Transformational Leadership and Organizational Maturity in the Digital Era

Theories, Models, and Practices

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First published 2026

ISBN: 978-1-041-12034-6 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-003-66273-0 (ebk)

1 Leadership revisited

Towards transformational leadership

DOI: 10.4324/9781003662730-2

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
NEW YORK AND LONDON

1 Leadership revisited

Towards transformational leadership

For decades, and even centuries, scholars have sought to define the concept of leadership, resulting in a proliferation of theories and approaches (see Tables 1.1–1.3). Despite these extensive efforts, capturing the essence and fully understanding the nature of leadership, by examining its multifaceted and complex character, remains a persistent challenge. On the one hand, early attempts to define leadership were grounded in trait and behavioural theories. On the other hand, more recent perspectives have emphasized the significance of contextual factors in shaping leadership practices. Nevertheless, the diverse theoretical frameworks that have emerged have yet to yield a single, unified, and comprehensive model of leadership. Fundamentally, the ongoing debate centres on the question: What makes an effective leader? Is it primarily a matter of personality and innate traits, or do external factors – such as situational, contextual, or environmental conditions – play a more decisive role in determining leadership effectiveness?

1.1 Leadership theories

Early leadership theories primarily focused on identifying the traits and characteristics that distinguish leaders from their followers. Subsequent theoretical developments expanded this perspective by incorporating additional factors, such as the situational context in which leadership occurs, as well as leaders' skills and behavioural styles. This progression has broadened the scope of the scientific discourse on leadership to include not only individual attributes but also external variables. According to Benmira and Agboola (2021), eight major leadership theories can generally be distinguished. To provide a clearer understanding of the leadership phenomenon, Table 1.1 categorizes these theories based on the extent to which they emphasize internal versus external factors.

Table 1.1 shows a certain interplay between the importance of internal and external factors that define a successful leader during the over-century-long scientific discussion on leadership. The last three theories,

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Table 1.1 Overview of leadership theories

Theories	*Internal factors*	*External factors*
'Great Man' theories	Basic assumptions: • Leaders are born with the necessary internal characteristics, such as intelligence, charisma, confidence, and social skills. • One cannot learn to be a leader; leaders are born and not made.	Not taken into account
Trait theories	The following traits make a leader: • Creativity • Interpersonal skills • Understanding others and their needs • Task competence • Adaptability and flexibility • Assertiveness • Capacity to motivate others • Courage • Decisiveness • Eagerness to accept responsibility • Emotional stability • Action-oriented, judgement • Intelligence • Need for achievement • Perseverance, • Self-confidence • Trustworthiness	Not taken into account
Contingency theories	Basic assumptions: • Leadership is not only about the qualities of the leader. • Leaders with their personal traits function within specific contexts. • Successful leader depends on his/her leadership style.	Basic assumptions: • Factors related to the environment may determine which particular style of leadership is best for the specific situation. • Leadership is about the balance between behaviours, needs, and context • Apart from leadership style, a successful leader depends on the qualities of the followers and aspects of the situation.

(*Continued*)

Table 1.1 (Continued)

Theories	*Internal factors*	*External factors*
Situational theories	Different styles of leadership should be used to be effective depending on the types of decision-making, meaning that an authoritarian style may be more appropriate when a leader is the most knowledgeable and experienced member of a group, whereas a democratic style would be more effective when group members are highly skilled.	Leaders choose the best course of action depending on situational variables.
Behavioural theories	In opposition to 'Great Man' Theories, mental qualities and internal states do not determine a great leader.	One can learn to become a leader through learning and observation.
Participative theories	Leadership style is subordinate to the input from other group members.	Group members and their commitment to the decision-making process are treated as relevant factors.
Transactional theories/ management theories	Focus is put on the role of supervision, organization, and group performance. Emphasis is placed on immediate objectives rather than fostering innovation or long-term development.	
Relationship theories/ transformational theories	Focus is put on the interplay between leaders and their followers. Transformational leaders motivate and inspire followers or group members by helping them to see the importance and higher good of the task. Such leaders focus on the performance of group members and at the same time want every person to fulfil their potential.	

Source: Own work based on Amanchukwu et al. (2015); Burns (1978, 2003); Cote (2017); Grant et al. (2011); Groves and LaRocca (2011); Hersey and Blanchard (1977); Hodgson and White (2003); Jiang et al. (2015); Kets de Vries and Cheak-Baillargeon (2015); Khan et al. (2016); Malakyan (2014); Mango (2018); Nichols and Cottrell (2014); Oakleaf (2016); Spector (2015).

namely, participative, transactional, and transformational ones, have been proven through decades of research that the notion of leadership is a complex, multilayered, and multifaceted phenomenon. And especially the last two of these theories show that the full potential of effective leaders can be achieved when both internal and external factors intermingle and merge with each other in a harmonious way.

1.2 Current leadership approaches

In contemporary leadership research, numerous scholars incorporate elements from a variety of theoretical frameworks. The conceptualizations of leadership differ notably in the emphasis placed on specific factors drawn from these diverse theories, resulting in distinct combinations that, according to different researchers, constitute the characteristics of an effective leader. Avery (2011) claims that with a huge range of definitions and theories of leadership available, the field has become confusing. Despite numerous efforts at developing an intellectually satisfying understanding of leadership, which has already taken over a century, the concept of leadership remains elusive and enigmatic. The whole problem lies not only in the sophisticated nature of the phenomenon but in the fact that over the years of scientific quest in this field an abundance of theories, frameworks, and approaches have been proposed. Furthermore, all these attempts sometimes use the same terminology in a confusing way. As a result, typology issues occur in relation to what is a leadership theory and what is simply an approach in leadership. Approaches are often mixed with leadership styles or leadership practical frameworks. Accordingly, the previously proposed typology must be treated as a general overview of leadership theories. And since relationship or transformational theories seem to prevail in the attempts to understand what an effective leadership is, this discussion leads to the most common and current leadership approaches – some of them still not yet well-conceptualized – that stem from these theories, or have been informed by them, or are commonly associated with them in one way or another. The vagueness of the very concept of leadership and failures in advancing the understanding of it is thoroughly discussed by Buckingham and Goodall (2019), who finally state that we can deprive the notion of leadership of its abstractness if we look at leading and following as human interactions, relationships, and emotional bonds of trust (Buckingham & Goodall, 2019). The human connections factor as a driving force for engagement and performance, and eventually a solid base for purposeful leadership, is also stressed by Joly (2021). Consequently, the first research in this study, presented in Chapter 3, explores leadership from exactly these humanistic points of view.

1.2.1 Servant leadership

From the point of view of servant leadership, leaders' primary goal is to serve their teams, organizations, or communities. Unlike traditional leadership, which focuses on hierarchy and authority, servant leadership prioritizes the growth, well-being, and empowerment of employees or followers. Servant leaders emphasize listening, empathy, stewardship, and the development of others to foster a more engaged and productive environment (van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2018; Greenleaf, 1970; Hunter, 1998; Spears, 2010).

1.2.1.1 Origins and main representatives of servant leadership

The concept of servant leadership was formally introduced by Robert K. Greenleaf (1970). He was inspired by Hermann Hesse's novel *Journey to the East*, in which a servant named Leo turns out to be the true leader of a group. However, the philosophy itself dates back centuries, with influences from religious and philosophical traditions, such as Christianity (Jesus Christ's teachings), Taoism (Laozi's ideas on leadership), and Confucianism as well as from historical figures like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Nelson Mandela, who led through service to their people. Apart from Greenleaf, other key proponents and scholars of servant leadership include James C. Hunter (1998); Larry Spears (2010), who expanded on Greenleaf's ideas and identified 10 characteristics of servant leaders: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building the community; Dirk van Dierendonck (2018); Kathleen Patterson (2003); Duena Blomstrom (2021) with her concept of Leadership 2.0.

1.2.1.2 Advantages of servant leadership

Researchers point at various advantages of servant leadership approach such as (1) improved employee morale: servant leadership fosters a positive work environment and higher job satisfaction by prioritizing employees' needs (Autry, 2004; Liden et al., 2008); (2) stronger relationships that encourage trust, collaboration, and open communication between leaders and employees (Autry, 2004; Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2018); (3) higher engagement and productivity: employees feel valued and supported, which can lead to greater motivation and performance (Autry, 2004; Blanchard & Hodges, 2008; Sipe & Frick, 2019; Searle & Barbuto, 2011; Spears, 2010); (4) ethical and inclusive decision-making: focusing on ethical considerations and inclusivity benefit the whole team (Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2018); (5) long-term organizational success: promoting sustainable growth by investing in employees' development and well-being (Autry, 2004; Van

Dierendonck & Patterson, 2018); (6) stronger community impact extending beyond the organization and fostering social responsibility and positive change (Keith, 2015).

1.2.1.3 Criticism of servant leadership

However, other researchers also see some shortcomings of the servant leadership approach. They point at the following aspects: (1) slower decision-making: the emphasis on collaboration and consensus can lead to delays in making critical decisions (Pfeffer (2015); (2) potential for leader burnout: leaders may focus so much on serving others that they neglect their own well-being and responsibilities (Searle & Barbuto, 2011); (3) risk of employee dependency: some employees may become overly reliant on leaders instead of developing their own independence (Searle & Barbuto, 2011); (4) not suitable for all work environments: servant leadership may not be effective in fast-paced, high-stakes industries where quick, authoritative decisions are needed (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012); (5) difficult to implement since it requires a cultural shift and strong commitment from leadership, which can be challenging in traditional hierarchical organizations (Yukl, 2010); (6) possibility of being taken advantage of: some employees might exploit a servant leader's kindness and focus on service (Searle & Barbuto, 2011).

1.2.2 Leader–member exchange theory

Leadership based on leader–member exchange (LMX) theory focuses on the relationship between leaders and their followers. It suggests that leaders develop unique, individualized relationships with each member of their team rather than treating all subordinates the same (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

1.2.2.1 Origins and main representatives of LMX theory

LMX theory originated in the 1970s as the Vertical Dyad Linkage Theory, which later evolved into LMX theory. Its main idea is based on the **two-way (dyadic) relationships** between leaders and each of their individual subordinates (Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The key scholars associated with its development are George B. Graen and Mary Uhl-Bien (1995). Both of them contributed significantly to the development of LMX theory by refining its principles over time. Their work highlights different aspects of leader–member relationships, emphasizing how these relationships evolve and affect workplace outcomes.

Graen and Scandura (1987) and Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), as one of the original theorists, focused on the development and quality of leader–member relationships over time. His main principles include (1) *leadership as a dyadic process* where leadership is built on one-on-one relationships (dyads) rather than a uniform leader–follower dynamic, and leaders develop different relationships with each subordinate rather than treating all followers the same; (2) *three stages of LMX development* of role-taking where the leader assesses the follower's capabilities and assigns initial tasks, role-making where the leader and the follower negotiate their working relationship, determining trust and mutual respect, and role-routinization where the relationship becomes stable, as either high-quality (in-group) or low-quality (out-group); (3) *in-group vs. out-group dynamics* where in-group members receive more trust, resources, and opportunities for career advancement and out-group members have more transactional, formal interactions with the leader, with limited access to additional resources; (4) *performance and organizational outcomes* where higher LMX quality leads to higher job satisfaction, commitment, and performance and poor LMX relationships can result in low morale, job dissatisfaction, and turnover (Graen & Scandura, 1987; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995)

Mary Uhl-Bien et al. (2007), Uhl-Bien and Marion (2009), Uhl-Bien (2016), and Uhl-Bien and Arena (2017) expanded Graen's work by integrating relational and social aspects of LMX theory. Her main contributions include (1) *relational leadership perspective* in which leadership is not just about exchanging resources but about developing meaningful relationships, and quality leader–member relationships are built on trust, respect, and mutual obligation; (2) *leadership-making process* where Uhl-Bien emphasizes that LMX quality is not static – it can be developed over time, and leaders should strive to bring more employees into the in-group by fostering trust and engagement; (3) *LMX differentiation and team-level effects* where LMX relationships do not just affect individual performance but also influence team cohesion and organizational culture, and unequal LMX relationships within a team can lead to perceptions of favouritism, potentially damaging team dynamics; (4) *application to organizational behaviour and development* as Uhl-Bien integrates LMX into organizational change, complexity leadership, and adaptive leadership frameworks and explores how LMX impacts workplace learning, collaboration, and innovation (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Uhl-Bien, 2016; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017; Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

Key differences between Graen's and Uhl-Bien's approaches are presented in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2 Key differences between Graen's and Uhl-Bien's approaches to LMX leadership

Principle	*Graen*	*Uhl-Bien*
Focus	Dyadic exchange (transactional and relational aspects).	Relational leadership (trust, respect, and social dynamics).
LMX development	Three-stage process (role-taking, role-making, role-routinization).	Dynamic and ongoing relationship-building.
Team-level impact	Mostly focused on individual leader–follower relationships.	Emphasized team and organizational effects.
Leadership implications	Leaders categorize followers into in-groups and out-groups.	Leaders should work to improve LMX quality for all.

Source: Own work.

1.2.2.2 Advantages of LMX theory

Literature review allows to identify the following advantages of LMX theory: (1) recognition of the importance of leader–follower relationships: unlike traditional leadership theories, LMX emphasizes that leadership is not one-size-fits-all but varies based on relationships; (2) prediction of positive outcomes: high-quality LMX is associated with higher job satisfaction, better performance, greater commitment, and lower turnover; (3) encouraging leaders to develop stronger relationships: LMX theory promotes personalized leadership, which can lead to a more motivated and engaged workforce; (4) applicability across various organizational settings: LMX can be applied in corporate settings, educational institutions, healthcare, and even virtual teams to improve leader–member relationships (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden et al., 1997; Scandura & Lankau, 1996).

1.2.2.3 Criticism of LMX theory

The following issues are raised by researchers who assume a critical perspective towards LMX: (1) lack of consistency in how LMX is measured: different studies use different scales, leading to unreliable comparisons (Schriesheim et al. (1999); (2) potential for favouritism and bias: LMX differentiation can lead to perceived unfairness and favouritism, where in-group members receive better treatment while out-group members feel excluded (Yukl, 1999); (3) overemphasis on dyadic relationships: LMX focuses on individual leader–follower relationships but does not fully address how leadership functions within larger teams or across an organization (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Yukl, 1999); (4) cultural and contextual limitations: some cultures may not support high differentiation in leadership relationships, particularly

in collectivist societies such as Japan and China where egalitarian leadership is preferred (Erdogan & Bauer, 2010, 2015); (5) lack of conceptual clarity (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). The main points of Dienesch and Liden's criticism are as follows:

(a) LMX as a multidimensional construct:
    - Previous research treated LMX as a unidimensional construct while it should be viewed as multidimensional (i.e., consisting of multiple facets such as trust, respect, and obligation).
    - Different dimensions should be measured separately to gain a clearer understanding of LMX.

(b) Measurement issues:
    - LMX was measured inconsistently across studies, with different scales and conceptual definitions, making results difficult to compare.
    - There is a need for better operationalization and consistent measurement tools.

(c) Exchange quality variability: LMX should not be seen as a simple 'high' or 'low' relationship but rather as a continuum with varying degrees of exchange quality.

(d) Conceptual ambiguity:
    - Earlier LMX research failed to clearly define what constituted high-quality versus low-quality exchanges beyond general terms like 'in-group' and 'out-group' dynamics.
    - A clearer conceptual framework must be proposed to differentiate aspects of LMX more precisely.

(Dienesch & Liden, 1986)

1.2.3 Ethical/inclusive leadership

Ethical and inclusive leadership emphasizes moral integrity, fairness, respect, and the inclusion of diverse perspectives. It is rooted in ethical decision-making, social responsibility, and ensuring that all individuals, regardless of background, have equal opportunities to contribute and succeed (Burns, 1978; Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999, Bass, 2008).

1.2.3.1 Origins and main representatives of ethical/inclusive leadership

The concept of ethical leadership has origins in moral philosophy, particularly in works by Aristotle (virtue ethics), Immanuel Kant (deontological ethics), and John Stuart Mill (utilitarian ethics). These philosophies emphasize moral virtues, duty, and the greater good (Dodamgoda et al., 2025; Perry, 2018). Inclusive leadership, on the other hand, gained prominence in

the late 20th and early 21st centuries alongside diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) movements. It has roots in social justice, civil rights movements, and organizational behaviour theories that stress the importance of diverse and equitable work environments (Bell, 2011; Thomas & Ely, 1996). The key representatives include James MacGregor Burns (1978) known for transformational leadership, which aligns closely with ethical leadership by emphasizing moral purpose and positive change; Bernard Bass (2008) and Bass and Steidlmeier (1999), who built on Burns' work and highlighted the ethical and moral responsibilities of leaders; Ronald Heifetz (1994) and Heifetz et al. (2009), who focused on adaptive leadership, encouraging leaders to navigate complex ethical dilemmas; Mary Gentile (2015), who developed the 'Giving Voice to Values' approach, which emphasizes ethical decision-making in business; Amy Edmondson (2018, 2019), a key researcher in psychological safety, which is essential for inclusive leadership; and, finally, a practitioner, Ginni Rometty (former CEO of IBM), who advocates for inclusive leadership in corporate settings, emphasizing diverse talent and ethical business practices in her speeches and interviews.

1.2.3.2 Advantages of ethical/inclusive leadership

The main advantages of ethical/inclusive leadership pointed at by researchers are the following: (1) trust and credibility: ethical leaders build trust with employees, customers, and stakeholders, enhancing an organization's reputation and credibility; (2) diverse perspectives and innovation: inclusive leadership fosters diverse viewpoints, leading to more creative problem-solving and innovation; (3) employee satisfaction and retention: employees feel valued and respected, leading to higher job satisfaction, engagement, and retention rates; (4) better decision-making: ethical leaders prioritize fairness, integrity, and long-term sustainability, leading to more sound and socially responsible decisions; (5) improved organizational performance: research suggests that diverse and ethical leadership contributes to higher productivity, better financial results, and a positive work culture; (6) legal and regulatory compliance: ethical leadership helps organizations avoid legal and compliance issues related to discrimination, corruption, and unfair labour practices; (7) stronger brand and public perception: organizations known for ethical and inclusive practices often attract loyal customers, investors, and top talent (Brown et al., 2005; Ciulla, 2002; Edmondson, 2018, 2019; Thomas, 2004; Ely & Thomas, 2011; Sweeney & Bothwick, 2016).

1.2.3.3 Criticism of ethical/inclusive leadership

The main criticism of ethical/inclusive leadership refers to the following aspects: (1) decision-making complexity: ethical and inclusive decision-making can be slower due to the need to balance multiple perspectives and interests;

(2) resistance to change: some employees or stakeholders may resist inclusion efforts, perceiving them as favouritism or unnecessary; (3) potential for conflict: managing diverse teams can lead to disagreements and cultural misunderstandings, requiring strong conflict resolution skills; (4) risk of performative actions: some organizations engage in 'virtue signaling', promoting ethical and inclusive leadership without real commitment or impact; (5) pressure and scrutiny – ethical leaders are held to high standards and may face criticism or backlash if they make mistakes; (6) short-term versus long-term goals conflict: ethical and inclusive approaches may sometimes clash with immediate financial goals, making it harder to justify decisions to profit-driven stakeholders; (7) bias in implementation: efforts to be inclusive can sometimes unintentionally exclude certain groups or lead to tokenism rather than genuine inclusion (Alvesson, 2013; Kellerman, 2012; Pfeffer, 2015; Pullen & Rhodes, 2015).

1.2.4 Authentic leadership

Authentic leadership focuses on self-awareness, transparency, ethics, and genuine relationships. Authentic leaders are self-reflective, act in accordance with their values, and foster trust and engagement among their followers. Key characteristics of authentic leadership are (1) self-awareness: understanding one's strengths, weaknesses, and values; (2) relational transparency: open and honest communication with followers; (3) balanced processing: considering diverse perspectives before making decisions; (4) internalized moral perspective: acting according to deeply held values rather than external pressures (Avolio, 2005; Gardner, 2022; George, 2003; George & Sims, 2007; George et al., 2011; Luthans & Avolio, 2003).

1.2.4.1 Origins and main representatives of authentic leadership

The concept of authentic leadership has roots in ancient philosophy, particularly in the ideas of Socrates and Aristotle, who emphasized virtues like integrity and self-knowledge. However, in modern leadership studies, the term was formally introduced in the 2000s, primarily by Bill George in his book *Authentic Leadership: Rediscovering the Secrets to Creating Lasting Value* (2003). Apart from Bill George (2003), George and Sims (2007), and George et al. (2011), the approach was further developed by scholars like Bruce Avolio (2005) and William L. Gardner (2022) who developed empirical frameworks for authentic leadership and Fred Luthans and Avolio (2003), known for linking authentic leadership to positive organizational behaviour and psychological capital. The contribution of authentic leadership to psychological capital and creativity is also researched by Rego (Rego et al., 2012). Additional contributors are Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones

(2019). They argue that being a great leader does not mean the sheer adherence to a set of specific character traits. Leaders become authentic by deploying individual strengths to engage the followers and teams. Authentic leaders are skilful at consistently being themselves, even if changing contexts make them alter their behaviours to respond effectively (Goffee & Jones, 2019).

1.2.4.2 Advantages of authentic leadership

Literature review reveals the following advantages of authentic leadership: (1) building trust and loyalty: leaders who are transparent and ethical foster trust among employees, leading to stronger relationships and organizational commitment; (2) encouraging employee engagement: authentic leaders inspire and motivate employees by creating an inclusive and value-driven work culture; (3) promoting ethical decision-making: leaders with a strong moral compass are more likely to make decisions that benefit the organization and society; (4) enhancing psychological well-being: employees working under authentic leaders often experience greater job satisfaction and reduced stress due to the supportive environment; (5) long-term organizational success: organizations led by authentic leaders tend to have sustainable growth because they prioritize long-term value over short-term gains (Avolio, 2005; Avolio & Luthans, 2006; Gardner, 2022; George, 2003; George & Sims, 2007; George et al., 2011; Goffee & Jones, 2019; Hsiung, 2012; Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Rego et al., 2012; Walumbwa et al., 2008, 2010).

1.2.4.3 Criticism of authentic leadership

Criticism of authentic leadership refers to the following aspects: (1) too idealistic: some argue that authentic leadership is more of an aspirational concept than a practical leadership model, as real-world challenges may require adaptability over strict authenticity; (2) may not work in crisis situations: leaders may need to act decisively and strategically rather than always prioritizing transparency or self-reflection in high-pressure environments; (3) risk of overemphasis on self-development: the focus on self-awareness and personal values might lead some leaders to become too inward-looking, neglecting external business needs and stakeholder expectations; (4) difficult to measure and implement: unlike transactional or transformational leadership, authentic leadership lacks a standardized framework, making it hard to evaluate effectiveness; (5) potential for misinterpretation: some leaders may justify unfiltered or insensitive communication under the guise of 'being authentic', which can create workplace conflicts or alienate team members (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; Alvesson & Einola, 2019; Einola & Alvesson, 2021; Ford & Harding, 2011; Pfeffer, 2015).

1.2.5 Adaptive leadership

Adaptive leadership concentrates on the ability to navigate complex challenges, foster innovation, and lead through change in uncertain environments. It focuses on mobilizing people to address difficult problems that require learning, adaptation, and behavioural shifts rather than relying on technical solutions (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

1.2.5.1 Origins and main representatives of adaptive leadership

Adaptive leadership was developed by Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government in the 1990s. It emerged as a response to the limitations of traditional leadership approaches, which often focus on authority and expertise rather than the ability to navigate unpredictable and systemic challenges. Ronald Heifetz (1994) and Heifetz et al. (2009), a key figure in developing the concept, authored *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (1994) and co-authored *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* (2009). Marty Linsky, a collaborator with Heifetz, co-authored *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (2002). They were mainly followed by Alexander Grashow, the co-author of Heifetz and Linsky, who contributed to refining the adaptive leadership framework. Additionally, the contribution of Mary Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) with the idea of complexity leadership must be mentioned here. Their complexity leadership theory focuses on enabling the learning, creative, and adaptive capacity of complex adaptive systems within a context of knowledge-producing organizations. The conceptual framework of this leadership paradigm includes three entangled leadership roles: adaptive leadership, administrative leadership, and enabling leadership that reflect a dynamic relationship between the bureaucratic, administrative functions of the organization and the emergent, informal dynamics of complex adaptive systems.

1.2.5.2 Advantages of adaptive leadership

Main advantages of adaptive leadership pointed at by researchers concentrate around the following issues: (1) encouraging innovation and learning: promoting experimentation and problem-solving beyond traditional solutions; (2) flexibility and responsiveness: helping organizations and leaders navigate uncertainty and complexity; (3) empowering people: engaging employees or stakeholders in problem-solving rather than relying solely on top-down decision-making; (4) addressing root causes: focusing on systemic issues instead of treating only the symptoms of a problem; (5) building organizational resilience: strengthening the ability to adapt to external disruptions (Heifetz, 1994, 2017; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

1.2.5.3 Criticism of adaptive leadership

Criticism of adaptive leadership touches upon the following issues: (1) difficult to implement: adaptive leadership requires a cultural shift in organizations, which can face resistance; (2) time-consuming: adaptive leadership involves experimentation and feedback, which can slow down decision-making; (3) unclear authority: encouraging shared leadership and engagement may lead to confusion about roles and responsibilities; (4) not always applicable: some problems are technical rather than adaptive and require expertise rather than learning and adaptation; (5) emotional and psychological challenges: adaptive leadership often involves pushing people out of their comfort zones, which can create resistance or stress (Einola & Alvesson, 2021; Nielsen, 2004; Obolensky, 2010). In general, these critiques highlight the ongoing debate about the applicability and limitations of adaptive leadership in various organizational contexts.

1.2.6 Charismatic leadership

Charismatic leadership emphasizes the leader who inspires and influences followers through personal charm, vision, and strong emotional appeal. Charismatic leaders create deep connections with their followers, often inspiring devotion and commitment beyond ordinary leadership styles. They use persuasive communication, confidence, and a strong sense of purpose to mobilize people towards a shared vision (House, 1976; Conger & Kanungo, 1998).

1.2.6.1 Origins and main representatives of charismatic leadership

The concept of charismatic leadership originates from the work of Max Weber (1922, 1978), a German sociologist who first introduced the term 'charisma' in a leadership context in the early 20th century. Weber classified authority into three types: (1) *traditional authority*: based on customs and traditions (e.g., monarchies); (2) *legal-rational authority*: based on rules and laws (e.g., bureaucratic leadership); (3) *charismatic authority*: based on an individual's extraordinary personal qualities that inspire devotion and obedience. Weber argued that charismatic leadership emerges in times of crisis or uncertainty when people seek strong and inspiring leaders. The main contributors to scientific discussion on charismatic leadership are Robert House (1976) and Jay Conger (Conger & Kanungo, 1998). The former translated Weber's view on charisma, mainly explored within political sciences into organizational studies (Yukl, 1993).

1.2.6.2 Advantages of charismatic leadership

Main advantages of charismatic leadership approach are as follows: (1) inspiration and motivation: charismatic leadership creates strong emotional

connections with followers; (2) driving change: charismatic leadership is effective in times of crisis or transformation; (3) increased loyalty and commitment: followers are deeply devoted; (4) enhancing innovation: charismatic leadership encourages bold and visionary thinking (House, 1976; Conger & Kanungo, 1998).

1.2.6.3 Criticism of charismatic leadership

Charismatic leadership has been widely studied and praised, especially for its emotional appeal and ability to inspire followers. However, several scholars have also criticized it, particularly in terms of its potential dangers, limitations, and the overly romanticized view of leaders. Even Max Weber (1922, 1978) emphasized its instability and unsuitability for long-term, rational governance. Charismatic leadership tends to depend on the personal qualities of the leader, making it fragile and potentially dangerous when routinized or institutionalized (Weber, 1922, 1978). Although Bryman (1992) offers a balanced view, he critiques the lack of clarity and operational consistency in how charisma is defined and measured. He warns that charisma can distract from organizational systems and processes that also contribute to success (Bryman, 1992). Alvesson and Spicer (2016) challenge the rationality of organizations and the cult of leadership, suggesting that charismatic leadership often contributes to 'functional stupidity' in the workplace with a lack of critical reflection and unquestioned loyalty (Alvesson & Spicer, 2016). Pfeffer (2015) argues that the glorification of charismatic leaders often masks unethical behaviour and distracts from the structural and cultural realities of organizations (Pfeffer, 2015). Although Conger (1992) is known for promoting charismatic leadership, he also highlights the 'dark side' of charisma, especially that it can lead to manipulation, overconfidence, and suppression of dissent (Conger, 1992). Other researchers point out that charismatic leadership may reduce the performance of certain team members in crisis (Wegge et al., 2019). The probably most powerful critique of the obsession with charismatic CEOs in corporate America comes from Khurana (2002). He argues that this 'romance of leadership' leads to poor hiring decisions, neglect of collaborative culture, and financial underperformance (Khurana, 2002). Consequently, the following areas of criticism can be identified: (1) dependency on the leader: organizations may struggle when the leader leaves; (2) risk of manipulation: charismatic leadership can be used for personal gain rather than collective good; (3) lack of stability: over-reliance on emotions rather than structure and policies; (4) potential for authoritarianism: some charismatic leaders may become dictatorial.

1.2.7 Path-goal leadership

The path-goal leadership is a contingency-based leadership model that suggests that a leader's primary function is to clear obstacles and guide subordinates towards achieving their goals by adapting leadership behaviours to the situation and followers' needs. The path-goal leadership approach remains influential in leadership studies, particularly for its focus on adaptability and motivation. While it has strengths in guiding leaders to support their teams effectively, its complexity and dependency on leader adjustments can make it challenging to implement universally (House, 1976).

1.2.7.1 Origins and main representatives of path-goal leadership

Path-goal leadership was developed by Robert J. House (1976), an American psychologist and leadership theorist. He was inspired by the expectancy theory of motivation within organizational behaviour studies of Vroom (1964), which argues that people are motivated when they believe their efforts will lead to desired rewards. Robert J. House, a primary developer, identified four key leadership styles that leaders should adapt based on followers and work situations: (1) *directive leadership*: providing clear guidelines, expectations, and instructions. Works best when tasks are ambiguous or complex; (2) *supportive leadership*: being approachable and concerned about employees' well-being, best for tasks that are stressful or tedious; (3) *participative leadership*: involving subordinates in decision-making. Works well when employees are highly skilled and desire involvement; (4) *achievement-oriented leadership*: setting challenging goals and expressing confidence in employees' abilities. Ideal when subordinates are highly motivated and competent (House, 1976). Additional contributors to path-goal leadership approach are Terence R. Mitchell, who was House's (1975) co-researcher, and Evans (1996), who followed House's work.

1.2.7.2 Advantages of path-goal leadership

Literature identifies the following advantages of path-goal leadership: (1) stuational flexibility: encouraging leaders to adapt their style rather than sticking to one approach; (2) employee motivation: aligning leadership with individual needs, leading to increased motivation and job satisfaction; (3) improved performance: leaders enhance productivity by removing obstacles and providing necessary guidance; (4) clear role definition: helping employees understand their goals and expectations (Evans, 1996; House & Mitchell, 1975; House, 1976, 1996; Yukl, 1993).

1.2.7.3 Criticism of path-goal leadership

Several researchers have critically examined the path-goal theory of leadership, highlighting various limitations. Researchers were questioning the effectiveness of the path-goal theory, especially concerning complex goals and large teams (Heath & Heath, 2010; Myers, 2011, 2014; Northouse, 2013). Additionally, despite the theory's potential, its practical realization remains elusive (Schriesheim & Neider, 1996; Gwin, 2020). Davis (2014) critiqued the path-goal theory for not adequately explaining or assisting in the improvement of leadership within organizational settings. He also highlighted the theory's tendency to place the onus on leaders, potentially fostering subordinate dependency, which could lead to organizational failure in the leader's absence (Davis, 2014). Additionally, inadequacies and differences in operationalizations of the path-goal theory's leader behaviour variables are pointed out by Schriesheim and Glinow (2017). These critiques underscore the need for a nuanced understanding of leadership that considers both leader behaviours and the situational contexts in which they are applied. In general, the aforementioned criticism perceives path-goal leadership approach as (1) too complex: it requires constant adjustment of leadership style, making it difficult to apply consistently; (2) leader-centric: the approach places too much responsibility on leaders rather than empowering employees; (3) lack of empirical support: some studies question its effectiveness in real-world applications; (4) overemphasis on motivation: it assumes motivation is the main factor for performance, neglecting other aspects like organizational culture.

1.2.8 Inspirational/resonant leadership

Inspirational and resonant leadership are leadership approaches that focus on emotional intelligence (EI), vision, and fostering a positive, motivating work environment. These leadership styles emphasize empathy, relationship-building, and creating a shared sense of purpose within teams and organizations (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005).

1.2.8.1 Origins and main representatives of inspirational/resonant leadership

Resonant leadership was introduced by Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee in their book *Resonant Leadership* (2005). It builds on EI principles, originally developed by Daniel Goleman (see Section 1.2.11). Inspirational leadership is rather associated with transformational leadership theory, developed by James MacGregor Burns (1978) and later expanded by Bernard Bass (1985). Apart from Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, as well as James MacGregor Burns and Bernard Bass as founders

of transformational leadership, which shares principles with inspirational leadership, other contributors to inspirational and resonant leadership include Matthew Taylor, Mette Miriam Boell, Matthew Lippincott, Claudio Fernández-Aráoz, co-authoring Boyatzis (2017).

1.2.8.2 Advantages of inspirational/resonant leadership

Researchers of inspirational/resonant leadership point out the following aspects in reference to the advantages of this approach: (1) higher employee engagement: inspirational/resonant leadership inspires motivation and commitment; (2) better team performance: building strong, cohesive teams with shared goals; (3) improved EI: encouraging empathy and interpersonal effectiveness; (4) adaptability and innovation: encouraging creative problem-solving and resilience; (5) better organizational culture: fostering trust, collaboration, and long-term vision (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005, 2006; Boyatzis et al., 2017)

1.2.8.3 Criticism of inspirational/resonant leadership

Several researchers have critically examined the inspirational and resonant leadership approaches, highlighting various concerns. Charlene Tan (2024) argues that traditional conceptions of resonant leadership overly emphasize individual attributes, particularly EI, at the expense of social communication processes. She suggests a shift towards recognizing mutual responsiveness and interactive processes within organizations (Tan, 2024). Ruben and Gigliotti (2021) discuss the disconnect between idealized leadership theories and practical outcomes. They emphasize the need to consider interdependencies and reciprocal influences between leaders and followers rather than focusing solely on leader attributes (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2021). These critiques collectively call for a more nuanced understanding of leadership that balances individual traits with the complexities of organizational dynamics and social interactions.

1.2.9 Visionary leadership

Visionary leadership is based on the leader's compelling vision of the future. The leader inspires and motivates others to work towards that vision and fosters an environment of innovation and long-term thinking. This leadership focuses on transformation, adaptability, and guiding organizations through change. Visionary leaders are typically charismatic, forward-thinking, and capable of rallying people around a shared purpose. Visionary leadership is powerful since it drives change, fosters innovation, and inspires people to achieve ambitious goals. While it has notable advantages, it also comes with

challenges that require a balance between vision and practical execution. Leaders who successfully integrate visionary thinking with strong management can create a lasting impact in their fields (Burns, 1978; Senge, 1990).

1.2.9.1 Origins and main representatives of visionary leadership

Visionary leadership has its roots in various leadership theories, particularly transformational leadership, which was first conceptualized by James MacGregor Burns (1978). Burns described transformational leaders as those who inspire followers to transcend their personal interests for a greater cause. Other influences on visionary leadership include Max Weber's (see Section 1.2.6) charismatic leadership theory, which is closely linked to visionary leadership, and Peter Senge's (1990) works on learning organizations, where he emphasized the need for leaders to develop long-term visions to foster learning and adaptability. However, visionary leadership is not attributed to a single originator; it has evolved as part of modern leadership and management thought. Contributors to visionary leadership also include Burt Nanus and Warren Bennis (1995), Daniel Goleman (2011), and Jeff Dyer et al. (2019) with their concept of innovation leadership.

1.2.9.2 Advantages of visionary leadership

The discussion on advantages of visionary leadership mainly concentrates on the following issues: (1) inspiration and motivation: visionary leadership encourages employees and followers to work towards a meaningful goal; (2) fostering innovation: the approach promotes creative thinking and new ideas; (3) providing long-term direction: helping organizations and movements navigate uncertain futures; (4) building strong organizational culture: visionary leadership creates a purpose-driven and passionate workforce; (5) encouraging risk-taking: the approach enables organizations to take calculated risks for greater rewards (Dyer et al., 2019; Goleman, 2011; Nanus & Bennis, 1995).

1.2.9.3 Criticism of visionary leadership

Several researchers have critically examined the visionary leadership approach, highlighting potential drawbacks in various publications. Nufer Yasin Ates et al. (2018) argue that, when middle and lower-level managers' visionary leadership is not aligned with the CEO's strategy, it can harm team strategic consensus and diminish commitment to the strategy (Ates et al., 2018). They also explore reasons why visionary leadership may fail, suggesting that misalignment between a leader's vision and the organization's strategic direction can lead to ineffective leadership outcomes (Ates et al., 2019).

Hao Chen et al. (2024) investigate the negative effects of visionary leadership on subordinates and report that visionary leadership can lead to cognitive strain and psychological contract violations among employees, resulting in increased work withdrawal behaviours (Chen et al., 2024). These publications provide a nuanced perspective on visionary leadership, emphasizing that while it can be beneficial, there are contexts and conditions where it may have unintended negative consequences. Accordingly, the following aspects can be identified in reference to criticism against visionary leadership: (1) unrealistic: overemphasis on vision may lead to impractical goals; (2) over-reliance on a single leader: organizations may struggle if the leader departs; (3) resistance to change: employees or stakeholders may resist radical changes; (4) neglect of short-term needs: too much focus on the future can overlook immediate challenges; (5) potential for autocratic leadership: some visionary leaders become overly dominant, disregarding input from others.

1.2.10 Distributed and shared leadership

Distributed and shared leadership are leadership models that emphasize collective, collaborative, and decentralized decision-making processes rather than relying on a single leader. These models recognize that leadership responsibilities can be spread across multiple individuals within an organization or team, leveraging their unique expertise and perspectives. Distributed leadership focuses on leadership as a process that emerges through interactions among individuals within an organization. It is not tied to formal positions but rather to expertise, collaboration, and shared responsibility. Shared leadership refers to a dynamic process where multiple individuals take on leadership roles at different times, depending on expertise, context, and needs (Ancona & Backman, 2017; Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006).

1.2.10.1 Origins and main representatives of distributed and shared leadership

Distributed leadership emerged from organizational and educational leadership studies, particularly in the early 2000s (Ancona & Backman, 2017; Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006). Shared leadership has roots in team-based organizational structures and management studies (Pearce & Conger, 2003). Main theorists of distributed leadership are James P. Spillane (2006), who developed the concept in the context of education, emphasizing leadership as a distributed practice rather than an individual trait; Peter Gronn (2002), who argued that leadership emerges through shared activities and interactions within organizations; and Deborah Ancona and Elaine Backman (2017), who contributed to leadership studies by highlighting the role

of networks and team-based leadership structures. Key theorists of shared leadership include Craig L. Pearce and Jay A. Conger (2003), who pioneered research on shared leadership in teams, emphasizing leadership as a dynamic and fluid process. Another contributor is also Mary Uhl-Bien with her research on the intersection of complexity leadership (see Section 1.2.5) and shared leadership with a focus on how leadership emerges in networks and complex adaptive systems, exploring relational dynamics and leadership as a process.

1.2.10.2 Advantages of distributed and shared leadership

Most commonly mentioned advantages of distributed and shared leadership in literature are as follows: (1) enhanced collaboration and engagement: employees feel more valued and motivated; (2) encouraging innovation and adaptability: different perspectives lead to creative solutions; (3) reduced leadership bottlenecks: decisions do not depend solely on one leader; (4) increased organizational resilience: multiple leaders reduce dependence on a single individual; (5) fostering professional growth: more individuals have opportunities to develop leadership skills (Ancona & Backman, 2017; Gronn, 2002; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Spillane, 2006).

1.2.10.3 Criticism of distributed and shared leadership

Several researchers have critically examined distributed and shared leadership, highlighting conceptual ambiguities and practical challenges. Alma Harris (2007) points out that distributed leadership lacks a clear definition and sufficient empirical support, leading to misunderstandings in both research and practice (Harris, 2007). Sandra Jones (2014) argues that, while distributed leadership promotes collective responsibility, it may overlook individual accountability, potentially causing role confusion and inefficiency (Jones, 2014). The individual aspect is also raised by Peter Gronn (2002), who criticizes the aggregation of leadership roles in distributed leadership models, arguing that this approach may not accurately reflect the complexities of leadership practices and could diminish the significance of individual contributions. Richard Bolden (2011) suggests that distributed leadership can obscure power dynamics within organizations, inadvertently reinforcing existing hierarchies rather than promoting genuine collaboration Bolden, 2011). Similarly, Tony Bush (2018) questions the practicality of implementing distributed leadership in environments with rigid hierarchical structures, indicating potential conflicts between theory and application (Bush, 2018). Wei Chen and Jun-Hui Zhang (2023) identified several negative impacts of shared leadership, including (1) power struggles among team members; (2) role stress leading to knowledge hiding; (3) psychological territorial loss

for formal team leaders; (4) reduced team performance and decision-making efficiency; (5) dispersion of team responsibilities and decline in team creativity (Chen & Zhang, 2023). Anne Sweeney et al. (2019) discussed the challenges of implementing shared leadership in commercial contexts, emphasizing the need to consider organizational context when evaluating its effectiveness (Sweeney et al., 2019). Consequently, the criticism of distributed and shared leadership approach can be summed up as follows: (1) lack of clarity in decision-making: when leadership is distributed or shared, accountability can become ambiguous; (2) potential for conflict: differences in leadership styles or opinions can create disagreements; (3) a strong culture of trust required: employees must trust each other and be open to collaboration; (4) not suitable for all organizations: some industries or organizational structures require hierarchical decision-making; (5) implementation challenges: organizations transitioning to these models may struggle with resistance to change or require extensive training.

1.2.11 EI in leadership

EI leadership refers to the ability of leaders to understand, manage, and influence their own emotions and those of others in a workplace or organization. Leaders with high EI use empathy, self-awareness, and social skills to foster teamwork, motivation, and a positive work culture. EI leadership has transformed modern leadership by emphasizing empathy, self-awareness, and social skills. While it has proven benefits in workplace environments, it also faces criticisms regarding measurement, applicability, and ethical concerns (Goleman, 2005, 2011).

1.2.11.1 Origins and main representatives of EI leadership

The concept of EI was popularized by Daniel Goleman (2005) in the 1990s, but its foundations trace back to earlier psychological research. Peter Salovey and John Mayer (1990) first introduced EI as a form of social intelligence. Daniel Goleman expanded the idea by linking it to leadership and workplace success. Goleman (2005, 2011, 2020) integrated EI with leadership and outlined five components: (1) self-awareness: knowing one's strengths, weaknesses, drives, values, and impact on others; (2) self-regulation: controlling or redirecting disruptive impulses and moods; (3) motivation: relishing achievement for its own sake; (4) empathy: understanding other people's emotional makeup; (5) social skill: building rapport with others to move them in desired direction, social skill is the culmination of the other dimensions of EI. Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee (2006) (see Section 1.2.8) developed the concept of *resonant leadership*, emphasizing the role of EI in effective leadership, which highlights emotionally intelligent leaders who

inspire and connect with employees. Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves (2009) developed practical EI models for workplace leadership, including the *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* framework.

1.2.11.2 Advantages of EI leadership

Advantages of EI leadership can be categorized as follows: (1) improved workplace culture: the EI approach creates a positive and inclusive work environment; (2) better decision-making: the EI approach helps leaders remain calm under pressure; (3) stronger team collaboration: enhancing communication and trust; (4) higher employee engagement: motivating and inspiring employees; (5) adaptability: enabling leaders to manage change effectively (Boyatzis & McKee, 2006; Bradberry & Greaves, 2009; Goleman, 2005, 2011, 2020).

1.2.11.3 Criticism of EI leadership

Several researchers have critically examined the application of EI in leadership, highlighting concerns about its conceptualization, measurement, and predictive validity. Mary J. Fambrough and Rama Kaye Hart (2008) criticize the use of EI in leadership development. They raise concerns about the lack of a unified definition of EI, the validity of its measurement instruments, and the potential cultural biases inherent in its application (Fambrough & Hart, 2008). Marie Dasborough et al. (2022) revisited the ongoing debate about EI's role in leadership. They discussed the persistent controversies surrounding the construct's validity and its predictive power for workplace outcomes, emphasizing the need for rigorous research methodologies in this area (Dasborough et al. (2022). Accordingly, the criticism points at the following aspects: (1) lack of scientific rigor: EI lacks clear, measurable standards; (2) overemphasis on soft skills: some industries require technical expertise over emotional management; (3) potential manipulation: emotionally intelligent leaders might use their skills for personal gain or manipulation; (4) cultural bias: EI models are often Western-centric and may not apply in some parts of the world.

1.2.12 General overview of contemporary leadership approaches and their comparison

Table 1.3 summarizes the main features of selected contemporary leadership approaches presented and discussed in Sections 1.2.1–1.2.11.

Table 1.4 points out the main similarities of selected contemporary leadership approaches.

Table 1.3 Overview of selected contemporary leadership approaches

Approach	*Origin/main representatives/ recent followers*	*Description*	*Application*
Servant leadership	Robert Greenleaf, James Hunter, Larry Spears, Dirk van Dierendonck, Kathleen Patterson, Duena Blomstrom	Leaders prioritize the needs and well-being of their team members and put their interests ahead of their own. They build trust and a supportive environment by empowering team members and encouraging them to grow. Such leaders help and do not hinder. They empathize and inspire.	Organizations that prioritize ethical standards and employee-centric cultures mainly from sectors such as healthcare, education, non-profit, religion, and some businesses.
Leader–member exchange (LMX) theory	George Graen, and Mary Uhl-Bien, but also Fred Dansereau, William Haga, and Terri Scandura	LMX theory focuses on the quality of relationships between leaders and followers, recognizing that leaders develop unique one-on-one relationships with other team members. High-quality relationships are built on trust, mutual respect, and loyalty, which should lead to greater engagement and satisfaction.	Effective in workplaces that value teamwork and personalized management such as sales teams, project-based organizations, and matrixed organizations.
Ethical/inclusive leadership	James MacGregor Burns, Bernard Bass, Ronald Heifetz, Mary Gentile, Amy Edmondson, Ginni Rometty, but also Michael Brown, Ingrid Nembhard, Linda Trevino, Ronald E. Riggio, Neil Malhotra, and Ken Shotts	Leaders promote ethical behaviour and values within their teams. They cultivate trust and credibility by modelling integrity, honesty, and fairness, as well as fostering positive relationships grounded in respect. Leaders foster a sense of belonging and psychological safety and seek to value and leverage diversity within their teams.	Often found across industries, global companies, public institutions, healthcare, education and academia, and any organization prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).
Authentic leadership	William George, Bruce Avolio, William L. Gardner, Fred Luthans, Rob Goffee, and Gareth Jones	Transparency, self-awareness, and genuine relationships are emphasized. Authentic leaders build trust and foster commitment from others. Authentic leaders lead by example and encourage open and honest communication. It is a response to turbulent times.	Common in mission-driven companies, social enterprises, and organizations where trust, interpersonal relationships, and culture are pivotal.

(*Continued*)

Table 1.3 (Continued)

Approach	*Origin/main representatives/ recent followers*	*Description*	*Application*
Adaptive leadership	Ronald Heifetz, Marty Linsky, and Alexander Grashow (adaptive leadership); Mary Uhl-Bien, Marion Russ, and Bill McKelvey (complexity leadership)	Adaptive leadership is also a response to turbulent times, and it also stems from the complexity leadership theory, which emphasizes flexibility, learning, and adapting to changing environments. Adaptive leaders focus to help organizations navigate through complex, encourage experimentation, foster collaboration, and empower teams to handle change collectively. The main role of a leader is to orchestrate adaptive change rather than provide ready-made solutions. The main pillars of adaptive leadership: emotional intelligence, organizational justice, development, and character, meaning being transparent and creative. Adaptive leadership incorporates behaviours and traits described in a servant leadership model and reflects most of the assumptions of the transformational leadership theory.	Often applied in industries that face constant disruptions and where leaders must quickly adapt to changing conditions. Also applied in the public sector, non-profit, education, and healthcare.
Charismatic leadership	Max Weber, Robert House, and Jay Conger	Charismatic leaders rely on their personal charm, passion, and vision to inspire and motivate others. This leadership style aligns with transformational leadership's focus on a compelling vision and the power of inspiration to drive change.	Characteristic of politics, various kinds of social movements, and innovative businesses.
Path-Goal leadership	Robert House, Terence R. Mitchell, and Martin Evans	The leader takes responsibility for providing followers with everything the team needs to follow their path to their goals.	Often applied in sales, but also in education, healthcare, military and law enforcement, and project management.

(*Continued*)

Table 1.3 (Continued)

Approach	*Origin/main representatives/ recent followers*	*Description*	*Application*
Inspirational/resonant leadership	Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, Annie McKee, James MacGregor Burns, Bernard Bass, and Matthew Taylor, Mette Miriam Boell, Matthew Lippincott, and Claudio Fernández-Aráoz	Inspirational leaders motivate followers through a shared vision, set high expectations, and help followers find meaning in their work. They use storytelling, symbolism, and emotional appeal to inspire followers to exceed ordinary expectations. Inspirational leaders foster belief and trust, value and respect each individual, prioritize self-development, create a supportive environment, and invest in opportunities to grow.	Often applied in environments where motivation, innovation, and employee engagement are critical to success. Mostly found in creative industries such as media, advertising, and design; non-profit and social organizations; startups and tech companies; educational institutions; healthcare; and corporations focused on transformation.
Visionary leadership	Burt Nanus, Warren Bennis, Daniel Goleman, and also Jeff Dyer, Nathan Furr, and Curtis Lefrandt, with their concept of innovation leadership	Visionary leaders create and communicate a clear, compelling vision for the future. They inspire followers by setting long-term goals and guiding their teams towards a shared objective. The main pillar of visionary leadership is vision, strategic directions, and goals.	Often found in organizations undergoing significant change.

(*Continued*)

Table 1.3 (Continued)

Approach	*Origin/main representatives/ recent followers*	*Description*	*Application*
Distributed and Shared leadership	James Spillane, Peter Gronn, and Deborah Ancona (distributed leadership) Craig Pearce, Jay Conger (shared leadership), and Mary Uhl-Bien	Especially effective with remote work and flatter organizational structures. Leadership responsibilities are spread among team members, encouraging collaboration, accountability, and empowerment. The focus is on team autonomy, collective decision-making, shared responsibility, and collaborative work culture, which are key elements of distributed leadership theory and shared leadership theory. The former suggests that leadership is spread across multiple individuals within a group or organization, rather than being concentrated in a single leader, and leadership is an activity that emerges from interactions among group members based on the situation, expertise, and context, whereas the latter builds on the idea that leadership can be distributed among team members. Distributed leadership is a key element of the transformational approach.	Popular in agile teams, project-based environments, startups, research institutions, and innovative organizations.
Emotional intelligence (EI) in leadership	Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, Annie McKee, Travis Bradberry, and Jean Greaves	The EI model is based on the following pillars or dimensions of leadership: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.	May be applied universally.

Source: Own work based on Avolio and Gardner (2005): Barling (2013); Bass (1985, 1999, 2008); Bass and Riggio (2005); Blomstrom (2021); Bono and Judge (2004); Boyatzis et al. (2017); Boyatzis and McKee (2006); Bradberry and Greaves (2009); Brennan (1997); Brown and Trevino (2006); Brown et al. (2005); Burns (1978, 2003); Conger and Kanungo (1987, 1998); Dansereau et al. (1975); Den Hartog (2015); Dyer et al. (2019); Edmondson (2019); Eva et al. (2019); Evans (1996); Gardner and McCauley (2022); Gentile (2015); George (2003); George and Sims (2007); George et al. (2011); Goffee and Jones (2019); Goleman (2005, 2011); Graen and Scandura (1987); Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995); Greenleaf (1970, 2002); Gronn (2002); Heifetz (1994); Heifetz et al. (2009); Heifetz and Linsky (2002); House and Mitchell (1975); House (1976); Hunter (1998); Joy (2018); Judge and Piccolo (2004); Lussier and Achua (2016); Luthans and Avolio (2003); Malhorta and Shotts (2022); Monahan (2012); Morgeson et al. (2010); Nanus and Bennis (1995); Northouse (2013); Nembhard and Edmondson (2006); Patterson (2003); Pearce and Conger (2003); Riggio (2010); Spears (2010); Spillane (2006); Trevino et al. (2006); Uhl-Bien et al. (2007); Uhl-Bien (2016); Uhl-Bien and Arena (2017); Uhl-Bien and Marion (2009); Van Dierendonck and Patterson (2018); Van Knippenberg and Sitkin (2013); Weber (1922, 1978).

Table 1.4 The comparison of selected contemporary leadership approaches

Leadership approach	*Key focus*	*Similar to*
Servant leadership	Serving and empowering followers	Ethical, authentic, distributed leadership
Leader–member exchange (LMX)	Quality of leader–follower relationships	Emotional intelligence
Ethical leadership	Integrity, fairness, and morality	Servant, authentic leadership
Authentic leadership	Self-awareness and genuine leadership	Ethical, servant leadership
Adaptive leadership	Navigating and leading change	Visionary, emotional intelligence
Charismatic leadership	Influence through personal charm	Inspirational, visionary leadership
Path-goal leadership	Motivating and guiding followers	Inspirational leadership
Inspirational leadership	Energizing and motivating followers	Charismatic, visionary leadership
Visionary leadership	Creating and communicating a long-term vision	Charismatic, inspirational leadership
Distributed and shared leadership	Collective leadership and decision-making	Servant leadership
Emotional intelligence in leadership	Managing emotions and relationships	LMX, charismatic leadership

Source: Own work.

Leadership approaches presented in Table 1.3 not only derive from transformational leadership theory but also draw from other developments in leadership studies. One of the consequences of such a state of affairs is that sometimes some of them differ only in reference to very few features or the difference between them lies in bigger or smaller focus put on these or those features depending on the sort of business, operations, or leadership area of activity they are dedicated to and applied in. Accordingly, the relations between the very approaches to leadership are complex and multilayered. This is reflected in various scientific debates on the nature of these relations. For example, Choi claims that, although very similar, there is a fundamental difference between transformational leadership and shared leadership, meaning that the former is vertical and the latter is horizontal. Vertical leadership stems from a leader, and horizontal leadership originates from a group (Choi et al., 2017). Rickards shows transformational leadership as a recent revision of ancient concept of charismatic leadership (Rickards, 2015). However, it is not the aim of this discussion to analyse those differences on the micro-level of the features associated with subsequent approaches, which would take a separate book to write but rather to give a general and comprehensive overview or the landscape of what leadership typology can be identified in scientific literature.

Practical application of these subsequent approaches to leadership, as well as of transformational leadership itself in the form of good practice examples or short descriptions of case studies, can be found in Appendix I.

1.3 Transformational leadership

The previous analysis leads to the conclusion that the current most prominent leadership theory, with various approaches stemming from or being associated with it, is transformational leadership. The previous literature review has also been enhanced with a bibliometric analysis of the number of occurrences of the notion of 'transformational_leadership' in the publications on leadership approaches presented and explored in the previous section. This analysis was carried out on 20 February 2025 with the use of the SCOPUS database (see Appendix II). It shows that out of all current leadership approaches presented in Section 1.2, EI in leadership approach is most often associated with the broader notion of 'transformational leadership'. However, Dirk Lindebaum and Susan Cartwright (2010) questioned the methodological rigour of studies linking EI to transformational leadership. They found that when controlling for common method variance, the purported strong relationship between EI and transformational leadership diminished, suggesting that previous findings may have been overstated (Lindebaum & Cartwright, 2010). Yet, EI in leadership approach constitutes the starting point for the creation of author's own model of transformational maturity used in the research on individual leadership presented in Chapter 3, especially due to its strong social dimension which, as explained and proved in Chapter 2, is the key element of effectively executed leadership during turbulent times.

In broad terms, transformational leaders focus on inspiring, motivating, and fostering personal growth within teams. They concentrate not only on performance but also on engagement and loyalty. Additionally, the concept of agile leadership is gaining traction, encouraging leaders to be adaptable, make quick decisions, and foster innovation, especially as organizations face rapid technological advancements and hybrid work environments. Furthermore, leaders align organizational goals with broader social or environmental responsibilities. Such an approach resonates in a workforce increasingly valuing inclusivity, psychological safety, and community engagement, which are seen as crucial to strong leadership in today's diverse and dynamic settings. Finally, the concept of digital transformation and the integration of AI as a result of technological advancement, with its speed on an unprecedented level, require modern leaders to be proficient in new technologies, capable of guiding teams through technological changes while emphasizing continuous learning and EI. This blend of empathy, adaptability, and tech-savvy skills is expected to define successful leaders in the coming years.

No wonder, then, that the complex matrix of challenges and organizational contexts in present times still produces new ideas towards leadership. One of the examples is the concept of *conscious leadership* coined by Mackey et al. (2020) in their book under the same title, co-authored with McIntosh and Phipps. Conscious leadership is the mixture of already described ethical, visionary, servant, and authentic approaches to leadership, which is supposed to be an answer to challenges posed by such global megatrends as (1) technological advancement proving increasingly disruptive, (2) global competitiveness, and (3) demography changes resulting in complicating organizational structure as well as changing attitudes about the responsibilities of business (Mackey et al., 2020).

Furthermore, John Hennessy, former President of Stanford University and current Chairman of Alphabet (Google) in his book entitled *Leading Matters* (2018), advocates and reports, as a practitioner, the effectiveness of leadership that uses and is based on authentic, servant, and visionary approaches, as well as other elements from practically most of the approaches presented in Table 1.3, especially humility, empathy, collaboration, teamwork, and innovation.

The mixture of authentic, visionary, and EI dimensions within a broader framework of distributed leadership is proposed by Henriksen and Lundby, who call their approach fearless leadership (Henriksen & Lundby, 2021). Additionally, with the latest developments in the field, *design leadership* (Quint et al., 2022) must be mentioned. It should be treated as an approach rather than a style since it is based on a broad conceptualized framework, and it encompasses the ideas that underlie innovative, inspirational, visionary, and adaptive approaches with a very strong collaboration aspect.

To complete the landscape of scientific discussion on leadership, especially in the international context in which the research presented in this book is rooted, it is worth referring to approaches that perceive the art of leading from a global perspective. Some researchers call it *global leadership* (Gundling et al., 2011), whereas others call it *trans-cultural leadership* (Trompenaars, 2021 in Tjemkes & Mihalache, 2021; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012). Furthermore, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's work is also rooted in the servant leadership approach. Gundling et al. (2011) define global leadership with the use of ten key behaviours, traits, and features that great leaders should possess: (1) cultural self-awareness; (2) inviting the unknown; (3) results through relationships; (4) frame-shifting; (5) expanding ownership; (6) developing future leaders; (7) adapting and adding value; (8) core values and flexibility; (9) influencing across boundaries; (10) third-way solutions (Gundling et al., 2011). In this sense, the concept of *global leadership* draws heavily from Burns's (1978) views on transformational leadership. Similarly, according to Trompenaars (2021), the development and use of a trans-cultural competency to guide organizations successfully is needed as a

response to the requirement of dealing with dilemmas that arise while functioning in multi-cultural environments (Trompenaars, 2021). What is also common for those two concepts is the emphasis put on social competences.

All these approaches, let us call them composite, or hybrid, frameworks, that is, including elements of various approaches, somehow associated with a broader concept of transformational leadership, first of all, perceive leadership from the interpersonal, inspirational, and visionary perspective. In this sense, they touch upon the essence of transformational leadership as coined and defined by an American political sociologist Burns (1978). His transactional leadership theory was based on the analysis of the process going on between leaders and followers, managers and staff, and parents and children. However, Burns drew the distinction between transactional and transformational leadership as mutually exclusive styles where, in the case of the former, leaders usually work in the existing culture, while, in the case of the latter, leaders try to change it. Unlike the transactional approach, transformational leadership is not based on a 'give-and-take' relationship but on the leader's personality, traits, and ability to make a change through example, vision, and challenging goals. The change of a paradigm here lies in the shift of this relationship, which should not be based on exploitation and manipulation but on trust and integrity. This, in turn, should supposedly lead to an increased level of motivation and morality and eventually to personal growth and development of all parties involved. Accordingly, he argued that transformational leaders develop followers as individuals and as leaders of the future by empowering them and responding to their needs (Burns, 2003). Moreover, his views on leadership were also closely connected with the idea of democratizing companies and organizations, which, according to Eaton et al. (2024), has been missing in the scientific discussion on leadership by Burns' followers. What still lies at the centre of this discussion are the key factors characterizing transformational leadership proposed by Bass (2008), who translated Burns' discussion on American politics into management studies. These factors, which Bass called 4 I's, are the following: (1) *idealized influence* that relates to charisma and identification with a leader's vision by his team and followers, a leader acts here as a role model with his ethical and moral values, and followers aspire to be like them; (2) *inspirational motivation* that relates to stimulating vision, goals, and high standards set for the followers and the organization by a leader; (3) *intellectual stimulation* that relates to leader's ability to invite followers to question and challenge assumptions, which eventually leads to personal growth, innovation, and creativity; (4) *individual consideration* that relates to leader's skills in appealing to the individuality of each follower by treating them as special and important and listening to their needs and problems acting as a guide, mentor, and coach (McGrath & Bates, 2017).

Although Warren Bennis, an American psychologist, and Burton Nanus, a management studies academic, are classified in Table 1.3 as representatives of the visionary leadership approach, they have contributed greatly to the development of the idea of transformational leadership. They identified four strategies that leaders use while transforming their organizations: (1) develop a clear and understandable vision for the organization; (2) act as social architects for the organization by changing the organizational culture; (3) create trust throughout the organization by making explicit their values and views; and (4) identify their own strengths and weaknesses and encourage their followers to do the same (Bennis & Nanus, 2007).

Other and recent developers of the idea of transformational leadership (Blane, 2017; Crowley, 2011; Mayberry, 2024; Warfa, 2024; Ytterstad & Olaisen, 2023) focus mainly on inspirational and motivational aspects, which help teams to achieve exceptional outcomes by fostering innovation, collaboration, and personal development. Additionally, Tjemkes and Mihalache (2021) stress the importance of what they call *transformative strategies*. These strategies used in strategic management are critical for organizational success in today's environment. Disruptions of various sorts, such as financial crises, continuing economic uncertainty, digitalization, environmental issues, and social issues involved in globalization, present strategic problems for organizations. Consequently, they need to develop strategies that fit their own complex situations. The development of these strategies is based on the shift from dichotomized thinking such as exploring or exploiting to transformative thinking, which is supposed to enable solving real problems that companies face, encouraging them to acknowledge the broader context in which they operate and to analyse the problems and challenges from multiple perspectives (Tjemkes & Mihalache, 2021).

However, Tourish (2013) proposes a rare critical perspective towards transformational leadership. He confronts the orthodoxy of presenting leaders as heroic, charismatic, and transformational visionaries by illustrating how such approaches encourage narcissism, megalomania, and poor decision-making, which eventually impose great expenses on the organizations in which transformational leaders serve (Tourish, 2013). Additionally, Szu-Han (Joanna) Lin et al. (2019) examine the personal costs of transformational leadership behaviours for leaders themselves. They find that such behaviours can increase leaders' emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions (Lin et al., 2019).

Regardless of the approaches to leadership and criticism against them, a practitioner with over 40 years of experience as a coach and an expert, John Maxwell (2019), describes a perfect leader from a general transformational point of view. He claims that transformational leaders know why they lead, are contagious, influence today and tomorrow, ask people to make

a difference, love the people they lead, are trained and transformed, help people change, have a calling, and impact many. Another practitioner, Chris Hirst, a global CEO, adds that our societies, businesses, and communities need more and better leaders from all walks of life. He also postulates for a more democratic type of leadership since we need a new way for new people (Hirst, 2020).

The examples of approaches to leadership, which in fact are the mixtures or off-springs of approaches presented in Sections 1.2.1–1.2.11, are multiple. What ties them together is the most current and probably most comprehensive definition of leadership provided by Yukl and Gardner (2020). They state that leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about the tasks and the way they should be accomplished, as well as the process of facilitating others towards these accomplishments (Yukl & Gardner, 2020). However, one thing is certain that the discussion on leadership will continue and must continue since current challenges resulting from local contexts and global megatrends require new leaders in all spheres and even on all levels of organizations and processes (Tichy, 1997; Gundling et al., 2011; Mackey et al., 2020). What is more, turbulent times caused by international conflicts of military or economical character and new emerging socio-economic patterns and rules fostered by technological advancement call for a profound and thorough consideration of the character and quality of leadership of our times. Robbins et al. (2015) stress that the dynamism of our times, which results in reshaping managers' and leaders' jobs, is really high (Robbins et al., 2015). Accordingly, the need for great and transformational leaders will still be growing.

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