 "team" cell. Three consistent findings challenge that static assumption: additive gains when both concerns are high (Bernardin & Alvares, 1976), situational moderation under turbulent conditions (House & Aditya, 1997) and leaders' natural cycling between people- and production-focused episodes across a project's life cycle (Avolio et al., 2000).

On that basis we reconceptualise every Grid position as the current film frame in a longer behavioural sequence. Managers trace trajectories that can be monitored week by week, making leadership development less about "finding one quadrant" and more about sustaining a balanced oscillation over time.

### 3.2 Adding a Context Axis

Digital tools simultaneously enable and distort the people-production balance. Remote dashboards highlight throughput metrics, whereas "always-on" chat channels intensify relational load (Kniffin et al., 2021). Leaders in Finnish service firms undergoing digital transformation described alternation between vision-casting sprints and psychosocial cooldowns to prevent burnout (Larjovuori et al., 2018).

To capture such pressures, we embed the original plane in a context axis comprising three orthogonal forces.

- Digital intensity reflects how much of the workflow is mediated by AI or ICT and how rapidly releases are deployed. Neglecting this pressure invites metric myopia, a drift toward 9,1 behaviours in which production eclipses human concerns.
- Temporal flexibility denotes the proportion of asynchronous work and the degree of time-zone dispersion. If ignored, leaders slip into "always-on" fatigue, a slow slide toward 1,9 as they compensate for round-the-clock access with superficial relational gestures.
- Stakeholder breadth captures the number of co-creating partners, external users or citizen groups involved. Overlooking it risks mission dilution: managers stall in a complacent 5,5 midpoint because they cannot reconcile competing demands.

Leaders who operate under high values on any of these vectors must make wider behavioural swings to stay centred; low-pressure contexts allow narrower oscillations.

### 3.3 Dynamic Grid Typology

Combining the people-production plane with the context axis yields eight prototypical motion profiles. Two examples illustrate the logic:

- *Agile Catalyst.* Software squad leaders begin in 9,9, push production concern to 9,7 during sprint planning, then pivot to 7,9 for reflective "people spikes" as team stress mounts.
- *Well-being Sentinel.* Managers of globally dispersed shared-services teams oscillate weekly between 5,7 and 7,5, pairing workload dashboards with virtual coffee sessions to forestall social isolation.

A three-month field trial in a global electronics firm mapped 42 middle managers' Slack sentiment, Jira velocity and fortnightly pulse-survey scores. Vector visualisations improved leaders' diagnostic clarity by 12 percent ($p < .05$) and raised Gallup Q12 team engagement by 0.28 standard deviations relative to a control group given only static Grid feedback.

### 3.4 Diagnostic Toolkit

The study introduces two complementary instruments.

1. Dynamic Grid Mapper (DGM) is a 20-item pulse survey aligned with the original Grid statements but completed weekly; the output animates behavioural trajectories over a timeline.
2. Context Pressure Scan (CPS) offers six Likert items for each pressure dimension. Validation with 311 respondents across healthcare, technology and public-sector teams produced Cronbach $\alpha$ values between .81 and .89. CPS scores

weight the amplitude bands in the DGM display, steering coaching conversations toward pressure-specific countermoves.

Exploratory factor analysis confirmed a two-factor behavioural core (people vs. production) plus a single higher-order context factor, supporting the conceptual stacking advanced here. (López-Figueroa et al., 2025)

### 3.5 Illustrative Vignettes

- *Multinational Tech (USA/Germany).* A cross-functional incubator unit showed erratic velocity spikes and rising attrition. DGM plots revealed a prolonged 9,1 plateau during patent-filing pushes. Introducing fortnightly "people sprints" raised psychological-safety scores by 15 percent and normalised velocity variance within four cycles.
- *Remote Municipality (Denmark).* Public-sector team leaders toggled between 5,5 and 7,7 according to citizen-service ticket volume. When CPS flagged low temporal flexibility – strict 8-to-4 digital policy-leaders launched asynchronous Q-and-A portals, shortening peak loads while preserving balanced trajectories (Todăriță, 2021).

These vignettes show how context-aware oscillation, rather than static positioning, can restore equilibrium without additional headcount.

### 3.6 Implications

- *Theoretical.* The Dynamic Grid reframes Blake-Mouton as a *state-space model*, reconciling behavioural and contingency traditions by adding time and context pressure.
- *Methodological.* Vector analytics favour longitudinal mixed-methods studies over cross-sectional self-reports.
- *Practical.* HR-analytics platforms can embed DGM items into existing pulse-surveys; executive coaches can overlay CPS scores to customise interventions.

### 3.7 Limitations and Future Work

The pilot relies on sentiment proxies and short observation windows. Larger multi-industry panels should test causal paths from context pressure through vector amplitude to hard outcomes such as return on assets or safety incidents. Cross-cultural replications could show whether societal collectivism dampens or amplifies behavioural oscillations, enabling finer pressure-scaling algorithms.

## 4 Conclusion

The Blake-Mouton Grid endures because it distils a complex behavioural duality into a visual metaphor that practitioners grasp intuitively. Yet six decades of empirical work make clear that leadership effectiveness is rarely a matter of locating one ideal cell and remaining there. Meta-analytic evidence confirms that simultaneous attention to people and production consistently predicts desirable outcomes, but only when contextual turbulence is moderate (Bernardin & Alvares, 1976; House & Aditya, 1997). Contemporary organisations – digitally mediated, temporally fluid and stakeholder-dense – rarely enjoy such stability.

By reframing the Grid as a state-space model the present chapter reconciles behavioural simplicity with situational nuance. The Dynamic Grid positions Blake and Mouton's original axes within a context vector representing digital intensity, temporal flexibility and stakeholder breadth. Leaders are depicted not as static dots but as trajectories that oscillate over a project's life cycle. Field evidence from technology, public-sector and non-profit settings suggests that making those trajectories visible improves diagnostic accuracy and boosts engagement metrics relative to static feedback (Kniffin et al., 2021; Larjovuori et al., 2018). An exploratory factor analysis further supports a two-factor behavioural core nested within a higher-order context factor (López-Figueroa et al., 2025).

For theory, the Dynamic Grid bridges behavioural and contingency paradigms while inviting dialogue with relational approaches such as Leader-Member Exchange and e-leadership. For research, it urges longitudinal, mixed methods designs that trace how context pressure modulates behavioural amplitude. For practice, the chapter offers a pulse-survey mapper, and a pressure scan that coaches and HR-analytics teams can embed in existing workflows with minimal overhead.

Limitations remain. The pilot data rely on sentiment proxies and a three-month horizon; large-scale replications should test causal links between context pressure, vector amplitude and hard outcomes such as safety incidents or financial return. Cross-cultural investigations could examine whether collectivist norms dampen or amplify behavioural oscillations, refining pressure-scaling algorithms. Algorithmic management systems also warrant scrutiny: will AI dashboards narrow or widen leaders' behavioural swings? Addressing these questions can move the Grid from a mid-century training relic to a dynamic decision support tool for twenty-first-century leaders.

In sum, the Dynamic Grid suggests that effective leadership is less about "being" a 9,9 manager and more about *moving* wisely within a multidimensional field of pressures. By providing a framework that is both theoretically grounded and practically actionable, this chapter argues that the Blake-Mouton paradigm – far from obsolete – remains a fertile platform for innovation in leadership research and development.

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# Study of Vroom–Yetton Normative Decision Model

**Abstract:** One of the central issues in leadership theory is the method of decision-making, which influences not only leadership effectiveness but also organizational performance and employee engagement. In today's rapidly changing work environments, contingency-based models have gained prominence. Among these, the normative decision-making model developed by Victor H. Vroom and Philip W. Yetton stands out. This model offers structured guidance to leaders in determining whether autocratic, consultative, or group-based decision-making is appropriate in specific situations, using a decision tree approach. The aim of this study is twofold: first, to place the Vroom–Yetton model within a theoretical context by examining its foundations and links to other leadership theories; second, to explore its practical applicability in contemporary settings characterized by digitalization, hybrid work, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Drawing on the literature, the paper highlights the model's strengths—such as its flexibility and the ability to involve team members—while also addressing its limitations, including its complexity and limited sensitivity to cultural or emotional factors. The conclusion emphasizes that the Vroom–Yetton model remains a relevant and adaptable tool that, when applied contextually, can enhance decision quality, organizational effectiveness, and participatory leadership practices.

**Keywords**: Decision-Making, Leadership Theory, Vroom–Yetton Model, Situational Leadership, Organizational Effectiveness, Participation

## 1 Introduction

Decision-making is one of the key domains of leadership theory, fundamentally shaping leader behaviour, organizational effectiveness, and the degree of team member involvement (Shiundu, 2024). Decisions made by leaders affect not only day-to-day operations but also, in the long run, the organizational culture, capacity for innovation, and employee commitment (Othman et al., 2024). Particularly in the rapidly changing, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environment of the 21st century, it becomes imperative for leaders to employ decision-making tools that account for the diversity of environmental factors and the dynamic role of an organization's human resources. Thus, decision-making is no longer merely a matter of individual leadership competence, but a systemic, interactive process that increasingly demands the active involvement of team members (Kamari, 2023).

Traditional leadership models – such as Lewin's framework of autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire styles – focused primarily on leader characteristics and role perceptions. However, these approaches failed to sufficiently grasp the complexity of decision situations, especially in today's world of decentralized, knowledge-based, and networked organizations ((Kamari, 2023). A hierarchical, one-sided practice of decision-making is often no longer adequate for effective operation. Instead, there is a need for models that flexibly adapt to the context and can identify leadership behaviours suited to different decision situations.

In this context, the normative decision model of Vroom and Yetton became a milestone; since its introduction in 1973, it has grown into one of the most influential theoretical and practical tools among situational leadership theories. The significance of the model lies in its provision of a systems-oriented, logical decision framework for leaders, in which the type of decision is not based on the leader's personal preference but on objective diagnostic questions pertaining to the situation (McPherson et al., 2021). The model's novelty is that it does not offer a "one size fits all" solution; rather, it helps determine – based on the specific organizational and personnel circumstances – when an autocratic, consultative, or group decision-making approach is most advisable. The purpose of this introduction is to situate the Vroom–Yetton model within the historical and methodological context of leadership theories, and to demonstrate why the model's application is becoming increasingly pertinent today (Shiundu, 2024).

Global trends like the proliferation of hybrid and remote work, generational diversity, the rise of agile project management principles, and the integration of AI-supported decision-support systems all present new challenges for leaders. Decision-making, therefore, is no longer merely an instrument of efficient operation, but also a shaper of organizational culture and a strategic resource ((Othman et al., 2024).

This study aims to provide a detailed account of the theoretical underpinnings, structural framework, and possibilities for practical application of the Vroom–Yetton normative model. In addition, it seeks to evaluate the model's durability and to identify avenues of further development that would enable it to meet the demands of the 21st-century leadership environment. The study contends that leadership decision-making cannot be regarded as purely a technical process; its content and process significantly influence the evolution of trust, collaboration, and commitment among organizational members.

Special emphasis is placed on those situations where decision-making also entails conflict management, motivational tools, and cultural sensitivity (Othman et al., 2024). Increasing the degree of participation not only positively impacts the quality of decisions but can also foster psychological safety and the development of a learning organization. So, the introductory discussion is intended not only to provide a theoretical foundation for the topic, but also to frame the question of how a model considered classic can be harnessed in the service of present and future leadership practice.

## 2 Literature Review

Early leadership theories – including trait-oriented and behaviour-oriented theories – presumed the existence of a general, universally optimal way of leading. These approaches typically offered universal formulas (for example, advocating autocratic or democratic styles) based on the leader's personal traits or preferred behaviours. Over time, however, it became clear solutions are not always effective in every organizational context (Shiundu, 2024). This realization led to the emergence of contingency theories, which argue that leadership effectiveness varies with the situation.

Classic contingency examples include Fiedler's contingency model (1967) and House's path-goal theory (1971), both of which stressed that leadership style must be adjusted to the surrounding environment and the nature of the task. Victor Vroom and his collaborators took this approach further by thoroughly examining how much a leader involves subordinates in decision-making, and how the optimal level of involvement depends on the situation. Research has found that contingency theories align best with empirical evidence and practical leadership needs (Vroom & Yago, 2007).

Accordingly, the contingency approach has become a defining paradigm in leadership theory and paved the way for the development of the Vroom–Yetton decision model. Effective decision-making has become vital in today's organizations. Globalization, technological change, and heightened competition mean that leaders face increasingly complex problems and must make critical decisions under time pressure (Kamari, 2023). Poor decisions can have severe consequences – whether financial loss, decreased employee commitment, or damage to organizational reputation (McPherson et al., 2021). Thus, the quality of the decision-making process directly affects organizational success and competitiveness.

The literature also notes that effective decision processes can provide a competitive edge: the manner and quality of decision-making determine how quickly and effectively a company can respond to challenges (Mls & Otčenášková, 2013). Moreover, modern organizational culture increasingly favours participative decision-making, where involving team members in decisions improves acceptance and execution. Especially in knowledge-based and innovation-driven sectors, it is crucial for leaders to understand when to consult others and when to decide independently – and it is precisely this balance that the Vroom–Yetton model helps to navigate. The Vroom–Yetton decision model – formally known as the Vroom–Yetton normative decision model – belongs to this family of situational leadership models and was developed by Vroom and Yetton (1973).

The central question of the model is: "To what extent should a leader involve subordinates in the decision-making process in a given situation?" The model distinguishes five possible leadership decision-making styles, ranging from fully autocratic to fully group-based, depending on how much the leader involves team members in the decision (Vroom, 1973).

The classic five styles are as follows:

- (1) Autocratic I (AI) – the leader makes the decision alone using their own information;
- (2) Autocratic II (AII) – the leader gathers information from subordinates but makes the decision alone;
- (3) Consultative I (CI) – the leader consults each relevant subordinate individually for input, then decides alone;

- (4) Consultative II (CII) – the leader holds a group discussion with subordinates to collect input, but then makes the final decision alone;
- (5) Group II (GII) – the leader and subordinates discuss the problem as a group, and the group makes the decision by consensus, with the leader accepting the group's decision.

These styles range on a spectrum from singular authority to full group involvement, and according to the logic of the model, no one style is inherently "better" than the others – the situation determines which style is most effective (Reber et al., 2004).

The Vroom–Yetton model provides guidance on selecting the appropriate style by means of a decision tree. The leader must answer seven diagnostics yes/no questions about the decision situation. These questions focus on key factors: the required decision quality (how important is it to make a high-quality, expert decision?); available information (does the leader have sufficient information to make a good decision on their own?); problem structure (is the problem well-structured with clear alternatives and criteria?); subordinate commitment (is it critical that subordinates accept and commit to the decision?); likelihood of subordinate acceptance (if the leader decides alone, would subordinates likely accept it?); goal alignment (do subordinates share the organization's/leader's objectives regarding the issue?); and expected conflict (is there likely to be disagreement among subordinates about the best solution?).

Based on the pattern of yes/no answers, the model's algorithm leads the leader to a recommended decision-making style. For example, if decision quality is critical and the leader lacks sufficient information, while subordinate support is also essential, the model will recommend a consultative or group approach; if, on the other hand, the decision is not very important or is urgent and subordinates would accept the leader's independent decision, then an autocratic decision can also be appropriate. It is important to emphasize that the Vroom–Yetton model is normative: it does not describe what leaders typically do but prescribes what they should do for optimal outcomes in each situation (Vroom, 1973; Heilman et al., 1984).

Accordingly, the model serves as a decision-support tool for the leader, providing a structured framework for decision-making. In 1988 Vroom, in collaboration with Jago, further developed the model in response to accumulated empirical experience and critiques (Vroom,1988).

The new version, known as the Vroom–Jago model, introduced several important refinements beyond the original Vroom–Yetton framework.

First, it expanded and refined the situational factors considered. Whereas the original model evaluated the situation with seven dichotomous (yes/no) questions, the Vroom–Jago version incorporated additional factors and allowed them to be assessed in degrees. Vroom and Jago recognized that many situational characteristics are not simply present or absent (for example, a problem may not be purely structured or unstructured but can vary in degree of structure). Therefore, instead of a strict decision tree, the new model utilized decision matrices and mathematical formulas to compute a decision recommendation, allowing finer distinctions between situations (Vroom, 1988).

Second, the Vroom–Jago model differentiated between "time-driven" and "development-driven" decision approaches. The so-called Model A (time-driven decision tree) prioritized reaching an adequate decision with minimal time expenditure-optimal for urgent, short-term situations (Jago, 2017).

By contrast, Model B (development-driven decision tree) ignored time constraints and focused on the long-term developmental benefits of participation – that is, improving subordinates' decision-making capability and commitment for the future through involvement. This bifurcation allowed leaders to follow different paths in the decision process based on their priority (quick result vs. team development). Furthermore, despite the increased complexity of the model, the authors sought to improve usability.

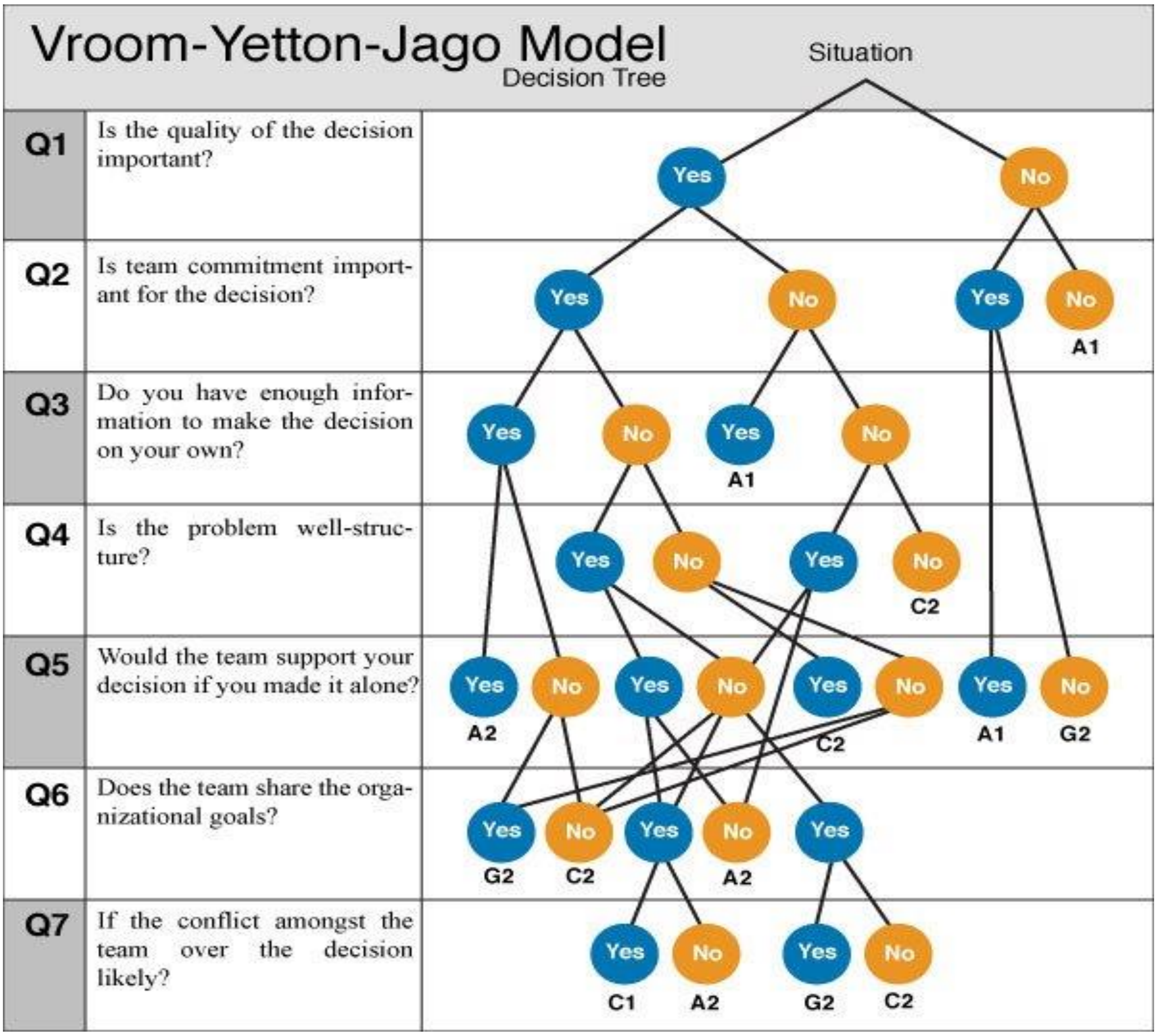


Figure 1 Wroom-Yetton-Jago Model

*Source: https://www.designorate.com/vroom-yetton-jagohow-to-decide/*

Vroom and Jago leveraged computer technology to create a computerized decision support system for the model: software into which a leader could input the situational characteristics, and the program would calculate the recommended decision style (Vroom, 1988). This made the model significantly more user-friendly, since a computer could quickly handle large amounts of information and complex formulas, making it easier for leaders to apply the model in practice. Overall, the Vroom–Jago model became much more detailed and nuanced than its predecessor: it accounts for trade-offs between decision quality and acceptance, measures the degree of situational factors, and more flexibly addresses different leadership goals (speed vs. development). It presents this more sophisticated model in a modernized format without requiring the leader to perform complex calculations – these are handled by the model's algorithm or its computer implementation.

The Vroom–Yetton–Jago model (Figure 1) had significant impact in academia and became part of the standard toolkit in numerous textbooks and leadership training programs. In terms of practical utility, the model provides leaders with a structured framework to approach decisions in a thoughtful, consistent way.

Numerous case studies and research findings confirm that when leaders act consistently with the model's recommendations, their decisions are more successful: Vroom & Jago (1988) summarized that decisions made in accordance with the model's recommended style were roughly twice as likely to be effective as those that deviated from it Vroom & Jago (Denison et al., 1995; Heilman et al., 1984). This suggests that the logic underpinning the model – namely, tailoring the decision procedure to the situation – indeed improves decision quality and implement ability.

The model's practical application has the added benefit of increasing subordinate commitment: if a leader involves the team in the decision when appropriate, team members may feel that their input is valued, which in turn strengthens their commitment to the decision and their sense of responsibility for implementing it.

Additionally, the model's use can save time in the long term by avoiding unnecessary consultations: it helps determine when it is worthwhile to invest energy in group deliberation and when it is not. For example, in a routine, less significant decision, the model might suggest an autocratic procedure, so the leader does not waste time on an unnecessarily broad consultation. In contrast, for a high-stakes decision that affects the team, the model recognizes the need for involvement, so although the decision process may take longer, implementation will be smoother due to the consensus.

The model's flexibility, therefore, allows different leadership strategies for different types of decisions, which in practice aligns with common sense (the principle of "decide alone, if possible, but involve the team if needed"). Nevertheless, applying the model requires learning and practice on the part of leaders: they must understand the seven situational questions and the logic behind them to use the model effectively – whether instinctively or deliberately – in their daily decisions. Empirical studies have been conducted in various industries and cultures to test the model's practical effectiveness. For example, a field study in a service organization found that leadership behaviour following the model's recommendations led to higher subordinate acceptance of decisions (Paul & Ebadi, 1989).

Similarly, Vroom and Jago pointed out that correct use of the model increases the likelihood of decision success. Naturally, because of the wide variety of real situations, the model does not guarantee 100% success, but it provides a useful framework that many leaders claim to have applied successfully.

The model's popularity is evidenced by the fact that even decades after its development it remains a reference point in the literature on leadership decision-making, and numerous modern leadership development programs have integrated its approach into their training materials. Like any leadership theory, the Vroom–Yetton–Jago model has its limitations and critics.

One of the most frequently mentioned criticisms is the model's complexity. Even early on, there were opinions that the model was too complicated for practicing managers to use in everyday situations (Field, 1979). Field's analytical critique suggested that while the Vroom–Yetton model is commendably well-grounded scientifically, it outlines such a complex decision process that it is hard for practitioners to follow, thus limiting its usefulness in day-to-day leadership (Field, 1979).

Other researchers have pointed out that when using the model, a leader must answer seven questions and trace through the decision tree, which can be time-consuming – especially in fast-moving or crisis situations when thorough analysis may not be possible.

Furthermore, the model assumes that the leader can objectively assess the situational factors – for example, judge how structured the problem is or predict whether subordinates would accept the leader's unilateral decision. However, a leader's perceptions can be subjective and can easily lead to a faulty situational analysis. If the leader misdiagnoses the situation (e.g., underestimates subordinates' resistance or overestimates their own level of information), then even the decision path suggested by the model will not be appropriate. In summary, critics of the model's complexity argue that it can be too "mechanical" and cumbersome, making it less practical in a dynamic environment where a leader may need to make quick, improvised decisions (Field, 1979). This criticism is tempered, however, by the fact that the Vroom–Jago improvements aimed to enhance usability – for example, through computer support – and that the "cost" of complexity can be offset by the benefits of better-grounded decisions. Another common criticism of the model is that it does not sufficiently account for cultural differences in decision-making.

The Vroom–Yetton model was originally developed in and for a North American leadership culture, and it implicitly assumes values whereby participative leadership is generally positive and involving subordinates in decisions is desirable. However, international research shows that leadership style preferences can vary significantly across different countries and cultures (Reber et al., 2004).

Bottger et al. (1985) found that managers in less developed countries tended to use more autocratic decision methods in certain situations than did managers in more developed countries. This suggests that national and organizational culture influences how well the Vroom–Yetton–Jago logic works. For instance, in high power-distance cultures (where hierarchy is accepted and autocratic leadership is the norm), subordinates may not expect – and indeed may not prefer – to be involved in decision-making; in such an environment, the model's "ideal" recommendation of group decision-making might not yield the best outcome. Similarly, in collectivist cultures group deliberation may feel more natural, whereas in individualist contexts a quick individual decision may be more acceptable.

Critics point out that Vroom's algorithm does not explicitly include any variable to account for cultural norms or group maturity, and therefore its cultural sensitivity is limited (Dinibutun, 2020). To mitigate this gap, some researchers have proposed testing and calibrating the model in various cultural settings (e.g. East Asia vs. Western Europe), but given the very nature of contingency theory, the authors themselves have acknowledged that situational particularities – including cultural background – can influence the optimal mode of decision-making (Vroom & Yago, 2007).

Further critical observations include that the model focuses only on a single aspect of leader behaviour – the decision-making process – and does not address other leadership roles (such as creating vision or motivating followers), thereby providing only a partial picture of leadership (Field, 1979). In other words, even if a leader selects the decision-making mode optimally according to the model, they might still be a less effective leader in other dimensions. In addition, the model assumes that a leader can employ any style, even though in reality leaders have personal limitations: for example, a charismatic but control-oriented leader may find it difficult to truly delegate decision authority to the group, even when the situation would dictate it.

The model does not address such differences in personality or ability. Finally, some critics have noted that the model's decision tree often yields multiple equally acceptable alternatives (a so-called feasible set of possible styles) and offers no guidance on which one the leader should choose.

Under Vroom and Yetton's original rules, any style not ruled out by the decision rules was considered acceptable – but critics pointed out that even within this set there might be better or worse choices. This uncertainty reduces the model's practical utility, since leaders typically turn to the model for clear advice.

The Vroom–Jago version attempted to address this problem by introducing weighted equations for its decision recommendations instead of rigid rules. Overall, the critiques emphasize that although the Vroom–Yetton–Jago model is scientifically well-founded and offers a logical framework, it is not necessarily a universal recipe for every situation – leaders must still draw on their judgment and experience when applying it.

The Vroom–Yetton–Jago model has over five decades of history, and during that time the organizational environment has changed dramatically. In the 21st century, new challenges have emerged that may require further refinement or extension of the model. One such challenge is the spread of hybrid work and the ubiquity of virtual teams and digital collaboration tools. The model originally assumed that leaders and subordinates work mostly together in the same place and time, and that communication occurs in in-person meetings.

In hybrid and remote work environments, however, the decision-making process involves new considerations: for example, the role of communication technology, how to build trust in an online setting, or the impact of linguistic and cultural diversity in a global virtual team. Research has shown that in virtual teams, decision-making success is influenced by factors such as the effective use of digital tools, detailed information sharing, and trust among team members (Davidaviciene et al., 2020). They found in a survey in the United Arab Emirates that the level of trust and the information and communication technologies (ICT) used have a direct effect on the decision-making processes of virtual teams, and through this on team performance. This suggests that it would be worthwhile to incorporate new questions or modules into the Vroom–Yetton–Jago model that consider the unique circumstances of virtual collaboration – for example: "Is an appropriate communication platform available to involve the group?" or "Is the level of trust among team members sufficient for open information sharing?" In hybrid work arrangements, a typical problem is isolation and information gaps: the leader must consider how to involve those who are physically remote in a decision so that they do not miss out on important information. In the future, improved versions of the model could extend to these aspects, offering guidance on how to "digitalize" decision-making – for example, by incorporating asynchronous online brainstorming tools or anonymous voting to rapidly assess group opinions ((Reber et al., 2004; Őri & Rudnák, 2019).

The digital revolution offers another angle: new possibilities for technology-assisted decision support. Vroom and Jago themselves took advantage of then-modern technology in 1988 by creating a computer program for their model. Since then, technology has advanced in leaps and bounds: today, one can envision incorporating artificial intelligence, expert systems, or fuzzy logic into the model's application. Indeed, the literature suggests that in the future even expert systems, machine learning, or fuzzy logic techniques could be used to automate the model's more nuanced application (Lührs et al., 2018). For example, by training neural networks on large databases of past decisions, the model could be fine-tuned to predict which style would yield the best results in a certain decision context within a given organization.

Mls & Otčenášková (2013) also experimented with improving the model: they integrated the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) method into the Vroom–Yetton framework and applied fuzzy decision trees to address weaknesses related to the model's validity and reliability. Their findings indicated that such a multi-criteria approach could better accommodate individual leaders' decision preferences and make the model's recommendations less rigid. These new directions show that the theoretical core of the Vroom–Yetton–Jago model remains relevant, but modern technological tools can greatly aid its practical application.

Finally, a key area for further development of the model lies in cross-cultural adaptation. As globalization increasingly affects organizations, there is a growing need for leaders to manage multicultural teams. Future versions of the model could incorporate factors such as cultural dimensions (e.g., Hofstede's indices) to fine-tune the decision tree's outcomes based on the cultural composition of the team. For instance, in a high power-distance culture, the model might be more tolerant of an autocratic decision-making style without compromising implementation, whereas in a low power-distance, consensus-oriented culture it might prioritize group involvement more strongly.

Similarly, it could consider the team's gender makeup, generational differences, or even personality types, since these can also influence how members react to a leader's decision-making style. The basic principle of the Vroom–Yetton model – that effective leadership is rooted in a decision-making method suited to the situation – has proven to be a timeless concept. However, in the face of today's challenges, the notion of what constitutes the "situation" has expanded: the digital realm, cross-cultural collaboration, and hybrid work are now all part of the context. Accordingly, future iterations of the model will likely incorporate these factors explicitly (Dinibutun, 2020).

In summary, the Vroom–Yetton–Jago model's further development opportunities lie primarily in making it more flexible, technologically supported, and culturally sensitive, thereby enabling leaders to answer the question of how to decide in 21st-century organizations. The theory's foundation remains unchanged, but the tools and frameworks for its application require continuous innovation so that the model can indeed remain a timeless practical guide for leaders.

## 3 Results

The chief strength of the Vroom–Yetton normative decision model is that it provides a structured framework for leadership decision-making. Using a predefined set of questions and a decision tree, the model guides the leader through the decision process, allowing the appropriate decision-making style to be determined in an objective and well-thought-out manner. This situational approach ensures that there is no single, universal leadership style that applies to every scenario: the mode of decision-making is always dictated by the characteristics of the current situation. As a result, the model adapts flexibly to circumstances – offering, for example, a different approach for a routine decision that must be made under time pressure than for a strategic decision of great importance that requires thorough deliberation. Additionally, the model emphasizes the possibility of involving subordinates in decisions: when appropriate, the leader can solicit team members' opinions or even strive for a joint consensus (Pol, 2020). This not only can improve the quality of the decision (since more information and perspectives are brought to bear), but also increases commitment to the decision's implementation, as team members feel ownership of the outcome (Margerison & Glube, 1979).

Overall, the Vroom–Yetton model provides an organized, logical framework for decision-making and helps balance efficiency, decision quality, and team involvement. Although the concept of the Vroom–Yetton model is strong, several weaknesses have been noted in the literature.

One of the most frequently mentioned drawbacks is the model's complexity and the difficulty of applying it. Using the decision tree and answering seven or eight questions can at times be complicated and time-consuming, particularly in rapidly changing or high-pressure decision situations.

Consequently, in everyday practice the model's every step may be hard for leaders to follow, and there is a risk that it makes the decision-making process too mechanistic or inflexible (Lührs et al., 2018). Another critique is that the model oversimplifies real decision situations: it accounts for only a few rational factors (e.g. availability of information, requirement for decision quality, need for subordinate acceptance), while ignoring numerous human and organizational factors. It does not explicitly address emotional factors – such as the level of trust between the leader and subordinates, motivation, team morale, or communication dynamics – nor does it consider varying cultural contexts. This can be problematic, since in some cultures or organizational settings people respond differently to autocratic versus participative decision-making (Pol, 2020).

Furthermore, the model assumes that the leader can accurately assess the situation and answer the questions without bias; in reality, the decision-maker's own perceptions and biases can influence how they evaluate, for example, their subordinates' willingness to cooperate or the structuredness of the problem.

Finally, it can be noted that the Vroom–Yetton framework provides no guidance on how to communicate or implement the decision – it focuses solely on the decision-making method itself. These limitations imply that while the model offers useful guidance, a leader must also consider factors beyond the model's scope when applying it.

Vroom and Jago responded to some of the original model's shortcomings with the 1988 refinement of the model. The new Vroom–Jago version has the advantage of approaching the decision process in an even more detailed and nuanced way. Whereas the original model worked with strict yes/no questions, the Vroom–Jago version allowed for graded evaluation of factors, thus handling cases more flexibly when an aspect is not a clear-cut yes or no. This made the model's recommendations more precise, as it could indicate more finely which style best fits a situation. In addition, the introduction of separate time versus development decision paths (the "time-driven" vs. "development-driven" approach) allows the leader to consider whether quick decision-making is the greater priority in each scenario, or whether it is more important to involve subordinates and, in doing so, develop the team's commitment and competencies for the long term. This addition underscores that sometimes it is worthwhile to invest more time in a participative process for the sake of developing subordinates, whereas other times a rapid response takes precedence – depending on the strategic aim of the situation (Margerison & Glube, 1979).

The Vroom–Jago model also considered a larger array of situational variables and became mathematically more complex, yet the creators provided a computer-based support tool, which paradoxically made it easier to use for leaders. In summary, the Vroom–Jago variant offers a more sophisticated decision logic: it overcomes some of the binary limitations of the original model and gives leaders the opportunity to tailor the decision-making process according to organizational priorities. All this was achieved while retaining the core idea of a structured, situational decision-making approach, thereby enhancing the model's practical value. Although the Vroom–Yetton model was originally developed decades ago, several of its features align very well with the 21st-century leadership environment (Vignesh, 2020).

Today, workplaces place increasing emphasis on psychological safety, meaning an organizational culture where team members can voice their opinions and ideas openly without fear of repercussions. This factor is closely tied to the success of the participative elements of the Vroom–Yetton model: if a leader identifies that a problem is best solved by involving the team, it is essential that the members feel safe to speak honestly and share their knowledge (Pol, 2020). In the absence of psychological safety, participative decision-making can easily become a formality – subordinates might not dare to raise genuine concerns or creative ideas – thus the model's promised benefits (better information, greater commitment) would not materialize.

Conversely, in an atmosphere of trust and openness, the inclusive style recommended by the Vroom–Yetton model can fully unleash its positive effects, and this is in harmony with modern principles of inclusive leadership. The spread of digitalization and artificial intelligence also creates a new context for applying the model (Uslu et al., 2025). The structured nature of the Vroom–Yetton model makes it amenable to integration into digital decision-support systems (Sousa et al., 2023).

Today, there are algorithms and software that can assist leaders in analysing decision situations – for example, quickly gathering relevant information, surveying the team's opinions through online questionnaires, or simulating the potential consequences of different decision options (Lührs et al., 2018).

The Vroom–Yetton logic can be embedded into such systems, which, by guiding the leader through targeted questions, suggest an appropriate decision-making mode. Artificial intelligence can further boost the model's effectiveness: AI can analyse large amounts of data related to decision quality and acceptability; thus, it can help the leader answer the model's questions more accurately (for instance, it could forecast how acceptable a certain decision would be to subordinates). Naturally, the final decision and responsibility remain with the leader, but AI-based support can aid in understanding complex situations and in the consistent application of the model (Vignesh, 2020).

Ultimately, the core principles of the Vroom–Yetton model – a situational approach to decision-making that also weighs participation – have remained relevant in the modern, technology-infused organizational environment. Indeed, with the right organizational culture and advanced digital tools, the model can contribute even more effectively to better decisions and to solutions that enjoy the support of the team (Jago, 2017).

## 4 Conclusion

Despite its decades-long existence, the Vroom–Yetton normative decision-making model continues to hold significant prominence in leadership theory and organizational decision-making discourse. The model's central message – that leadership decision-making cannot be viewed as a uniform procedure applicable to all situations – still serves as a fundamental guideline for leaders today.

One of the model's greatest innovations lies in embedding leadership decision-making within a structured diagnostic process, which allows decisions to be considered in a deliberate, context-sensitive manner, while still leaving room for leadership flexibility and self-reflection. By now, the situational interpretation of leadership decision-making has become not only a foundation of the leadership literature, but it has also shaped practical leadership training and organizational operations. Participative leadership, emphasized by the model, has been shown to have positive effects on employee satisfaction, commitment, and loyalty, as well as on an organization's capacity for innovation.

The organizational changes of the past two decades in particular – such as flattening hierarchies, network-based operations, and hybrid work – have given rise to needs to which the model's logic is excellently suited. These include, for example, supporting team autonomy, developing a culture of shared decision-making, and strengthening trust between leader and subordinate.

Nevertheless, there are numerous challenges in applying the model in practice. The decision-tree structure forces the leader into a form of "algorithmic thinking" which, while it aids systematic thought, does not offer a sufficiently flexible framework in every situation. In crisis situations, rapidly changing environments, or decisions fraught with strong emotional tension, a rational, logic-based approach may not necessarily yield an optimal solution. In addition, a critical issue for the model is cultural adaptation: participative decision-making does not carry the same meaning in every organizational or national culture, so the universality of the model can only be maintained with qualifications. Another important challenge is managing informal organizational factors.

The Vroom–Yetton model typically considers formal and measurable criteria, yet decision-making involves many hidden dynamics such as power relations, influence networks, organizational politics, or individual interests. Leadership intuition, experience, and situational intelligence are indispensable complements to rational decision-making in these cases – and the model incorporates these elements very little into its decision structure. Therefore, in practical application the model should not be viewed as an exclusive tool, but rather as a useful framework that must be supplemented by other considerations. The further-developed versions – particularly the Vroom–Jago model – have been able to partially respond to some of these critiques.

The introduction of weighted decision matrices and software-based decision-support tools opened new possibilities for digitizing structured decision-making. These tools allow leaders to interpret situations more quickly and accurately, and they support documented, traceable decision-making, which increases not only effectiveness but also accountability.

The model thus integrates well into modern leadership systems, and it can also be evolved in directions that consider the possibilities of artificial intelligence and big data–based decision support. Numerous directions present themselves for future research. On one hand, it would be worthwhile to empirically examine the model's application in various industry and cultural contexts; on the other hand, to further develop the model so that emotional and social aspects – such as psychological safety, communication style, and relationships among team members – become integrated components of it. Such development would not only enrich the theoretical framework but also bring leadership practice closer to reality. In summary, it can be stated that the Vroom–Yetton model provides a timeless, structured, yet further improvable framework for bringing consciousness to leadership decision-making.

The value of the model lies not only in offering guidance for different situations, but also in encouraging leaders to cultivate a more responsible, open, and participation-oriented leadership practice. For future leaders, this type of reflexive and situational decision-making model may prove not only to be a key to success, but also to become a driver in shaping the quality of organizational culture.

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# First Impressions and Meta-Accuracy: A Bibliographical Review of the latest Theoretical and Empirical Research

**Abstract**: This bibliographic review examines recent theoretical and methodological advances in the study of first impressions, with a focus on meta-accuracy, natural language analysis, and cultural learning. The present paper aims to present the major developments in the field through a systematic interpretation of the most significant empirical findings and conceptual frameworks. The results presented point towards a theoretical model that considers both inherited mechanisms and the effects of cultural learning. This approach is also relevant for practical applications, especially in the fields of education, health and recruitment, where the role of rapid impression formation is critical.

**Keywords:** First Impression, Meta-Accuracy, Natural Language Processing, Cultural Learning, Social Perception, Valence-Dominance Model

## 1 Introduction

First impressions research is one of the oldest and most actively studied areas of social psychology. Early studies, such as the classic experiment (Kelley, 1950) on the effect of 'warm-cold' cues, showed early on that even a single word can have a significant effect on the perception of a person. Since then, the field has undergone significant theoretical and methodological development. The finding that people can form stable personality impressions in a very short time, up to 100 milliseconds (Bar et al., 2006; Willis & Todorov, 2006) has received considerable attention. This speed raises fundamental questions about the nature of first impressions, particularly the relationship between innate and culturally learned mechanisms. Among the dimensional models, the valence-dominance framework has become dominant, which organizes facial trait inferences along two main dimensions – trustworthiness and threat (valence) and physical strength and control potential (dominance) (Oosterhof & Todorov, 2008).

The research directions of the last decade are concentrated around three main areas. The first is the study of meta-accuracy, which analyses how accurately individuals perceive how others perceive them (Tsankova & Tair, 2021). The second is the application of natural language processing techniques that allow the linguistic content of spontaneous impressions to be analysed (Jones et al., 2024). And the third aims to reinterpret the relationship between innate mechanisms and cultural learning, with a particular focus on cultural patterns of automatic impression formation (Eggleston et al., 2021; Over & Cook, 2018).

One of the starting points for this research was a classic experiment that investigated the effect of prior information on person perception and showed that even a single descriptive phrase can significantly alter the impression of a subject (Kelley, 1950).

Subsequent studies have confirmed that as little as a few hundredths of a second of visual stimulus can be sufficient to detect persistent features associated with facial features (Bar et al., 2006; Willis & Todorov, 2006).

The structure of face-based perceptions is described by a two-factor model that organizes impressions along dimensions of valence, which expresses trustworthiness and benevolence, and dominance, which is related to physical controllability (Oosterhof & Todorov, 2008). In parallel, findings have emerged that suggest that social evaluations are not based solely on innate mechanisms. Some socially mediated associations, such as the link between spectacles and intelligence, may also be automatically activated (Eggleston et al., 2021).

The notion of meta-accuracy – the accuracy with which someone correctly perceives others' impressions of them – has been investigated using different conceptualisation approaches, which have been systematised in a review of twenty studies (Tsankova & Tair, 2021). The emergence of natural language processing methods has opened new directions in the textual analysis of spontaneous utterances, by exploring the thematic structure of free-form descriptions (Jones et al., 2024). In a practical context, studies have also suggested that there may be a medium-strength relationship between first impressions and structured evaluation results, which may warrant a rethinking of selection procedures (Klusmann et al., 2023).

The critique of research methodological practice has recently received special emphasis. The ethnic homogeneity of facial images – in particular the predominance of white faces – significantly limits the generalizability of results (Cook & Over, 2021), while other analyses have pointed out that different facial images of the same person can lead to significantly different evaluations (Todorov & Porter, 2014). Theoretical frameworks that emphasize the role of cultural learning, such as Trait Inference Mapping (TIM), highlight associative links between facial features and stereotypical inferences, building on individual experiences and socialization (Over & Cook, 2018). And reviews that focus on historical development map processes from classical experiments to modern theoretical constructs (Zebrowitz, 2017).

The issue of the balance between reliability and ecological validity has also been highlighted, pointing out that structured and reproducible research procedures often simplify the complexity of real-world social situations (Satchell et al., 2023).

The aim of this paper is to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of the field, integrating the theoretical approaches outlined above and outlining possible future directions. Particular attention will be paid to practical applications and methodological challenges, such as the ethnic homogeneity of samples (Over & Cook, 2018), and the problem of impression variance induced by different images (Todorov & Porter, 2014). In addition, there is a strong critical perspective that sees the focus on methodological reliability as a shift at the expense of ecological validity (Satchell et al., 2023).

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Classical Foundations: the "Warm-Cold" Paradigm and the Phenomenon of Rapidity

One of the early milestones in the study of social perception was the demonstration that prior information – even a single word – can have a significant impact on the formation of impressions. In a classic study, participants were given a description of an instructor in which all the information was the same except for one key word: the person was described as either "warm" or "cold". This slight difference proved to be enough to lead participants to form different impressions of the person (Kelley, 1950).

The results were dramatic: the instructor who was labelled "warm" was perceived by the students as much more positive (Kelley, 1950). 56% of participants with "warm" expectations participated in the interview, compared to only 32% of those with "cold" expectations. This experiment established a theoretical framework for the field and demonstrated that minimal prior information can transform overall social perception.

Several decades later, Bar et al. (2006) as well as Willis & Todorov (2006), have conducted remarkable research that shed new light on how impressions are formed during social perception. In these experiments, the researchers investigated how long it takes for an impression of a person to stabilize.

Bar et al. (2006) worked with three different exposure times: an extremely short (26 ms), a slightly longer (39 ms) and a relatively long (1700 ms) presentation. Surprisingly, they found that impressions formed during even the short 39 ms presentation were significantly similar ($r = 0.49$) to those formed during the longer exposure. In contrast, for the even shorter 26 millisecond exposure, the correlation between impressions was very weak and did not reach the level of statistical significance.

A study on a larger sample confirmed that first impressions are stable even after very short exposures of up to 100 milliseconds. The results showed that this requires only minimal conscious perception, yet the consistency of impressions remains high (Willis & Todorov, 2006).

### 2.2 The Valence-Dominance Model: Theoretical Paradigm

In their paradigm-shifting research, Oosterhof & Todorov (2008) developed a model that fundamentally reshaped understanding. They conceptualise our impressions of people around two main aspects. The first is valence, which measures how trustworthy and well-intentioned we perceive a person to be. The other is dominance, which is our perception of how strong, assertive, or potentially dangerous a person is to us.

This valence-dominance model has since provided a dominant theoretical framework for research. The valence dimension includes traits such as trustworthiness, emotional stability, responsibility and caring, which are related to the perception of social intentions (Oosterhof & Todorov, 2008). The dominance dimension correlates with traits such as aggressiveness and viciousness, which are related to the other person's ability to cause physical threat.

This two-dimensional model accounted for 81.6% of the variance in explicit trait ratings, providing very strong empirical support (Oosterhof & Todorov, 2008). The model has since been supported by several cross-cultural studies, although more recent studies have identified additional dimensions in certain contexts.

### 2.3 Meta-accuracy: Self-awareness in the Social Space

The state of the art in meta-accuracy research is presented in a summary of 20 studies that highlight the main theoretical and methodological trends in the field (Tsankova & Tair, 2021). Meta-accuracy refers to the degree to which we can accurately perceive how the other person sees us in each social situation, for example during a first encounter.

The research follows two basic conceptualisation approaches. The first is the so-called global metrics approach, which treats meta-accuracy as a stand-alone indicator, typically through the comparison of correlations, regressions or averages. The other, more complex strand – the componential approach – examines perceptual accuracy by considering the preceptor, target and situational characteristics together, usually using multilevel statistical models (Tsankova & Tair, 2021).

The three main foci of this theme are (1) to explore empirical evidence on the existence and characteristics of meta-accuracy, (2) to examine how personality traits and social behaviour are related to meta-accuracy, and (3) to analyse meta-accuracy in online contexts, such as text-based or visual online communication. While most studies have been based on live, face-to-face interactions, in recent years there has been an increasing use of research based on videos, photographs and online texts.

Natural language approaches: methodological innovation

The use of natural language processing techniques has opened new horizons in this research. In a recent study, free-text descriptions of 2222 facial images provided by the 10k US Adult Faces Database (Jones et al., 2024) were analysed using a Non-Negative Matrix Factorization (NMF) algorithm, which allowed the identification of dominant themes in the linguistic representation of impressions.

The analysis revealed two major, coherent themes. The first theme related to positive emotional valence and warmth and was characterised by words such as "happy", "friendly", "kind", "smile" and "nice". The second theme reflected negative emotional valence and potential threat, with characteristic words including "serious", "sad", "angry", "unhappy", and "shy" (Jones et al., 2024). A strong negative correlation was found between the two themes ($r = -0.65$, 94% Credible Interval [-0.67, -0.62]).

Comparing the results of the NMF-based natural language analysis with the Valence and Dominance components from the traditional explicit trait evaluations, the latter were found to explain only about 44% of the variance in natural language topics. This suggests that an approach based on natural language processing provides additional information compared to standard dimensionality reduction procedures and may be suitable for a richer mapping of subjective impressions.

### 2.4 Cultural Learning versus Innate Mechanisms

Recent research has fundamentally challenged the assumption that impressions are based solely on innate mechanisms. The study analysed a culturally mediated association that links wearing glasses with intelligence and showed that such learned impressions can also be activated rapidly and automatically, like biologically based trait inferences (Eggleston et al., 2021). The findings suggest that culturally acquired patterns of meaning can also become part of primary, reflexive social perception processes.

The four-phase research design first demonstrated the baseline effect: faces with glasses were rated significantly more intelligent ($M = 5.2$, $SD = 0.8$) compared to faces without glasses ($M = 4.1$, $SD = 0.7$), $t(23) = 4.8$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.51$ (Eggleston et al., 2021). In the second phase, the effect persisted despite the "ignore glasses" instruction. The third study showed the effect even after 100 milliseconds of exposure, while the fourth study provided a developmental perspective.

One theoretical explanation for this phenomenon is the Trait Inference Mapping (TIM) model, which posits that spontaneous trait inferences are based on face-space and trait-space mappings (Over & Cook, 2018). This approach emphasizes that these mappings are formed during individual developmental experiences in which cultural learning plays a prominent role.

Further evidence has emerged from anthropological research that cultural learning plays a significant role in shaping trait formation (Over et al., 2020). Their findings suggest that certain traits of image may be associated with different trait outcomes in different cultural contexts, supporting the determinants of cultural factors.

### 2.5 Practical Relevance: MMI Studies and Applications

A pilot study with 196 applicants investigated the practical role of meta-accuracy in a specific assessment situation (Klusmann et al., 2023). The assessment took place immediately after the applicant's appearance, before the interaction started.

The internal consistency indicators showed good reliability for both the first impression scale ($\alpha = 0.71$) and the MMI performance scale ($\alpha = 0.69$) (Klusmann et al., 2023). There was a correlation of $r = 0.49$ between first impression and MMI performance across the whole sample. This correlation was maintained ($r = 0.37$) when first impression and MMI performance were measured by different raters.

Surprisingly, the MMI performance did not provide significant incremental validity after the first impression ($\Delta R^2 = 0.002$, $p > .05$) (Klusmann et al., 2023).

This result raises serious questions about the cost-benefit ratio of the expensive and time-consuming MMI method.

### 2.6 Critical Perspectives and Methodological Challenges

A prominent methodological problem with this research is that most studies (88–90%) use only white faces, which poses significant limitations to the generalizability of the results (Cook & Over, 2021). This lack of diversity raises three main problems: first, it makes it difficult to assess accuracy; second, it does not eliminate stereotypes but rather activates other types; and third, it does not realistically reflect the diverse social situations of everyday life (Over & Cook, 2018).

A further important methodological insight is that different images of the same person can lead to significantly different impressions (Todorov & Porter, 2014). The results show that impressions of different images of the same person differ at least as much as impressions of different people differ. This fundamentally challenges the common assumption that an image is a clear reflection of a person's personality (Todorov & Porter, 2014).

First impressions research has evolved considerably from the classic work of Asch (1946) to the present day. Asch's initial investigations established an approach suggesting that spontaneously formed face-based impressions often rely on overgeneralizations of certain facial features with adaptive significance. Examples include infant-like facial features, emotional expressions, or signs of physical health (Zebrowitz, 2017).

Recently, the field has made major methodological advances, such as the use of open stimulus databases, international collaborations and replication studies. However, these developments do not always increase the validity of the results. Reductionist approaches and atomized person representations often just barely reduce the ecological validity of results and are less reflective of the complexity of everyday situations (Satchell et al., 2023).

## 3 Results: Thematic Synthesis of Findings

### 3.1 Structural convergence and theoretical integration

The studies reviewed paint a convergent picture of first impressions' nature in several key areas. In the field of structural organization, both traditional trait evaluation methods (Oosterhof & Todorov, 2008) and modern natural language processing techniques (Jones et al., 2024) support the idea that impressions are organized along two main dimensions.

In the domain of speed and automaticity, it has been shown that stable impressions can be formed in as little as 100 ms (Bar et al., 2006; Willis & Todorov, 2006), and this speed is also characteristic of culturally learned associations (Eggleston et al., 2021). This integration is particularly significant because it bridges the innate versus learned mechanisms debate.

Meta-accuracy research (Tsankova & Tair, 2021) and practical applications (Klusmann et al., 2023) demonstrate that impressions do have predictive value for social competence, with important practical implications for the design of assessment systems.

### 3.2 Integrated Theoretical Model

Based on the literature, a three-level integrated model emerges, which combines different theoretical approaches:

1. *Evolutionary base level:* evolutionary roots of preferences for certain facial features (symmetry, large eyes, infant features) that may be linked to survival and reproductive success (Zebrowitz, 2017).
2. *Cultural learning level:* the impact of social messages and cultural associations (e.g., spectacle-intelligence, attractiveness-competence relationships), as described in detail in the TIM model (Over & Cook, 2018).
3. *Cognitive processing level 3:* Rapid, automatic integration with information from both previous levels, resulting in the valence-dominance dimensions (Oosterhof & Todorov, 2008).

### 3.3 Methodological Developments and Challenges

There has been a significant evolution in methodology: while classical experimental manipulations dominated initially (Kelley, 1950), later, precisely timed exposure studies (Bar et al., 2006; Willis & Todorov, 2006). More recently, natural language processing algorithms (Jones et al., 2024), and comprehensive methodological taxonomies (Tsankova & Tair, 2021) have also been published, further enriching the toolbox.

However, methodological progress is not without its problems. Efforts to improve reliability, such as open stimulus databases and replication studies, are often associated with a decrease in ecological validity (Satchell et al., 2023). Other challenges include issues related to diversity (Over & Cook, 2018) and the effect of different images of the same person creating different impressions (Todorov & Porter, 2014), all of which can cloud the generalizability and validity of research.

## 4 Conclusions and Future Orientations

### 4.1 Key Findings

Research on first impressions has evolved considerably in recent decades. The 15 studies reviewed reveal several important conclusions:

1. *Structural organization:* impressions are consistently organized along two main dimensions (valence/warmth and dominance/threat), which is supported by both traditional trait evaluation methods (Oosterhof & Todorov, 2008) and modern natural language processing techniques (Jones et al., 2024).
2. *Speed and automaticity:* the extreme speed of social perception (Bar et al., 2006; Willis & Todorov, 2006) and the automaticity of culturally learned associations (Eggleston et al., 2021) suggest an integrated processing system.

3. *The importance of meta-accuracy:* Systematic reviews (Tsankova & Tair, 2021) and empirical studies (Klusmann et al., 2023) clearly demonstrate that meta-accuracy is a real phenomenon with predictive value for social competence.
4. *The role of cultural learning***:** paradigm-shifting research (Eggleston et al., 2021; Over & Cook, 2018; Over et al., 2020) has shown that culturally learned associations can also have features of automaticity and rapidity.
5. *Methodological challenges:* critical analyses (Cook & Over, 2021; (Satchell et al., 2023; Todorov & Porter, 2014) point to the importance of the lack of diversity, the reliability-validity dilemma and the stimulus-variance problem.

### 4.2 Future Research Priorities

Four main directions emerge from the literature reviewed:

1. *Increasing cultural diversity:* addressing ethnic homogeneity in research samples is not only a methodological requirement but also a theoretical need to understand universal and culturally specific aspects (Cook & Over, 2021).
2. *Methodological innovation***:** developing dynamic, interactive paradigms that better reflect real-world social interactions and enhance ecological validity (Satchell et al., 2023).
3. *Longitudinal studies:* examining the stability and change of first impressions over time is essential to fully understand the phenomenon (Todorov & Porter, 2014).
4. *Technology applications:* advancing natural language processing techniques and developing artificial intelligence-based evaluation systems for more sophisticated analysis of spontaneous impressions (Jones et al., 2024).

### 4.3 Practical Applications and Social Implications

In educational settings, awareness of implicit biases and the development of meta-accuracy are of particular importance, especially in light of one study showing a medium-strength correlation ($r = 0.49$) between impressions and structured interview (MMI) performance, which raises questions about the need for costly assessment methods (Klusmann et al., 2023).

Improving the quality of the therapeutic relationship in clinical practice and increasing the objectivity of recruitment and selection processes in the organisational sphere could be important ways forward. However, the development of cultural competence becomes essential in multicultural societies where the understanding between individuals from different backgrounds is a particularly sensitive area.

### 4.4 Theoretical Challenges and Limitations

The studies reviewed have several methodological and theoretical limitations. In the area of cultural representativeness, most of the studies reviewed focus on WEIRD populations (Over & Cook, 2018), which limits the generalisability of the results.

In terms of ecological validity, many studies still use static images instead of real dynamic interactions (Satchell et al., 2023) which reduces the external validity of the results. The issue of image variance, which refers to the fact that different faces of the same person may give different impressions, poses additional methodological challenges in reliably measuring first impressions (Todorov & Porter, 2014).

### 4.5 Concluding Thoughts

This research is not only of basic research interest, but also a key area for understanding social cognition, cultural learning and interpersonal functioning. Together, the 15 studies reviewed paint a rich and nuanced picture of this complex phenomenon, which promises to remain an exciting field from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

The need for integration is particularly important: it is not enough to consider innate and learned mechanisms separately (Eggleston et al., 2021; Over & Cook, 2018), but to understand their dynamic interaction. Future research should follow this integrated approach, while paying attention to cultural diversity (Over & Cook, 2018), methodological validity (Satchell et al., 2023), and practical applicability (Klusmann et al., 2023).

Natural language processing techniques (Jones et al., 2024) and meta-accuracy research (Tsankova & Tair, 2021) open up new perspectives in the field, while critical analyses (Over & Cook, 2018) (Satchell et al., 2023) provide important guidance for future research. Research is thus a dynamically evolving field with significant potential to address social and practical problems.

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ZELEKE WALELIGN AMENU

# Impact of Impression Management on Performance Ratings in Ethiopia

**Abstract**: Impression management (IM) is a process through which individuals consciously or intentionally control how they are perceived by others. They subconsciously influence how others perceive them, an object, or an event by controlling information during social interactions. IM can also serve as a metaphor for human interactions. Effective impression management enhances workplace performance. Impression management by subordinates can indirectly influence their performance ratings. A 1995 study by Wayne and Liden found that a supervisor's liking and perceived similarity to a subordinate mediates the relationship between the subordinate's impression management and performance rating. Five studies examine the link between impression management tactics and performance ratings, though direct evidence from Ethiopia is limited. Other studies emphasize that factors like remote work and cultural values can moderate these impacts. Overall, while evidence from Ethiopia is sparse, the findings suggest that the effectiveness of impression management varies based on the tactics used and the organizational context.

**Keywords:** Impression Management, Performance Rating, Ethiopia.

## 1 Introduction

Human nature is dynamic and flexible, and intellectual behaviour drives people to interact with others in society. As a result, they are driven to create an impression on their intended audience (Dautenhahn, 1998).

Scholars are becoming more aware of how important impression management (IM) is and how they believe it to be a fundamental part of human nature (Dziedzic & Jastrzębowska, 2022). Human nature is highly adaptable and versatile, and individuals strive to create and maintain various impressions during their daily social interactions (Hussain et al., 2023).

Over the past 30 years, social psychologists have devoted much research to impression management and the related topics of self-presentation and integration(Tetlock & Manstead, 1985). However, in recent years, impression management (IM) has received renewed attention among scholars (Liu & Lei, 2025). Impression management tactics have been used in many areas within the organization's premises, including interviews, performance appraisal, leadership, career development & strategies, and cultural diversity (Mtshelwane et al., 2016). Impression management has gained considerable attention during the past five decades (Bolino et al., 2008).

The concept of impression management was first presented by Goffman (1959), who provided a model in which actors perform differently according to the settings and audiences (Beames et al., 2021).To date, impression management studies in the performance appraisal area have either been conducted in a laboratory setting or have employed cross-sectional designs with established supervisor-subordinate dyads (Bolino et al., 2006).

Whereas much can be learned from these studies, longitudinal research with newly formed supervisor-subordinate dyads is needed to determine whether subordinate impression management behaviour affects performance ratings over time.

Performance ratings are critical for employee development, promotions, and compensation. However, these ratings may be influenced by impression management tactics, where employees actively attempt to shape their image in front of supervisors. In Ethiopia, where hierarchical structures and collectivist values are prevalent, IM may have unique implications for performance evaluations.

The impression management tactics can be useful in controlling their images in others' minds (Goffman, 1959; Jones & Pittman, 1982), better influence the situation (Goffman, 1959) and group dynamics (Kacmar & Carlson, 1999; Johnson et al., 2016).

Although previous research has focused on the link between impression-management tactics and supervisor ratings of employee likeability and job performance, it has recently been argued that employees might also use impression management so that their superiors will see them as 'good soldiers' who engage in high levels of organizational citizenship behaviours (OCBs) (Grant & Mayer, 2009).

According to Kacmar & Carlson (1999), the attempts carried out by individuals to portray the desired images in their social networks can be referred to as impression management (IM) (Alqarni, 2025). The two parties in this definition are the actor and the target.

An actor is the individual who controls the flow of information and presents it desirably, while the target is the individual or group receiving the information (Tashmin, 2016). Although both parties are involved in this process, most researchers have only studied the role of an actor (Kacmar & Carlson, 1999).

The purpose of this article is to review the IM on performance ratings in Ethiopia, unfortunately, the impact of impression management on performance ratings in Ethiopia cannot be determined from existing research due to a lack of contextual evidence. In this systematic literature review composed of 55 articles in English published from 1990 to 2025, to explore the Impact of Impression Management on Performance Rating.

### *Searching the Empirical Literature*

In this review, the author examined various databases to explore Impression Management (IM). They identified key terms for the literature review, as shown in Figure 1 (e.g., "impression management"), using reliable sources like Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar. The search included keywords such as "impact of IM," "performance rating," "impression management development," and "job search with IM."

This process resulted in an initial yield of 55 publications.

### *Screening the Literature*

The reviewer analysed 55 publications and identified relevant studies based on specific authors, settings, designs, and sample sizes. We developed a framework to categorize the five selected articles and highlight current and future research topics.

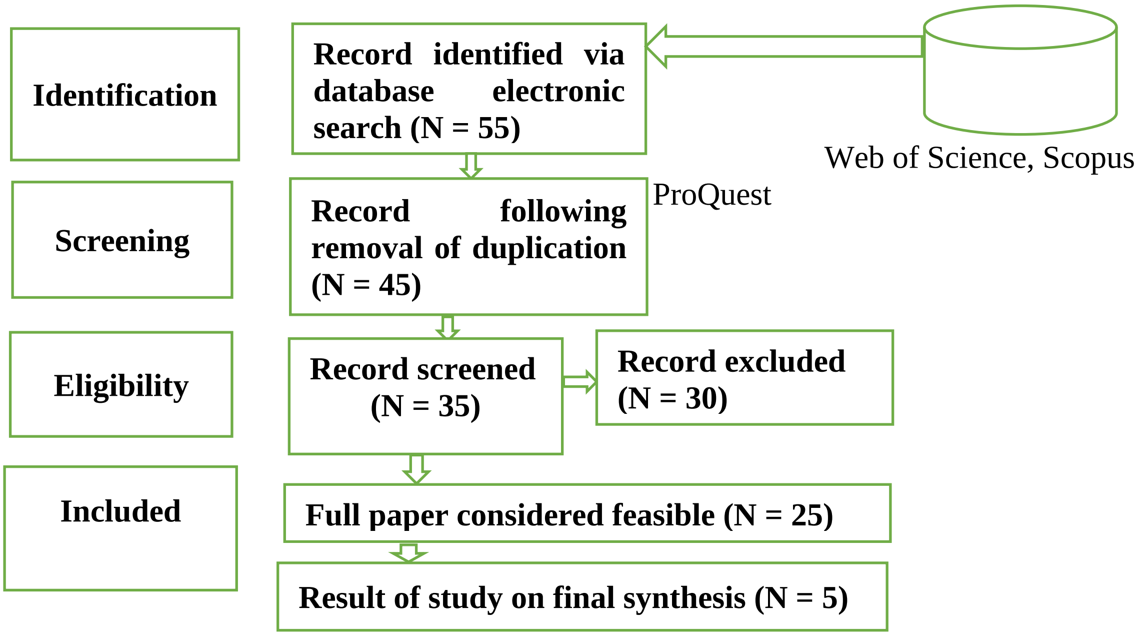


**Figure 1** Key terms for the literature review
*Source: author's own work*

### *Paper Search*

Using "the Impact of Impression Management on Performance Rating in Ethiopia", we searched across over a million academic papers from the Semantic Scholar corpus. We retrieved the 55 papers most relevant to the query.

Screening: The screened papers that met these criteria:

- *Study Location:* Was the study conducted in Ethiopian organizations or workplaces?
- *Study Focus:* Does the study examine both impression management behaviours and their relationship to performance ratings/evaluations in workplace settings?
- *Study Population:* Does the study include adult working professionals (aged 18 or older) in organizational contexts?
- *Study Design:* Is the study either an empirical investigation (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods) or a systematic review/meta-analysis?
- *Evaluation Context:* Does the study examine supervisor-subordinate relationships in the context of performance evaluation?
- *Variable Priority:* Is impression management examined as a primary variable of interest in the study? We considered all screening questions together and made a holistic judgement about whether to screen in each paper.

### *Data Extraction and Results*

We gave the model the extraction instructions shown below for each column.

Study Design Type: Identify the type of study design used. Look in the methods or design section of the paper.

Possible types include Cross-sectional study, Longitudinal study, Correlational study, Experimental study and Qualitative study (Table 1-2).

**Table 1** Characteristics of included studies

| Study | Study setting | Research design | Sample size |
|---|---|---|---|
| Barsness et al., 2005 | An internet commerce firm in the south-western United States | Cross-sectional, correlational study | 148 |
| Dinka, 2018 | Dire Dawa University, Ethiopia | Correlational study | 114 |
| Hussain et al., 2023 | Private sector universities of Peshawar | Correlational study | Not mentioned found |
| Kim and Lee, 2012 | Not mentioned found | Correlational study | Not mentioned found |
| Wayne and Liden, 1995 | No mention found. | Longitudinal study | Not mentioned found |

*Source: author's own work*

**Table 2** Impacts of impression management on performance ratings

| Study | Impression management tactic type | Performance impact | Context factor | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Barsness et al., 2005 | Supervisor-focused Impression Management These assertive behaviours have frequently been categorized as supervisor-focused job impression management. | The use of supervisor-focused behaviours is positively associated with performance evaluation. | Remote work, demographic dissimilarity, and social network centrality | Statistically significant |
| Barsness et al., 2005 | Job-focused Impression Management | The use of job-focused behaviours was negatively associated with performance evaluation | Remote work, demographic dissimilarity, and social network centrality | Statistically significant |
| Dinka, 2018 | No mention found | No direct measurement found | Ethiopian university context | Not applicable |
| Hussain et al., 2023 | Ingratiation | Integration has a positive impact on job performance | Private universities in Peshawar | significant |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hussain et al., 2023 | Self-promotion | Self-promotion has a positive impact on job performance | Private universities in Peshawar | Significant |
| Hussain et al., 2023 | Exemplification | Exemplification has a negative impact on job performance | Private universities in Peshawar | significant |

*Source: author's own work*

## 2 Literature Review

Impression management is grounded in Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory, which posits that individuals perform "social roles" in interactions. In organizational settings, Bolino & Turnley's (1999) taxonomy of IM strategies self-promotion, ingratiation, exemplification, intimidation, and supplication) has been widely used to assess employee behaviour. In personal and professional settings, impression management creates positive perceptions (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Monitoring these impressions is crucial in organizations to influence colleagues and achieve goals (Hussain et al., 2023).

In Ethiopia, several researchers have adapted these theories to analyse how employees navigate hierarchical and collectivist work environments. For instance, emphasized the preference for ingratiation over self-promotion due to cultural norms of humility and deference.

According to researchers, to create a positive workplace image, individuals engage in behaviours that focus on enhancing relationships with others and on enhancing others' perceptions of their skills and efforts, and performance (Barsness et al., 2005).

According to Chawla et al. (2021), impression Management (IM) tactics shape how others perceive you. Key strategies include ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, supplication, and intimidation, applicable in both high-stakes situations and daily interaction. Krieg et al. (2018) found that successful impression management is associated with better employment chances, positive performance, and higher organizational citizenship behaviour ratings.

The study suggests that competent individuals perform well without using impression management techniques, while those who lack confidence and perform poorly tend to rely on such strategies to avoid negative evaluations (Steinmetz et al., 2017).

According to Impression management behaviour, researchers have identified the tactics used by individuals to enhance their image as perceived by others(Kim & Lee, 2012). Previous research has identified trends in impression management (IM) behaviours at the individual level in contexts like interviews, performance appraisals, and career success and explored IM within organizational settings (Roulin & Bourdage, 2017).

According to studies, IM is the selective presentation or strategic disclosure of information used to facilitate smooth interpersonal relationships or to achieve important social goals, even if this involves negative or deceptive self-presentation (Forster-Heinzer et al., 2023).

According to the Wayne & Liden (1995) scale, supervisors rated employee performance based on their agreement with four statements: (1) The employee is superior to others previously supervised; (2) Their overall performance is excellent; (3) They are highly effective; and (4) They effectively fulfil their roles and responsibilities (Bolino & Turnley, 2003).

Depending on the research tradition and paradigm, definitions and conceptualizations of impression management differs hugely. While the psychoanalytic tradition clearly understands impression management as conscious lying and deception, organizational research attributes both a conscious and an unconscious dimension to impression management. In addition, a distinction is made between advantageous and disadvantageous self-presentation, verbal and nonverbal tactics, as well as honest and deceptive impression management. According to Goffman (1959) individuals' impression management behaviours typically involve "backstage preparation" and "front stage performance"(Liu & Lei, 2025).

Based on Goffman's (1959) impression management theory, people usually desire to control their identity information and image characteristics in social environments while self-presentation on social media serves as a crucial means for identity impression management and efficient self-expression (Arseneault, 2020). Dinka (2018) found a positive correlation between organizational citizenship behaviour and employee performance at Dire Dawa University, but did not assess impression management tactics. Barsness et al. (2005) showed that supervisor-focused tactics improve performance ratings, while job-focused tactics lead to declines in a U.S. internet firm. Hussain et al. (2023) found that ingratiation and self-promotion are linked to better evaluations in Pakistani private-sector universities, while exemplification and intimidation result in lower ratings.

## 3 Conclusion

To provide a conclusion and results about the impact of impression management on performance ratings in Ethiopia, it is important to consider the general findings from organizational behaviour research, as specific studies on this topic in Ethiopia may not be readily available. However, the following points offer a general understanding based on common themes in impression management research. Impression management can positively influence performance ratings; organizations in Ethiopia must develop strategies to mitigate potential biases. This may include training evaluators to recognize impression management tactics and emphasizing objective performance metrics in evaluations.

This approach can help ensure that performance ratings accurately reflect employees' true contributions to organizational success.

Employees often use impression management strategies to shape their supervisors' perceptions, aiming to secure favourable evaluations. In the Ethiopian context, cultural factors, organizational norms, and interpersonal dynamics play crucial roles in how impression management is practiced and perceived.

While impression management can enhance employees' performance ratings by aligning their perceived image with organizational expectations, it also poses challenges. These include the potential for biased evaluations, where perceived competence or effort, rather than actual performance, drives ratings.

To address these challenges, organizations must strive for a balanced approach that recognizes genuine performance while being aware of impression management tactics. The influence of impression management on performance ratings can have both positive and negative implications. On the positive side, employees who effectively manage impressions may be perceived as more competent and motivated, potentially leading to higher performance ratings and career advancement opportunities.

However, there is also a risk that excessive reliance on impression management could overshadow actual performance, leading to biased evaluations and undermining the fairness and accuracy of performance assessments.

## 4 Results

Research examining impression management's impacts on performance ratings in Ethiopia remains limited, though international studies indicate context-dependent outcomes.

Research findings in similar contexts suggest that:

- *Positive Correlation:* There is often a positive correlation between impression management tactics and performance ratings. Employees who engage in impression management may receive higher ratings due to their ability to align their perceived image with organizational expectations.
- *Cultural Influences:* Cultural norms and values in Ethiopia may influence the types of impression management tactics that are most effective. For instance, collectivist cultures might favour tactics that emphasize group harmony and respect for authority.
- *Managerial Awareness:* Managers' awareness and understanding of impression management tactics can moderate their impact on performance ratings. Training managers to recognize these tactics can help ensure more accurate and fair evaluations.
- *Potential Bias:* There may be a potential bias in performance ratings if impression management is mistaken for genuine performance. This can lead to discrepancies between perceived and actual employee contributions.

- The key findings related to impression management and performance in this study such as statistically significant relationships, direction of impact (positive/negative), Strength of relationships (if quantitative data provided), and any unexpected or contradictory results.

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KRISZTIÁN ADORJÁN – KRISZTINA HALÁSZ-KAKUK

# Synergies between Impression Management and Adaptability in a Changing Labour Market – How can Impression Management be Authentic and Credible?

**Abstract**: This study explores the relationship between impression management and adaptability in a significantly changing labour market environment. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, hybrid types of work become more common, and increased interactions on online platforms. These phenomena create new challenges and expectations for employees. Adaptation has become a key competence for all individuals in all areas of life, particularly in the world of work. The aim of this essay is to examine, using qualitative, secondary sources, how impression management (IM) strategies such as self-promotion or exemplification contribute to creating and maintaining a positive and successful impression of an employee or company. This study also highlights the downsides of IM. Prolonged, discredited and exaggerated roles, such as ingratiation, can lead to mental exhaustion, loss of self-control and behavioural problems. The main limitations of this study are the lack of primary data collection, but it provides a basis and framework for future empirical research, particularly on the role of emotional intelligence in IM. At the end of the analysis, the authors propose the creation of an honest, authentic and democratic corporate culture and the development of emotional intelligence as a solution to reduce the negative effects of IM.

**Keywords:** impression management (IM), adaptability, emotional intelligence, labour market, online communication

## 1 Introduction

The study of the relationship between impression management and adaptability in the workplace is motivated by the significant changes in the labour market. During the COVID-19 epidemic, alternative work arrangements have intensified. Following the pandemic, some phenomena have certainly stayed with us: hybrid working, online meetings, meetings, job interviews. Adapting to changes in online and offline spaces is a key issue for the future. The positive impression created by a self-promotion role technique used in a job interview is something every employee wants to maintain. An employee who is not able to adapt to changed circumstances may use the strategy of flattery or self-promotion for a while, but if he or she is not honest and authentic, he or she may experience internal tension, defamation and conflict over time, which may even lead to job loss (Csák & Juhász, 2025).

The relevance of the thesis is reinforced by the fact that Generation Z is constantly entering the labour market, creating a completely new situation in the workplace, so an analysis of the relationship between the two concepts can be useful. Generation Z spends a significant part of their lives in the virtual space, where they are exposed to role models, influencers or celebrities, but they are also influenced by all the role techniques of impression management (Krämer & Winter 2014). Generational differences in the workplace environment require more adaptability and increasingly credible impression management strategies from all actors.

The integration of Generation Z into the labour market is not smooth, in case of conflicts with older, more experienced colleagues, they unfortunately rarely take the opportunity to ask for help, preferring to change and look for a new job (Brečko, 2021; Andreasik, 2022; Steigervald, 2024). Intergenerational cooperation in the workplace is a sensitive, difficult but extremely urgent task.

Of all the IM strategies, perhaps the most sensitive role is that of intimidation. Many forms of workplace bullying are already known. Overt or covert behaviour involving direct, or indirect, physical and/or verbal threats or humiliation can be an existing problem in an organisation. An employee, whether a manager or subordinate, who engages in such unlawful behaviour usually uses intimidation to persuade the victim to remain silent (Colaprico et al. 2023). The use of impression management, used correctly, well and credibly, can be a way of developing emotional intelligence and adaptability (Goffman,1959.; Jones &Pittman, 1982).

For this study, we analyse the relationship between adaptability and IM by analysing qualitative secondary sources. We seek to answer questions such as:

- How is individuals' adaptability related to conscious impression management?
- How does impression management support adaptability in workplace situations, such as job interviews (self-promotion) or online communication (example setting)?
- Are there any downsides to the use of IM and, if so, what solutions are possible?

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Adaptability and the Scope of Adaptability Management

#### *2.1.1 Understanding Adaptability*

Adaptability should be understood in its complexity and interconnectedness. Adaptability and emotional intelligence are closely related. The concept of emotional intelligence (EI) was first introduced by Salovey and Mayer in 1990. In terms of its content, it refers to the recognition, understanding and management of emotions. Adaptability, Bar-On (2000) considers as part of emotional intelligence, is closely related to it, and the study examines IM strategies in this light. According to Bar-On's theoretical model, emotional intelligence is a support and help for the individual to be able to cope with changes in his/her environment or increased expectations (Kanesan & Fauzan, 2019). We will present the relationship between emotional intelligence and impression management later in the study.

The term adapt is derived from the Latin word to fit, to join, in any case it refers to the ability of an individual to adjust, to adapt to some changed circumstance (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). According to the Cambridge Dictionary, "adaptability is the capacity or willingness to change in order to adapt to different circumstances (dictionary.cambridge, 2025). The Oxford Dictionary adds to the concept by placing adaptability in an inherently positive context and defining it as a condition for success (oxfordlearnersdictionaries, 2025).

| INTRAPERSONAL SKILLS | INTERPERSONAL SKILLS | STRESS MANAGEMENT | ADAPTABILIT | GENERAL MOOD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Self-esteem<br>Self-awareness<br>Assertiveness<br>Self-actualisation<br>Independence | Empathy<br>Social responsibility<br>Interpersonal relationships | Stress tolerance<br>Impulse control | Problem solving<br>Flexibility<br>Sense of reality | Happiness<br>Optimistic |

**Figure 1** Bar-On (2000) Components of a theoretical model of emotional intelligence
*Source: aothors' own edit*

Of course, adaptability is present in all aspects of life, but for the effectiveness of this study, its role and importance in the world of work will be further explored. According to the theory used in workplace human resource (HR) management, the personal resources needed for adaptability, the responses and the resulting outcomes are closely linked. Adaptation to a changed situation refers to an individual's ability, attitude and behaviour. This ability supports the employee in coping with career-related challenges, tasks, transitions and personal traumas (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

A well-adapted employee with the right qualities can keep up with rapidly changing priorities, new projects, changes in the workplace organisation, the appointment of new managers, customer relations and is open to new technologies (Kaplan, 2023). Hall (2002) considers adaptability as a 'meta competence', which, together with personal identity, motivation and professional knowledge, is a central component of a career path (O'Connell et al. 2008).

Adaptability is an innate trait, a measurable and developable skill, part of our emotional intellect (Locaso et al., 2023). The willingness to be adaptable can be observed and measured already during a job interview.

Nowadays, when companies are looking for managers or employees, adaptability is identified as the most important attribute (Hill et al., 2022). A study in Hungary in 2021 found that the competency "Flexibility, quick adaptability, openness" was the most important soft skill in the Covid position and this has not changed since.

The digital 'transition' in the workplace will not depend on IT professionals, but primarily on HR staff, because developing the right soft and hard skills, motivating people to use new tools, and creating a corporate culture that emphasises adaptability and resilience will all be essential (Reguly, 2024; PwC, 2024).

### *2.1.2 Adaptability in the Personal Career Life Course*

The role of adaptability in workers' careers has been explored by several researchers. One of the pioneers in the field, Savickas (2002), according to his career planning theory, argues that adaptability to one's career has four dimensions: concern for the future, control, curiosity and confidence (Savickas & Portfeli, 2012). According to

Savickas (2002), concern motivates a person's preparation for the future, control is the individual's assumption of responsibility for guiding career decisions, curiosity is the desire for new career opportunities, while confidence is the belief in one's own abilities and the competence to adapt to change and challenges (Yang et al., 2023). Adaptive competence thus focuses on four personal domains: cognitive, emotional, behavioural and a combination of the above, social adaptation. Each of the four domains effectively supports the ability to be flexible (Lo Iacono, 2025). The theory of adaptability will be related here to the topic of impression management (IM) because in practice, based on the work of Goffman (1959) and later researchers, it can play a role in supporting behavioural and social adaptability. This will be summarised and illustrated to the reader in a figure later.

### 2.2 Understanding Impression Management

The term impression management (IM) and its content were first coined by sociologist Goffman (1959) in his seminal work on IM, "The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life". Using a dramaturgical analogy, the author compares everyday social interactions to a theatrical performance in which individuals 'play roles', making choices to avoid awkward situations. The actors, according to Goffman (1959) work to maintain the image of themselves as known, preferred and positive to others, while striving for social cooperation. This theory and practice are particularly true today, in both the online and offline worlds (Szász, 2023; Edeh et al., 2023).

Impression management is an interdisciplinary discipline. It is most used in human resource management and management theory, business, communication, branding (self-branding, self-promotion), social media platforms (Gupta & Sagadevan, 2024; Liu & Lei 2025). In the era of digitalization, everyone strives to influence the positive image message about oneself or one's company, consciously or unconsciously, by creating a positive image of oneself or one's company. Knowledge of IM strategy can therefore be an important area for understanding human interactions in a globalised and multicultural world (Zhang & Rudnák, 2024). In the field of impression management, after Goffman (1959), numerous and significant research have been carried out and new models have emerged to complement Goffman's work. In view of the limited scope of this paper, we would like to present only a few prominent early concepts.

Jones & Pittman (1982) took Goffman's (1959) theatre analogy further and gave the actor five optional roles, depending on what the individual's goal is. The five strategies leading to the goal are: ingratiation, self-promotion, role modelling, intimidation, and begging for help. Tedeschi & Melburg (1984) theorize that ingratiation and opinion conformity imply the doing of favours and that we conform to the opinions of others because it gives us a positive evaluation, so that self-promotion has been successful (Yan et al., 2020). Leary & Kowalski (1990) see impression management as a parallel process of two concurrent processes, IM motivation and IM strategy.

Motivation is influenced by the goals and their significance and by the "theatrical audience", while role strategy involves the performer's verbal and nonverbal behaviour and the specific context of the situation (Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Bolino et al., 2016). In the remainder of this study, we will use Jones and Pittman's (1982) IM role tactics to conceptually analyse the relationship between adaptability and IM.

### *2.2.1 IM is a Tool for Visualising Positive Adaptability*

It is proposed to examine some real-life situations in practice on the relationship between adaptability and impression management. Jones and Pittman's (1982) theory of impression management can be useful in any work environment. However, it is our view that the individual's current life situation, personality, age, willingness to be flexible and degree of emotional intelligence can never be ignored. The many factors involved make the subject extremely complex, which is why we have taken the liberty of linking the concept of IM strategies with adaptability and emotional intelligence. Based on the IM literature we have reviewed, impression management, can be a good concept for a positive vision of adaptability, so we would like to present the linkages, its optimistic effects on performance, but also its downsides, and then draw the appropriate conclusions.

### *2.2.2 The Effectiveness of IM at Work*

In a job interview, you want to use IM as a tool for self-promotion. We adapt to the situation as positively as possible, reflecting on the interviewer's style, communication, what he or she is looking for in us, what he or she wants to know about us that might be useful to him or her. As mentioned earlier, the quality of adaptability is nowadays the first soft skill that companies look for in an employee. In job interviews every night, venture capitalist Locaso et al. (2023) analyses the extent to which prospective company founders respond to the inevitability of change, especially when there are multiple factors at play at once.

In the job interview, given the short duration of its genre, the self-promotional IM role strategy is positive, purposeful, understandable and does not diminish the individual's personality. Maintaining a positive image of the interviewer is your responsibility.

In the digital age we live in, traditional leadership methods are no longer sufficient. Impression management can be a technique where leaders, by leading by example and engaging in a winning style, can more effectively enhance the performance of subordinates and the organisation. This will enhance the image of the leader and the whole company, both online and offline. Leaders should take advantage of the opportunity provided by IM to motivate employees and help achieve organizational goals (Edeh et al., 2023). A workplace leader's knowledge of IM can help to integrate generation Z into the workplace, who are significantly more accepting of exemplary leadership styles (Steigervald, 2024).

A systematic literature review of studies published in the field of IM between 2016 and 2024 shows that there is a positive relationship between improvements in individual and organisational performance and IM strategies. Since 2016, IM has played a role in creativity, entrepreneurship and organisational contexts. From job interviews to social media presence, IM has had a positive impact. The papers saw a correlation between IM, well-being at work and employee satisfaction. IM is a good opportunity for self-promotion and leading by example, and engaging behaviour is key to the advancement of individuals and organisations (Gupta & Sagadevan, 2024).

In a research study, the impact of and adaptation to Enterprise Social Media Platforms (ESMP) on the impression management strategy of individual employees was investigated. Enterprise digital spaces give employees the opportunity to build and maintain their online image. The results showed that incumbents adopted two strategies: the ‘fit-in’ and ‘stand-out’ IM roles. By using the fitting-in type of IM, employees sought to fit perfectly into the corporate and organisational culture.

In turn, with a prominent IM strategy, employees have sought to differentiate themselves from the company and draw attention to themselves. Only by addressing individual motivations and boundaries can the relationship between the two tactics be modified. The opportunities provided by ESMP encourage employees to adapt and indirectly move in an optimistic or aloof direction. The practical significance of the study for employees was that they could consciously shape their image to gain the respect and goodwill of colleagues. And managers can better understand their subordinates' IM strategies and adapt their policies for using ESMP accordingly. Developers of enterprise digital platforms have no choice but to design features that more effectively manage employees' online image (Sun et al., 2021).

#### *2.2.3 The Shadow Side of IM*

In the everyday workplace, therefore, the strategy of ingratiation or self-promotional IM to achieve a goal can be a tactic that works and is useful for the individual. However, the continuous and prolonged use of ingratiation and self-promotional role-playing tactics can lead to psychological fatigue and contribute to a weakening of self-control, which over time can lead to counterproductive behaviour on the part of the employee (Ni et al., 2023).

Constant, daily ingratiation has more harmful consequences in lower power distance orientation than in higher power distance orientation (Yan et al., 2020). Adapting to a changed work situation with this IM tactic only helps the subordinate for a while, over time it turns against the individual like a double-edged sword, distorting his personality, leading to mental illness and then physical symptoms. The daily use of ingratiation is therefore exhausting and consumes the mental resources of employees (Klotz et al., 2018). Impression management research in the online world suggests that individual or organisational self-promotion on social media platforms, IM use, can lead to discrediting, increasing unethical behaviour in the workplace, according to Al-Shatti et. al. (2022) study. Reasons for discredit: positive self-promotion used by individuals or organisations, but reality presents a different picture. Social media users – individuals and companies – are afraid to disclose real information because of the freedom of the internet.

### 2.2.4 Minimising the Downsides of IM

The solution to minimise the negatives of impression management in a workplace lies in the hands of owners and managers. Create an honest and authentic work environment, a democratic corporate culture, and value the skills of employees above all else (Yan et al., 2020). Ni et al. (2023) found that emotional intelligence mitigated the negative effects of IM strategies. Based on the results, the researchers concluded that the adverse consequences of using ingratiation and self-promotion techniques were weaker for employees with high emotional intelligence, and stronger for those with low emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence can reduce the negative effects of loss of self-control.

### 2.2.5 The Relationship between Adaptability, Emotional Intelligence and IM

Figure 1 is based on the work of Savickas (2002), Iacono (2025), Dam (2009) and Ni et al. (2023) summarizes the possible links to the literature review of the present study.

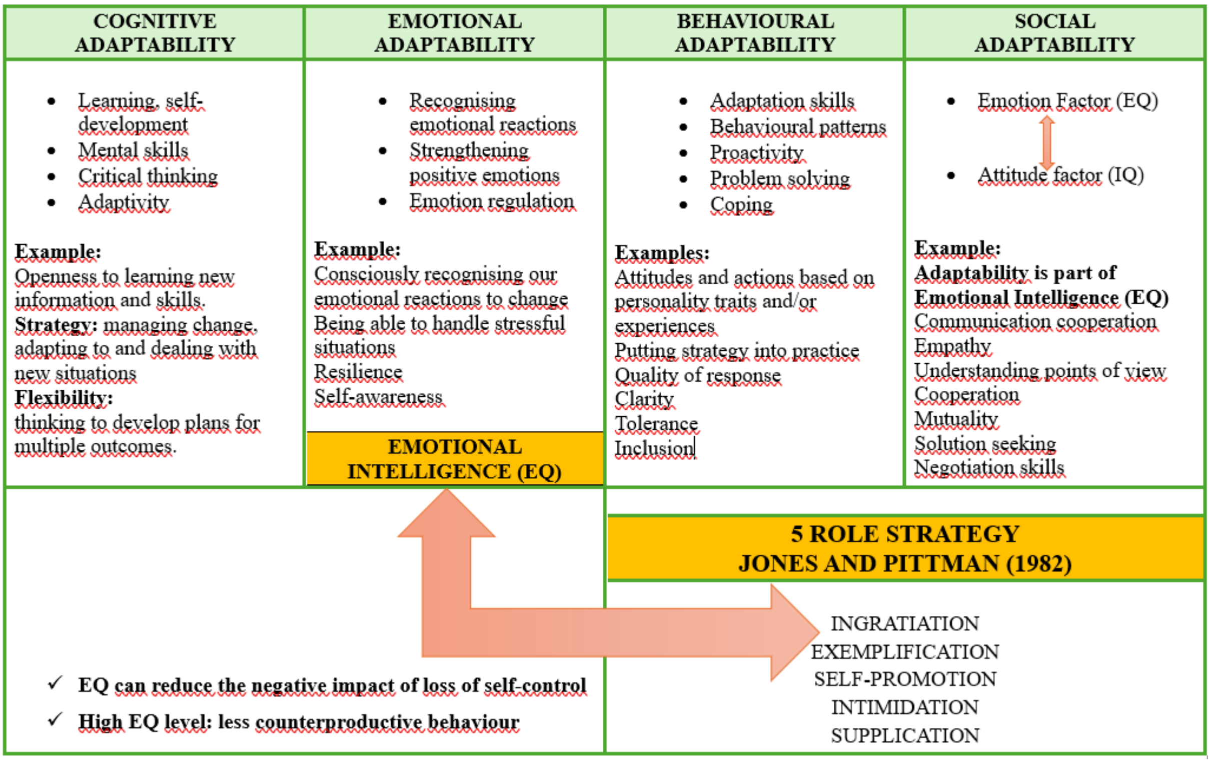


**Figure 1** Possible links to the literature review of the present study

*Source: authors' own edit based on Savickas (2002); Lo Iacono (2025); Dam (2009); and Ni et al. (2023).*

### 2.2.6 Limitations of research

The study relied exclusively on qualitative and secondary sources, so the authors' findings are rather theoretical in nature. The topic is highly complex and interdisciplinary in nature and therefore cannot cover all the scientific concepts in the field of adaptability, emotional intelligence and impression management. Most of the papers are research and works by foreign authors and thus include national, cultural and regional specificities.

### *2.2.7 Possible research directions*

Primary research methods on the relationship between impression management (IM) adaptability and emotional intelligence in the workplace may be worth exploring in the future. A combination of questionnaire survey and in-depth interview formula may be effective to explore the subject in more depth. The long-term impact of IM strategies on individual career, quality of life, and well-being can be investigated through longitudinal research. Questions may also arise as to how IM techniques can help to cope with the emotional adaptation to AI or the FOMO (Fear of missing out) phenomenon in the digital world of work.

## 3 Conclusion

There is a strong correlation between adaptability and impression management and emotional intelligence. Adaptability – by developing emotional intelligence – can be supported by impression management. The correct use of exemplary IM role strategy by managers can motivate subordinates to higher quality work, performance and help Generation Z to integrate in the workplace. The right use of self-promotion in job interviews and online platforms can be constructive and create a positive impression of employees and organisations. It is important to note, however, that poorly used IM techniques can have negative consequences in the longer term for one's mental health and therefore for the overall workplace climate. The key to successful IM use in a rapidly changing workplace environment is to maintain awareness, self-identity, authenticity, honesty and moderation. Only then can the IM strategy become an effective tool for performance improvement and career development.

This study used qualitative, secondary sources to examine the relationship between adaptability and impression management. Adaptability has become the most important soft skill in a rapidly changing world of work. Adaptability is closely related to one's emotional intelligence, which influences the individual consequences of impression management. The study shows that using IM consciously, moderately and authentically as a behavioural shaping technique, such as self-promotion, ingratiation or example-setting, can help individuals to develop and maintain a positive image of themselves. IM tactics are particularly important in job interviews, during day-to-day work and in the online space, where employees can consciously build their image. At the same time, the study also examines IM techniques from a different perspective. The use of untrustworthy, insincere and continuous impression management strategies, such as ingratiation or self-promotion, can lead to psychological exhaustion, weakening of self-control, counterproductive behaviour and ultimately personality distortion. The downside of IM can be particularly discredited in the use of individual or organisational self-promotion in the online space. To reduce the negative impact on the individual, the study, citing secondary sources, recommends that workplaces should develop an honest, realistic environment and a democratic corporate culture.

Owners and managers should value employees' skills and attitudes to work. Within corporate organisations, greater emphasis should be placed on developing emotional intelligence and fostering adaptability, as this can help to reduce the shadow side of IM role techniques and strengthen the well-functioning and effective side.

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