

# Beyond Authority: Leadership Approaches From Classical to Contemporary

Editors: Assist. Prof. Dr. Onur OKTAYSOY

Lecturer Dr. Ozer ELKIRMIS



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# BEYOND AUTHORITY: LEADERSHIP APPROACHES FROM CLASSICAL TO CONTEMPORARY

## **Editors:**

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# 1. CLASSICAL AND TRADITIONAL APPROACHES





## Autocratic Leadership 8

Erdogan Kaygın<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This study aims to examine the theoretical framework of autocratic leadership with a multidimensional approach and to examine the effects of this leadership style at the organizational and individual levels, its principles, dimensions, and its relationship with the cultural context. In the leadership literature, autocratic leadership is defined as a managerial approach that focuses on absolute authority in decision-making processes, limits the participation of subordinates, and prioritizes control mechanisms. While this leadership model can be functional in terms of rapid intervention and maintaining order, especially in crisis conditions, it can weaken organizational flexibility, employee loyalty, and psychological safety in the long run. In the study, autocratic leadership was analyzed through five basic dimensions, and significant structural patterns were revealed in areas such as decision-making style, use of authority, communication style, level of supervision, and leader-subordinate relations. In addition, the study draws attention to the role of cultural factors in shaping the leadership approach and emphasizes that high power distance and collectivist cultures are more prone to an autocratic approach.

### 1. Introduction

Leadership plays a decisive and crucial role in the sustainability and effectiveness of modern organizations. Accordingly, the impact of leadership styles on organizational structures, employee behaviors, and performance indicators has become one of the main areas of discussion in management sciences. Among these styles, autocratic leadership represents a management model in which authority is centralized and decision-making processes are based on the initiative of the leader within a hierarchical structure. Autocratic leaders make decisions without the participation of subordinates, directly control organizational processes, and demand strict adherence to

1 Prof.Dr., Kafkas University, kaygin@kafkas.edu.tr, ORCID:0000-0002-2125-5032

rules (Molemane et al., 2015). Historically, this approach has been widely adopted, especially in military organizations, crisis management situations, or sectors with a high need for control.

Although autocratic leadership is traditionally considered to be oppressive and counterproductive to employee motivation, a more comprehensive and multidimensional assessment is needed to understand all aspects of this approach. Some studies in the literature suggest that autocratic leadership in certain contexts may provide advantages in terms of organizational efficiency, speed of decision-making and crisis management (Yea et al., 2024; Asno & Sary, 2023), and that autocratic leadership style may have the potential to create positive and significant effects on employee performance, especially under conditions of crisis and high levels of uncertainty (Asno & Sary, 2023).

On the other hand, this leadership style can often bring risks such as decreased employee satisfaction, suppression of innovative thinking, weakened organizational commitment, and increased deviant behavior (Khizer et al., 2024; Liaqat et al., 2024). International studies show that employees show lower levels of motivation and job satisfaction under authoritarian management.

In this chapter, the concept of autocratic leadership will be discussed in a holistic framework, and its reflections at both organizational and individual levels will be examined. In addition, the principles and dimensions of leadership, the main areas of debate in the literature, and the legitimacy of autocratic leadership in the contemporary context will be questioned. The subject will be evaluated not only as a theoretical discussion but also in the light of applied results and sectoral comparisons. Thus, it is aimed to provide the reader with an in-depth and critical perspective on the place of autocratic leadership in contemporary management practices.

## **2. Overview of Autocratic Leadership**

Leadership is considered a basic managerial function that determines the direction of organizations, plays a decisive role in making strategic decisions, and directs employee behavior. In this context, among different leadership styles, one of the approaches that has been focused on and attracted significant attention in the literature has been the autocratic leadership style. In this leadership style, decision-making authority is generally concentrated in a single individual, the leader, and the participation of employees in the process is minimized or completely excluded. The leader's decisions are

implemented without question, and communication within the organization is vertical and unidirectional (Yea et al., 2024).

When the historical origins of this leadership style are analyzed, it is seen that it is defined within the framework of “rational-legal authority” within the Weberian typology of authority. According to Weber, in structures where leadership power is based on legal norms and authority is strictly enforced from top to bottom, it is accepted that the autocratic form of government has institutional legitimacy. For this reason, autocratic leadership has been positioned as a frequently preferred management style, especially in the standardization of production lines after the industrial revolution, military structures that require discipline, and crisis periods (Maseti & Gumede, 2011; Altintas, 2024).

In today’s management literature, the functionality of autocratic leadership is addressed from a more critical perspective. It is stated that in processes carried out under the absolute authority of the leader, negative results such as decreased motivation levels of employees, decreased organizational commitment, and suppression of creativity are frequently observed (Liaqat et al., 2024; Khizer et al., 2024). However, it is also emphasized in the literature that this leadership style contributes to accelerating decision-making processes in situations such as time pressure, high risk level, or organizational chaos (Hamze & Sadiq, 2025; Asno & Sary, 2023).

The functionality of leadership styles is not only related to their conceptual characteristics but also to the cultural, sectoral, and structural contexts in which they are applied. Indeed, autocratic leadership has been found to be legitimate in some cultural structures, and this style is met with less resistance by employees. It is stated that in societies where respect for authority is high, this leadership style is more easily internalized, whereas in structures with high levels of individualism, conflict and resistance levels increase. This situation indicates that leadership styles should be considered within the framework of contextual validity rather than universal validity (Modise, 2024; Kanat & Geçgin, 2025).

On the other hand, it is also argued that autocratic leadership provides speed and clarity in decision-making processes due to its “one-voice” structure and offers certain advantages in achieving organizational goals without deviation. However, it is argued that these advantages are generally short-term; in the long run, they may lead to employee disengagement, low job satisfaction, and weakening of innovative capacity (Jony et al, 2019).

Based on this framework, autocratic leadership is neither a completely functional nor a completely objectionable management model. On the contrary, the advantages and disadvantages of this leadership style should be analyzed by taking into account multidimensional factors such as the personality traits of the leader, organizational culture, structural needs, and external environmental conditions. Therefore, in evaluating the effects of autocratic leadership, unidirectional interpretations should be avoided, and a multidimensional, contextual, and critical perspective should be adopted.

### **3. Autocratic Leadership at The Organizational Level**

Within organizational structures, leadership styles are among the main managerial factors that shape decision-making processes, communication styles, employee performance, and the overall organizational climate. Autocratic leadership stands out as a management style in which hierarchical control and authority are felt intensely in organizations. In this leadership style, the leader's decisions are implemented directly and often without consultation, and organizational members are generally positioned as passive actors who carry out instructions (Yea et al., 2024). At the organizational level, autocratic leadership is often associated with centralized decision-making structures, in which functions such as strategic planning, performance management, crisis intervention, and resource allocation are centralized to achieve efficiency (Korkmaz & Altintas, 2024; Elkırımıř & Yılmaz, 2024). In this respect, autocratic leadership is adopted as a preferred form of leadership, especially in organizational environments where time pressure is high, rapid action is required, or crisis situations are in question (Asno & Sary, 2023). However, various studies have also shown that this leadership model may lead to negative outcomes in dimensions such as organizational commitment, motivation, and employee engagement. Empirical studies, especially in educational institutions and the service sector, have found that autocratic leadership increases distrust among employees, weakens organizational synergy, and suppresses innovative suggestions (Liaqat et al., 2024; Bhatti et al., 2012).

The effects of autocratic leadership at the organizational level are directly related to the behavioral style of the leader, and this relationship may vary according to organizational culture, sectoral structure, and employee profile. As a matter of fact, a study conducted in higher education institutions in 2023 revealed that employee engagement can be strengthened when autocratic leadership is applied in a certain dose. However, it was stated that this commitment was mostly achieved through control mechanisms based

on discipline and punishment, and therefore, it was not sustainable (Yea et al., 2024).

However, it is also suggested that autocratic leadership can increase organizational symmetry and contribute to the maintenance of internal order. In a 2019 study conducted in Iraq on education directorate employees, it was found that the “benevolent autocratic leadership” approach increased the sense of organizational belonging and supported organizational symmetry (Abdullah et al., 2019). These findings suggest that there are significant differences between cases where autocratic leadership is practiced in a rigid manner and cases where it is adopted in a “softened” manner.

Autocratic leadership at the organizational level also affects internal innovation processes. In environments where this form of leadership is practiced, the fact that decision-making processes are closed to employees makes it difficult for innovative ideas to emerge and be supported; this situation negatively affects the competitiveness of organizations in the long term (Wagner, 1995). Therefore, the functionality of autocratic leadership is limited, especially in knowledge-based sectors and in areas that require high levels of creativity.

To summarize the organizational effects of autocratic leadership listed above;

***Acceleration of Decision-Making Processes:*** As the leader holds all the authority, fast and clear decisions can be made in emergency situations. This feature strengthens organizational reflexes, especially in times of crisis (Asno & Sary, 2023).

***Strengthening Organizational Symmetry and Hierarchy:*** The reinforcement of hierarchical structures allows roles and tasks to be clearly defined, which contributes to maintaining internal order (Abdullah et al., 2019).

***Decreased Employee Participation:*** Limited opportunity to participate in decisions leads to alienation of employees from the processes, which negatively affects organizational commitment (Yea et al., 2024).

***Suppression of Innovation and Creativity:*** The narrowing of the space for employees to present ideas makes it difficult to generate innovative solutions, which reduces competitiveness, especially in knowledge-based industries (Wagner, 1995)

***Decline in Motivation and Job Satisfaction:*** Limiting participation and authoritarian control mechanisms reduce the intrinsic motivation of employees, which in turn reduces job satisfaction (Liaqat et al., 2024).

***Weakening of Organizational Commitment:*** In organizations where rigid management structures are dominant, employees have difficulty in identifying themselves with the organization and cannot develop long-term commitment (Bhatti et al., 2012).

***Internal Audit and Increased Discipline:*** In structures where autocratic leadership is dominant, internal control mechanisms are strengthened and strict discipline is maintained within the organization. This may lead to short-term performance gains (Modise, 2024).

As can be seen in the literature, autocratic leadership is considered a form of management that can produce functional results under certain conditions in terms of organizational aspects, but poses risks in terms of long-term performance, commitment, and innovation. Therefore, the applicability of autocratic leadership needs to be analyzed by considering the structural needs, cultural codes, and sectoral dynamics of the organization.

#### **4. Autocratic Leadership at the Individual Level**

The effects of autocratic leadership style at the individual level directly shape employees' basic work experiences, such as motivation, psychological well-being, organizational commitment, and professional satisfaction. In this leadership model, limiting the employee's participation in decision-making processes, ignoring their opinions and suggestions, and subjecting them to a control-oriented managerial approach increases the psychosocial pressure on the individual. Therefore, it has decisive consequences on individuals' attitudes towards their work, their professional productivity, and their sense of belonging to the organization (Yarar & Babaoğlu, 2025).

In many studies, it has been reported that employees exposed to autocratic leadership have a particularly low level of psychological safety perception, are hesitant to communicate openly with the leader, and are pushed into a suppressed role within the organization (Yea et al., 2024). This situation has been found to decrease the intrinsic motivation of individuals and lead to a decrease in job satisfaction in the long run (Liaqat et al., 2024). In addition, autocratic leadership is considered a suppressive factor for individuals' organizational citizenship behaviors (such as self-sacrifice, benevolence, volunteerism, etc.). This is because individuals may refrain from taking responsibility and contributing to organizational development in an environment where their opinions are not valued. In a study conducted

in 2024, it was observed that the autocratic leadership style weakens the perception of organizational justice at the individual level and, as a result, deviant behaviors (destructive and against the rules) increase (Khizer et al., 2024).

Despite the negative effects at the individual level, autocratic leadership has also been shown to provide short-term benefits in some specific circumstances. Indeed, when inexperienced employees are removed from complex decision-making processes, they may understand their tasks more clearly and become more receptive to guidance. Moreover, in highly disciplined environments, task-oriented performance may increase, especially in the early stages (Shrestha et al., 2024). However, this effect is usually temporary and may evolve into irreversible negative consequences if individual development and initiative are suppressed. It has also been stated in various studies that individuals working under autocracy have an increased risk of experiencing burnout syndrome in the long term, their tendency to quit their jobs increases, and their overall job performance decreases (Bhatti et al., 2012; Geçgin & Gülsoy, 2024). Especially in structures where the leader exhibits punitive or oppressive attitudes, the psychological resilience of employees weakens, and the sense of belonging decreases significantly.

To summarize the individual effects of autocratic leadership listed above;

***Clarification of Job Description:*** The leader's directive and instruction-oriented attitude contributes to a clearer understanding of what needs to be done, especially for new or inexperienced employees (Shrestha et al., 2024).

***Protection from Complex Decisions:*** The cognitive load of individuals who are excluded from difficult decision-making processes is reduced; this may provide a relaxing work experience for some employees.

***Discipline and Short-Term Performance Improvement:*** Individuals working under a strict leadership structure may be more likely to fulfill certain tasks on time and completely. This can lead to productivity, especially in result-oriented jobs.

***Weakening of Psychological Safety:*** Employees' courage to communicate and share ideas with the leader decreases; this situation creates a feeling of suppression (Yea et al., 2024).

***Deviant Behavior Tendency:*** Factors such as perceived injustice, control pressure, and lack of expression can lead to negative and organizationally damaging behaviors (Khizer et al., 2024).



***Suppression of Innovation and Creativity:*** Autocratic leadership prevents the emergence of creative potential as it weakens the individual's courage to think critically and propose innovations. This situation negatively affects individual development and organizational competitiveness, especially in knowledge-based and innovation-based sectors (Wagner, 1995).

Based on the framework outlined above, it is seen that autocratic leadership deeply affects the attitudes, psychological states, and behavioral tendencies of employees regarding their organizational life. The effects of this form of leadership on the individual should be evaluated not only with the level of managerial pressure, but also with multidimensional variables such as the employee's personality traits, level of experience, nature of the job, and organizational culture.

## 5. Principles and Dimensions of Autocratic Leadership

The structural character of autocratic leadership is determined not only by the way the leader makes decisions, but also by the set of principles that make this approach a managerial practice and the behavioral dimensions that become visible within the organization. This model, which is based on the absolute authority of the leader, is constructed and put into practice in a certain systematic order at every stage of managerial functioning. In this context, not only “what autocratic leadership does” but also “how it does it” gains importance. Therefore, the basic normative principles on which autocratic leadership is based and how these principles are reflected in organizational behaviors should be addressed. In addition, the functional structure of autocratic leadership needs to be comprehensively analyzed not only through its consequences but also through its constituent elements (Elkırması, 2024). Accordingly, both the normative principles and the behavioral dimensions of autocratic leadership observed at the implementation level are discussed in detail below.

### 5.1. Basic Principles of Autocratic Leadership

***Absolute centralization of authority:*** In autocratic leadership, decision-making authority is concentrated in a single leader figure; the leader makes all strategic and operational decisions on his/her individual initiative. This centralization of authority leads to a management culture based on authority throughout the organization (Yea et al., 2024).

***Structural Limitation of Subordinate Participation:*** Employees are not included in decision-making processes; their opportunities to offer suggestions, criticism, or alternative views are largely blocked. Thus,

subordinates are positioned in a passive position in line with the unquestioned orders of the leader (Maseti & Gumede, 2011).

***Prioritization of Discipline and Control:*** In autocratic leadership structures, strict compliance with rules and tightening control mechanisms are adopted as a basic norm. The leader keeps the activities of employees under constant surveillance and punishes deviant behaviors (Khizer et al., 2024).

***Results Orientation and Performance Pressure:*** In this leadership model, which focuses on results rather than processes, employees are only expected to fulfill their assigned tasks on time and completely. This approach may encourage productivity in the short term but may hinder long-term development, learning, and adaptation processes (Asno & Sary, 2023).

***One-way and top-down communication:*** In autocratic leadership, the flow of communication is usually top-down and one-way. The leader gives information and instructions directly; feedback from subordinates is either limited or completely blocked. This structure does not allow for two-way communication and open dialogue (Modise, 2024).

## 5.2. Dimensions of Autocratic Leadership

Autocratic leadership is not only based on certain managerial principles but is also shaped by behavioral and structural dimensions that show how these principles operate in organizational practice. These dimensions concretely reveal how leaders use authority, how they relate to employees, and how they maintain management. These dimensions, which are generally examined under five main headings in the literature, are decision-making, use of authority, communication style, control mechanisms, and leader-subordinate relations. These dimensions, which are very important for understanding the appearance of autocratic leadership in practice and its impact on employees, can be defined as follows (Liaqat et al., 2024).

***Decision-Making Dimension:*** In autocratic leadership, the decision-making process is under the absolute control of the leader. Strategic, managerial, or day-to-day decisions are made directly by the leader, without any consultation or collective wisdom process. Employees are seen as responsible for the implementation of decisions; they are not encouraged to contribute or be involved in the process. While this structure facilitates quick and clear decisions, especially under time pressures, it has the effect of limiting organizational capacity for learning, diversity, and adaptation.

***Use of Authority and Power Dimension:*** This dimension determines how the leader uses his/her authority and how he/she is positioned within the organization. The autocratic leader uses formal authority not only as a positional tool but also as a power of direct intervention and direction. There is no delegation of authority; the entire chain of control, orders, and instructions is leader-centered. This situation strengthens the unquestionable position of the leader while restricting the employees' space for independent thinking, decision-making, and responsibility development. Thus, the balance of power within the organization turns into a single-centered, top-down hierarchy.

***Communication Dimension:*** In autocratic leadership, communication is basically a one-way transmission from top to bottom. The leader only communicates tasks, orders, and expectations to subordinates, whereas processes such as receiving feedback from subordinates, exchanging ideas, or developing mutual understanding are either not carried out at all or remain at a symbolic level. This structure ensures that the flow of information is under the absolute control of the leader but seriously undermines organizational transparency, mutual trust, and open communication.

***Supervision and Monitoring Dimension:*** This dimension is related to the leader's constant observation of employee behavior and close monitoring of performance. The disciplinary approach is strict; tolerance for rule violations is low, and punishment mechanisms are prominent. Although this strict control system is effective in preventing deviations and achieving short-term goals, it creates pressure on employees and reduces their sense of psychological security. Constant monitoring often leads to individual consequences such as stress, burnout, and low job satisfaction.

***Leader-Subordinate Relations Dimension:*** The relationship between leaders and employees is largely task-based and hierarchical. Human bonds such as emotional closeness, mutual trust, or democratic interaction are weak; the leader is positioned as a figure who keeps his distance and constantly reminds his authority over subordinates. This type of relationship prevents employees from feeling valued, identifying with the organization, and showing initiative. This structure, in which subordinates are kept only in the role of implementers, negatively affects belonging, commitment, and voluntary contribution behaviors in the long run.

## 6. The Role of Autocratic Leadership in the Future

For many years, autocratic leadership has been considered a functional tool within governance structures based on centralized authority and has

been a preferred leadership style, especially in time-pressured conditions where decisions need to be made quickly. However, with the transformation of contemporary management paradigms along the axis of democratization, participation, and inclusiveness, the legitimacy of this leadership approach has been questioned more and more. At this point, the question of what role autocratic leadership will play in the future has come to the fore again, especially in the context of crisis management practices and organizational resilience debates.

Crisis situations (natural disasters, pandemics, wars, economic collapses, etc.) require rapid and centralized organization of decision-making processes, and, therefore, an autocratic leadership style stands out as an effective tool in this context. In times of crisis, when individuals' power to cope with uncertainty decreases, social acceptance of strong and directive leader figures increases, and authority becomes a symbol of security and order (Shrestha et al., 2024). In such situations, autocratic leadership can facilitate the rapid reorganization of disorganized structures, the clear distribution of tasks, and the strengthening of coordination. However, this temporary functionality often risks becoming intertwined with toxic governance practices.

The unquestioning internalization of authority becomes permanent after the crisis, and as the leader's sphere of control expands, employee participation, the right to question, and freedom of expression are pushed to the background (Khizer et al., 2024). Thus, even after the crisis passes, authoritarian structures are institutionalized and democratic governance is replaced by permanent mechanisms of repression. Moreover, in the new business world, where digitalization, generational change, and horizontal organizational tendencies are becoming more prevalent, the structural incompatibilities of autocratic leadership are becoming more apparent. In this age of democratized access to information and employees demanding more voice and responsibility, oppressive and monocentric forms of leadership pose serious risks to organizational commitment, innovation, and psychological well-being (Liaqat et al., 2024).

For these reasons, the role of autocratic leadership in the future will be determined by the answer to the question of whether it will be a temporary crisis management tool or a systemic governance issue. If this style of leadership is applied only in emergency situations, for a limited period of time, and within accountable structures, it can be effective. However, when it becomes permanent and is removed from democratic control, it risks becoming a toxic form of governance that suppresses employee psychology, organizational climate, and ethical values, along with managerial authority.

## 7. Autocratic Leadership and Culture

Leadership is not only a set of managerial behaviors, but also a reflection of the values, norms, and expectations of social culture on management processes. From this perspective, autocratic leadership can be considered as an institutionalized outcome of certain cultural codes and historical governance habits rather than the preference of a particular leader. In particular, issues such as how power is distributed in organizations, how authority is legitimized, and to what extent employees are involved in managerial decisions are largely shaped by the cultural framework (Muk & İnandı, 2025).

Autocratic leadership is considered a more “legitimate” and even “natural” form of leadership in cultures where high power distance norms are dominant. Conceptually, power distance refers to the extent to which society embraces hierarchical distinctions between authority figures and subordinates. For example, in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and some African countries, the fact that the manager is an unquestionable authority figure is not only an institutional requirement but also a culturally internalized expectation. In this context, the autocratic leader is accepted not only as a distributor of tasks but also as an unquestionable guide where decisions are taken from a single center (Yarar & Babaoğlu, 2025).

Real-life examples show that in centralized cultures such as China, leaders are more likely to succeed with structures that give direct orders, impose strict rules, and are closed to employee participation. This suggests that leadership styles that are compatible with cultural norms can increase organizational effectiveness. However, in societies accustomed to individualistic and horizontal relationships (e.g., Sweden, Canada, or the Netherlands), the same authoritarian approaches lead to management crises, declines in employee satisfaction, and significant increases in high turnover rates (İmtiaz, 2025).

In particular, global companies or multinational organizations are experiencing how autocratic approaches that do not take into account the leadership expectations of different cultures can lead to problematic results. In fact, scenarios such as a Western leader having difficulty in establishing authority over a team in the Middle East with a democratic leadership style or, conversely, an Eastern manager being alienated in the West due to his or her autocratic behavior are typical examples of cultural leadership mismatch.

Cultural context also transforms the way autocratic leadership is perceived. A figure seen as a “decisive and visionary leader” in one society may be

labeled as an “oppressive and authoritarian manager” in another (Van de Vliert, 2006). Therefore, when evaluating autocratic leadership practices, it is necessary to pay attention not only to the behaviors of the leader but also to the cultural structure in which these behaviors are embedded.

In line with this framework, it should be stated that autocratic leadership is not a model that can be declared universally effective or unsuccessful; it can have positive effects on organizations when it is compatible with cultural values, while it can have destructive consequences on employee engagement, psychological safety, and managerial legitimacy when this harmony is not realized. Therefore, it should be emphasized that leadership should not only be limited to “what to do” but also be considered as a comprehensive activity that requires knowing “where to do it and to whom to do it”.

## **8. Conclusion**

Based on the academic literature, this study reveals that autocratic leadership is not only a managerial preference or individual tendency, but also a multi-layered form of leadership that is interwoven with organizational dynamics, social culture, and historical processes. Autocratic leadership functions as a kind of managerial “safety valve,” especially in structures where decision-making processes are centralized and control and hierarchy are at the forefront. In this context, the management style shaped under the absolute authority of the leader may provide effectiveness and efficiency under certain conditions, but it also brings with it significant behavioral, psychological, and structural risks.

Academic research at the organizational level has shown that autocratic leadership can be effective in achieving short-term goals quickly, clarifying job descriptions, and maintaining order in times of crisis. However, it is also emphasized that this effectiveness can have a limiting effect on critical factors such as organizational flexibility, innovation capacity, and employee commitment in the long run. This reveals that leadership is not only a process of “managing” but also a process of ‘developing’ and “empowering”.

At the individual level, the most emphasized effects of autocratic leadership are evident in employee motivation, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being. The state of constant control and supervision over employees weakens individual initiative, leading to silence, withdrawal, withdrawal from creative contribution, and even burnout. For this reason, the perceptual effects of power on employees should be carefully managed, as well as the way the leader uses power.

The dimensions discussed in this study reveal the multifaceted nature of autocratic leadership and the fact that leadership is not only a behavioral but also a structural phenomenon. This type of leadership, which is analyzed at many levels from decision-making to communication style, from the use of power to leader-subordinate relations, assumes different functions in different contexts. Especially the cultural context stands out as a determinant variable in terms of the legitimacy and sustainability of this leadership style. In collectivist cultures with high power distance, autocratic leadership is accepted at a normative level, whereas in cultures with individualism and low power distance, this type of leadership is perceived as problematic and conflictual. This situation reveals that leadership should be designed with context-sensitive approaches rather than universal principles.

In the implications for the future, autocratic leadership is expected to become an increasingly less preferred model unless it is aligned with the transforming parameters of the business world, such as digitalization, horizontal organization, psychological safety, and generational differences. This transformation moves leadership away from establishing authority to creating meaning and value, creating shared vision, and developing an inclusive governance approach.



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## Democratic Leadership 8

Mustafa Altıntaş<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This study examines the democratic leadership approach, which has been one of the most fundamental issues in the leadership literature in the past. Democratic leadership is a leadership style that ensures the active participation of employees in decision-making processes and is based on mutual trust and cooperation within the organization. One of the most prominent features of this leadership style is that it takes into account the views of employees instead of making decisions based on the leader's authority or power sources. Democratic leadership not only increases participation in decisions and expands their quality, but also strengthens the satisfaction, motivation, trust, and loyalty of employees within the organization. Especially when the literature is examined, findings that democratic leadership increases innovative and creative behaviors and strengthens organizational citizenship behaviors stand out. The main reason for this can be said to be making employees feel valuable by prioritizing the concept of democracy, which is at the core of democratic leadership. Although democratic leadership is a leadership style that emerged in the past, it has overlapping aspects with many modern leadership styles. In particular, it has similar characteristics to transformational, ethical, and servant leadership. Democratic leadership is a leadership style that prioritizes participation, ethical values, transparency, and cooperation, and is considered an important approach that can contribute to the strong presence of organizations in today's rapidly changing and competitive business world.

### 1. Introduction

The concept of leadership is an important concept in many disciplines, especially in social sciences, and is among the most fundamental topics in organizational behavior and management literature. From past to present, the impact of different leadership styles on employees and the phenomena

1 Assist. Prof. Dr., Kırşehir Ahi Evran University, mustafaltintas40@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0002-9846-5513

affecting leadership continue to be researched (Northouse, 2019). Leadership is known as a person who has the power to influence and direct others. In this respect, the fact that leadership achieves different outputs with many factors, such as personality traits, the environment, and the power it possesses, has led to the emergence of leadership styles. One of these, democratic leadership, stands out as a leadership approach that supports the active participation of employees in decision-making processes and ensures mutual cooperation and trust. Democratic leaders adopt a “participatory” decision-making process by taking into account the views of group members instead of a management approach based solely on their own authority (Lewin et al., 1939).

Democratic leadership differs from classical leadership styles with its participative and employee-centered characteristics. In this leadership style, active participation of employees in all business processes is encouraged, and it is aimed at increasing the motivation and satisfaction levels of employees within the organization (Gastil, 1994). In democratic leadership, instead of imposing their own decisions, leaders base their decisions on giving importance to the ideas of employees, and communication channels are kept open. In addition, it is aimed that employees actively participate in all processes (Goleman, 2000). Keeping the channels open in terms of communication is seen as important in terms of contributing more to the organization while contributing to their active role (Somech, 2006).

Democratic leadership is a highly effective leadership style for organizational outcomes as well as for employees. Although it is considered a classical leadership style, it is still applicable today. Research in the literature shows that democratic leadership increases employees’ job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship, and encourages innovative and creative behaviors (Chen & Tjosvold, 2006; Bhatti et al., 2012). It is stated that employee loyalty and motivation are likely to decrease, especially in sectors where competition is intense, but these can be increased through democratic leadership (Mullins, 2016). In addition, democratic leadership plays an important role not only in the results of employee performance but also in the construction of organizational values based on justice and ethics (Iqbal et al., 2015). Democratic leadership stands out as a leadership style that strengthens the active participation of employees, encourages organizational creativity, and contributes to sustainable success in contemporary management understanding. In both theoretical and practical terms, democratic leadership has an important place in management and organizational behavior literature.

## 2. Democratic Leadership

Democratic leadership is generally seen as a leadership style that is based on the participation of subordinates/followers and gives importance to their ideas. It is argued that democratic leadership came to the forefront in the 1970s when the idea of democracy became dominant throughout the world. In democratic leadership, where followers have a lot of say in management, both a sharing and a democratic management approach emerge. As a result, followers' satisfaction increases (Güney, 2011). In another study, it is stated that democratic leadership has become popular with the publication of the results of a series of experiments involving children and adults. Especially in these studies, democratic leadership was investigated together with autocratic leadership (Lewin et al., 1939). The reason for researching these leadership styles together is that they are at opposite poles. This means that most leaders fall at one point on this scale, depending on the level of participation of followers or the amount of control leaders exert over decisions (Schoel et al., 2011).

On the other hand, it is stated that democratic leadership is expressed as a style of having open and equal authority in terms of teamwork, in addition to these characteristics. In organizations where there is a democratic leader, ideas are discussed freely and openly, and everyone can put forward their opinions. It is stated that there are very few fixed elements in this leadership style and that everything is dynamic and can change rapidly. In addition, at the end of situations such as putting forward, discussing, and sharing ideas, the democratic leader is expected to synthesize them in the best possible way (Woods, 2021).

The concept of leadership should be considered as a more pluralistic and inclusive practice rather than a concept that is usually monopolized by one person. What is also important here is that it starts the process of seriously engaging with theories of participatory democracy. However, from the past to the present, it has not been fully realized to put forward democratic leadership as a theory in accordance with its purpose. In other words, it has not been fully emphasized that democratic leadership is a leadership style that can function outside of organizational environments. In addition, the proposition of democratic leadership as a democratizing leader opens a new field of discussion for this leadership style (Smolović Jones et al., 2016).

Although new areas of discussion have been opened, democratic leadership, like other leadership styles, has an important role in the effectiveness of an organization. Leadership in general is an indispensable part of institutions and organizations internationally, and is a concept that has been frequently

researched from the past to the present. Democratic leadership is claimed to achieve better employee performance than other leadership styles (Dixon & Hart, 2010; Polston-Murdoch, 2013; Mohammed et al., 2014; Ozdemirkol, 2025). In addition to employee performance, democratic leadership, which has an important role in creating competitive advantage for organizations, has a great share in achieving high profits (Negron, 2008).

When examined not only from the organizational dimension but also from a general perspective, it has been observed that effective leaders adopt democratic leadership styles. There is a consensus that democratic leadership practices generally yield more desirable results (Gastil, 1994; Caillier, 2020). Similarly, it is also stated that democratic leadership is a more acceptable style than autocratic leadership (Schoel et al., 2011). It has been suggested that adopting a more democratic style can be beneficial, especially when public interest is considered (Van Vugt & De Cremer, 1999).

Another term for democratic leadership is participative leadership. Many researchers argue that organizational leaders need a high level of trust to overcome challenges in a competitive environment. Therefore, participative leadership, which aims to encourage behaviors that support employees' participation in organizational decision-making processes, is gaining attention in many organizations (Huang et al., 2006). Participative leadership is a leadership style that exists in organizations of all types and at all stages, regardless of size. The delegation of authority to employees in organizational decision-making processes and the importance of their opinions are shown as the most basic feature that distinguishes this leadership style from other leadership styles (Huang et al., 2021).

When traditional organizational structures are examined, it is seen that they are mostly hierarchical structures, and it is accepted that leadership is strongly felt with top-down management approaches (Arnold et al., 2000). The role of a leader has been examined in various contexts in organizations, and the results show that the behaviors of leaders can help create an ideal organization for employees (Ahn, Y.-j, & Bessiere, 2022). Participative leadership is a leadership style that has an important place in organizations. The share of the participative leader, who has behaviors such as actively listening to the opinions of subordinates/audiences and taking their suggestions into account in decisions, cannot be ignored in creating an ideal organization (Arnold et al., 2000). In addition, when making strategic decisions, participative leaders can share decision-making authority and fully consult with employees to jointly address problems that may arise (Chan, 2019; Onen & Elkırımı, 2022).

In a participative leadership style, subordinates have a significant level of responsibility in the final thinking phase just before the leader makes the final decision. Therefore, it is argued that in a participative leadership style, subordinates are at least as influential in decisions as the leader and assume responsibility. By participating in decisions, the leader is relieved of the obligation to make decisions alone, and subordinates can freely express their own opinions. Therefore, one of the most prominent features of participative leadership is that activities can be carried out without the leader, but the presence of the leader in the final decision is a must (Sabuncuoğlu & Tüz, 2005).

### 3. Theories Explaining Democratic Leadership

Democratic leadership is a leadership style that is evaluated within the framework of traditional leadership styles. In addition to the personal characteristics of the leader, it is thought to be effective in leadership in changing conditions. The period between the 1930s and 1940s was examined as “personal characteristics”, the period between the 1940s and 1960s as ‘behavioral’ and the period between the 1960s and the end of the 1970s as “situational” approaches. The common feature of these approaches is that there is not a single type of leadership, and that sometimes there are task-oriented and sometimes relationship-oriented approaches (Çeliköz et al., 2025).

Behavioral approaches were defined as four leadership styles: “libertarian”, “democratic”, ‘autocratic’ and “bureaucratic”. Situational approaches, which came to the forefront in the 1960s and later, are dominated by the main idea that “there are different leadership styles in different situations” (Jiang, 2014). When the emergence dates of democratic leadership are examined, it is seen that they coincide with the years of behavioral approaches.

Behavioral Leadership Theory is an approach that emphasizes the behaviors of the leader in ensuring the effectiveness of leadership. The theory aims to reveal that the leader is task-oriented and people-oriented. While there is high respect for people-oriented leadership style, technical aspects are emphasized in the task-oriented leadership style (Gül, 2003). Behavioral Leadership Theories started to gain importance after the 1940s. It is known that research contributed greatly to the development of these theories. Ohio State University Leadership Studies, University of Michigan Leadership Studies around 1947, Blake and Mauton’s Management Style Matrix, McGregor’s Theory X and Y, Likert’s System 4 Approach are among these studies (Bayram, 2013).

The inadequacy of the traits approach in leadership has led researchers to put forward different approaches. Researchers have tried to examine the behaviors of the leader and the effects of these behaviors on the leadership process. The Behavioral Leadership Approach, which emerged as a result of related studies, focused on the effectiveness of leadership rather than its formation (Szilagyi & Wallace, 1990). In general, the Behavioral Leadership Approach seeks to answer the questions of how leaders will make decisions in the face of an event or problem, or what behaviors they will engage in while making decisions. This is expressed as the key point of the approach. In the Behavioral Leadership Approach, which suggests that leadership can be explained by behaviors instead of traits, it is stated that the leadership process is not a process that belongs to a single person and can be explained by examining the behaviors of followers in the leadership process (Ozdemir, 1998).

On the basis of the Behavioral Leadership Approach, behaviors such as communication between leaders and followers, followers' commitment, leader's motivational ability, followers' participation in decisions, leader's management style, and leader's use of resources towards the group they address are among the prominent issues in order to achieve corporate goals (Demir et al., 2010). In this approach, leaders give their followers the feeling that "they are one of them" with their behaviors. In addition, one of the reasons why the Behavioral Leadership Approach was adopted at that time was that behaviors were not innate and could be learned. In the traits approach, the assumption that all the characteristics of the leader are innate was emphasized (Simsek et al., 2001).

One of the stages of the Behavioral Leadership Approach, the Ohio State University Leadership Studies, aimed to reveal some of the behaviors observed in the leader. This research, which revealed 1800 different leadership behaviors, was reduced to 150 with the analysis and turned into a questionnaire and a measurement tool (Luthans, 2011). In the related research, this questionnaire was applied to school administrators, students, soldiers, and some other organizations, and it was investigated whether the leader behaviors showed the same characteristics (Helms, 2006). According to the results of the research, it is stated that leadership is based on "building structure" and "showing understanding" in terms of role. Behaviors such as showing interest in the employee, supporting, planning, and organizing the work were put forward in this way (Bakan, 2008).

After the Ohio State University Leadership Research, the University of Michigan Leadership Research, one of the Behavioral Leadership



Approaches, is a leadership research initiated by Rensis Likert and his colleagues (Yukl, 2010). The University of Michigan Leadership Research is based on the premise that a leader can exhibit either a task-oriented leadership style or an employee/audience-oriented leadership style, but not both behaviors at the same time. On this basis, it is stated that it is more effective to show employee/audience-oriented leadership behavior than task-oriented leadership behavior. The reason for this is stated to be performance (Griffin & Moorhead, 2013). According to the University of Michigan Leadership Research, a task-oriented leader is a leader who constantly controls employees and uses the power of authority, while a person-oriented leader is a leader who adopts delegation of authority, tries to provide working conditions that will motivate employees, and focuses on the personal development of employees (Helms, 2006).

Another research used to explain the behaviors of managers in organizations is Blake and Mouton's Management Style Matrix. In this research, which is used in Behavioral Leadership Approaches, the researchers created a "Management Style Matrix" to explain leader behaviors based on the results of leadership research at Michigan and Ohio State Universities. In this matrix, the researchers tried to understand the orientations of the behaviors that leaders exhibit while they are in a relationship in the work environment. In this matrix, which consists of two dimensions, interest in work and interest in people, the dimensions were graded by assigning numbers between 1 and 9, and the weights of the behaviors were examined according to these grades (Findıkcı, 2009).

Another research used in Behavioral Leadership Approaches is the X and Y Theory put forward by McGregor. According to this theory, person X reflects laziness and an employee who does not like to work, while in Theory Y, the employee reveals a working and creative personality when given opportunities (Goethals et al., 2004). It is suggested that it would be right to develop a leadership style suitable for employees who resemble such theories.

Within the scope of Behavioral Leadership Approaches, Rensis Likert examined the behaviors of leaders in four groups in the model he developed as a continuation of the University of Michigan studies. He also addressed the leadership variables of trusting the followers, the degree of participation of the followers, and taking the ideas of the followers. In Likert's Quadrilateral Approach Model, it is stated that while abusive and benevolent autocratic leaders exhibit work-oriented behaviors, democratic leaders exhibit person-oriented behaviors (Sinha, 2008: 271).



Democratic leadership is mostly discussed within behavioral leadership approaches in the literature. This leadership style emphasizes the behaviors of the leader rather than his/her personal characteristics. A democratic leader is a leadership style that involves employees in decision-making processes, takes their opinions and suggestions into account, and thus increases both the sense of belonging and productivity. The Ohio State University Leadership Studies and the University of Michigan Leadership Studies, which are important studies of behavioral leadership approaches, are critical for understanding the behavioral foundations of democratic leadership. As a result of these studies, it is understood that caring and understanding towards employees is more effective than task-oriented leadership; democratic leadership is especially positioned in the “relationship-oriented” dimension (Yukl, 2013).

Moreover, since democratic leadership is defined by participatory decision-making and the inclusion of employees in the process, it plays a role in increasing motivation and commitment in organizations. In particular, McGregor’s Theory Y is in line with the democratic leadership approach that trusts employees and supports their creativity (McGregor, 1960). Among behavioral approaches, the fact that democratic leadership is a leadership style that can be learned and developed is one of the main factors that distinguish it from the trait approach. In addition, democratic leadership is not an innate characteristic; it is seen as a form of behavior that can be developed through education, experience, and organizational culture (Northouse, 2022). In addition, democratic leadership should be considered within the scope of behavioral leadership theories, both in terms of its historical development line and its positioning in the literature. In addition, it should not be ignored that the effect of democratic leadership may vary according to situational conditions. However, in terms of its origins, this leadership style has emerged as a product of behavioral theories.

In addition to its origin, democratic leadership has also formed a kind of infrastructure for modern leadership styles. In particular, it can be said that many sub-dimensions of modern leadership styles are directly or indirectly related to democratic leadership. For example, the dimensions of inspirational motivation and individual-level interest in transformational leadership overlap with the elements of democratic leadership, such as increasing the participation of employees in the process and managing change. On the other hand, the dimensions of ethical leadership, such as justice, transparency, and encouragement of participation, are directly compatible with democratic leadership. Servant leadership, like other modern leadership styles, carries today’s reflections of democratic leadership. In particular, concepts such as

serving employees, contributing to their development, and listening to their voices emphasize the essence of democratic leadership.

However, although there are leadership styles that have emerged in the recent past within the scope of modern leadership theories, it should not be understood that democratic leadership has remained in a certain time period in the literature. In particular, it is envisaged that democratic leadership can be explained by several different theories. For example, implicit leadership theory emphasizes employees' expectations and beliefs about the competencies that leaders should possess. The theory distinguishes leaders from non-leaders and effective leaders from ineffective leaders (Lu et al., 2008). In the implicit leadership theory, it does not emphasize the outcome of leadership behavior, and it takes place in the minds of subordinates as a schema of their perceptions about the leader. In theory, if the participative leader does not send strong enough signals to encourage employees to participate in the decision-making process in line with the expectations of participative management, the activation of the "participation model" in subordinates may be prevented. As a result, they do not react positively to the participative leader until they perceive that the leader's participative behavior has reached a certain threshold level (Lam et al., 2015). In addition, social exchange theory predicts mutual assistance and work welfare, and social cognitive theory predicts that employees' psychological safety and performance will increase (Usman et al., 2021; Zou et al., 2020).

#### **4. Characteristics and Scope of Democratic Leadership**

It can be said that democratic leadership has a complex structure in itself and is based on the principles of various theories of democracy and leadership (Arenilla, 2010). Although there is no clear definition for democratic leadership, it can be defined by considering the components of both leadership and democracy (Butcher & Clarke, 2006). Democratic leadership is defined as a participatory leadership process in which the leader and group members formulate decisions together (Dolly & Nonyelum, 2018). On the other hand, democratic leadership style is considered a process that involves both the leader and the followers at the same level and emphasizes multidirectional communication and cooperation (Wilson, 2020).

Democratic leadership encourages group discussions and creates a positive effect. Thanks to this, it contributes to the performance of the organization (Hilton et al., 2021). The basic principles of democratic leadership include participation, inclusiveness, open communication, and employee participation in organizational decisions. In addition, there is an

organizational climate in which employees are seen as valuable, allowing them to try and implement new ideas (Imran et al., 2025). In addition, there is accountability and delegation of authority in democratic leadership. Leaders delegate their authority to ensure employee participation (Abid et al., 2024). Research in the literature shows that high levels of democratic leadership in organizations create an environment that encourages participation and inclusiveness, which has a significant impact on both commitment and motivation (Hamze & Abdulkhaliq, 2025). In addition, research indicates that the creation of this organizational environment leads to employees' perception that top management is accessible and contributes to firm performance (Odiwo et al., 2022).

Some characteristics of democratic leadership are listed below based on the literature (Daft, 1991; Rowe & Guerro, 2011; Feldman, 2012):

- Democratic leaders trust their employees and allow them to take responsibility for the distribution of tasks.
- Democratic leaders approach criticism objectively.
- Democratic leaders encourage and reward employee creativity.
- Democratic leaders generally care about employees' opinions.
- Democratic leaders solicit ideas from their employees, even when the outcome is certain.
- Democratic leaders enable subordinates to contribute to goal setting.
- Democratic leaders show a well-motivated personality and keep the morale of subordinates high, who are responsible for non-repetitive tasks.
- Democratic leaders determine how the goals of the organization will be achieved.
- Democratic leaders tend to be accessible and approachable.
- Democratic leaders coach and mentor subordinates by providing constructive feedback.
- Democratic leaders support teamwork and interprofessional cooperation.
- Democratic leaders resolve conflicts through effective negotiation.
- Democratic leaders exhibit emotional intelligence.
- Democratic leaders provide accurate and complete information to subordinates.

## 5. Conclusion and Assessment

Democratic leadership is a leadership style that focuses on the participation of employees in decision-making processes, organizational communication, and a climate of trust, especially within the framework of classical leadership approaches and modern leadership approaches. The literature on democratic leadership states that it is a leadership style that focuses on individual outcomes such as employee motivation, commitment, and job satisfaction, as well as on innovation, performance, and competitive advantage of organizations.

When evaluated within the framework of behavioral leadership theories, democratic leadership draws attention as a leadership style that can be learned and developed. In particular, it is seen that relationship-oriented leadership behaviors emphasized in Ohio State and Michigan University studies form the basis of the democratic leadership style. In addition, it is understood that situational factors also play a role in the effectiveness of democratic leadership and may lead to different outcomes in different organizational conditions. In some sources, situational leadership theories are supported by theories such as Democratic Theory, Situational Leadership Theory, Agency Theory, Dynamic Capabilities Theory, Optimal Firm Size Theory, and Balanced Scorecard Model (Muli et al., 2025).

When compared with modern leadership approaches, democratic leadership overlaps significantly with contemporary leadership styles such as transformational, ethical, and servant leadership. The fact that it encourages the active participation of employees in the process, is based on the principles of transparency and justice, and supports organizational creativity and innovative behaviors, makes democratic leadership a leadership style that is still valid today. In addition, it is necessary to recognize that democratic leadership is not only a leadership style that remained in a certain period of time in the past, but also has reflections on the present.

Democratic leadership is a participative management approach that creates positive effects at individual and organizational levels. Especially in today's fast-changing and competitive business environment, democratic leadership can be seen as a powerful approach that can contribute to the sustainable success of organizations. In today's world, it is important for organizations to develop democratic leadership practices and to follow policies in this direction by giving importance to factors such as increasing employee participation.

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## Laissez-Faire Leadership 8

Mehmet Selman Kobanoğlu<sup>1</sup>

Ali Bayram<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

In today's turbulent, chaotic, and intensely competitive environment, if you take on the responsibility of leading an organization, you need to have highly developed skills that are open to change and further development. Organizations no longer carry the old traditional organizational structures, nor do employees carry the old employee profile. The cumulative speed of the technological changes that mark our age makes tomorrow much more change-prone than today, and there is a need for leaders who can anticipate these changes, interpret them correctly, and respond to them quickly. As it is known, leadership is still not understood by many circles. In particular, the fact that there are hundreds of definitions of leadership in the management literature, the abstract and minimal differences between the many types of leadership defined, and the difference in the understanding of leadership between leaders and followers cause the subject to be more difficult to understand. In this part of the book, laissez-faire leadership is discussed, and its definition, characteristics, effects on followers and organizations, advantages, and disadvantages are given.

### 1. Introduction

Modern leadership theory argues that no one type of leadership can universally produce the best results and that leaders should adapt their leadership style to the situation and the qualities of their followers. In the organizational literature, although there are many sub-divisions such as charismatic, participative, transactional, strategic, delegative, servant, as well as digital leadership, which is needed especially with technological

1 Assoc. Prof. Dr., Samsun University, mehmet.kobanoglu@samsun.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0003-0891-6016

2 Assoc. Prof. Dr., Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University, alibayram@ohu.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0002-0732-0483

development and digital transformation (Topçuoğlu et al., 2023; Özbacı & Kobanoğlu, 2022) under leadership characteristics, behavioral, situational and modern leadership approaches, in terms of providing responsibility and initiative to subordinates; we see that it is examined in three categories: authoritarian, democratic and laissez-faire leadership.

The term laissez-faire originated from the phrase “*laissez-faire, laissez-passer*” used by the French physiocrat Vincent De Gournay in the 17th century as a reaction to the mercantilist policies implemented by the state. With these words, De Gournay advocated individual freedom in the economy instead of state intervention, which later became one of the basic principles of liberal economics with Adam Smith’s classic work *The Wealth of Nations* (Groenevegen, 2002). In the early 20th century, Lewin et al. (1939) introduced the concept into management science literature. Today, the concept is defined as a leadership style in which the leader minimally interferes with the followers and gives them full freedom in decision-making processes (Northouse, 2019).

The laissez-faire leader is largely dependent on group members to set goals and make decisions and assumes a passive role (Bhattacharya, 2012), and because of this structure, it is conceptualized by some authors as *the absence of a leader* (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008a). Judge and Picollo (2004) define laissez-faire leadership as a leadership-avoidance behavior that avoids making decisions, hesitates to act, and disappears when necessary. Bass and Riggo (2006) state that these leaders do not make necessary decisions, leave actions for later, do not use authority, ignore the responsibilities of leadership, and are the most ineffective type of leadership.

Empowering leadership is an active leadership style that provides autonomy to subordinates and, in this respect, it differs from laissez-faire leadership, which abdicates legitimate responsibilities and focuses on inaction (Humborstad & Giessner, 2015). While staff empowerment involves assigning important tasks and responsibilities to subordinates and adopts a non-intrusive approach, laissez-faire leadership is insensitive to what followers do, ignores their requests for help, and avoids being responsible for their performance (Bass & Riggo, 2006; Ridwan et al., 2022; Piccolo et al., 2012). Here, followers’ expectations from the leader play an important role, and in cases where the leader’s empowering behaviors are more than followers’ expectations, the leader may be perceived as laissez-faire (Humborstad & Giessner, 2015).

Distinguishing laissez-faire leadership from passive leadership, Bass (1999) states that while passive leaders wait for problems to arise before taking corrective action, laissez-faire leaders avoid any action.

## 2. Leadership and Use of Power

The concepts of leadership and power, which are defined as the leader's ability to influence the resources to be mobilized in line with the objectives, are often mentioned together. More precisely, power is the capacity of a leader to influence the factors of production that the leader will direct in order to increase productivity and achieve success. French and Raven (1959) argued that there are five sources of power that can be used, especially on social structures. These are;

- Coercive power,
- Legitimate power,
- Reward power,
- Expert power and,
- Referent power.

Leaders decide which of these five sources and/or which of them they will use and to what extent and with what intensity, depending on the organizational structure, culture, and the qualifications of their subordinates. It is known that the use of power is not only a leadership behavior but also a process that involves followers, situational factors, and interactions between them, and is guided by many variables such as the willingness of employees to be influenced, their attitudes towards the power source used, and their capacity to resist power (Dirik et al., 2016; Elkırımış ve Yılmaz, 2024).

Kets de Vries (2022), who frequently addresses the issue of power in organizations, emphasizes the corrupting effect of power and states that democracy in organizations is severely lacking and is often the exception rather than the rule. In contrast, laissez-faire leaders avoid the use of power and expect their followers to take the initiative.

In terms of the use of power, laissez-faire leaders largely refrain from using the power they have and relinquish the leadership role, which allows subordinates considerable freedom of action and contributes to maximizing their power and influence towards the work (Deluga, 1990).

### 3. Needs of Leadership

De Vries et al. (2002) defined the need for leadership as “the extent to which an employee wishes the leader to facilitate the paths towards individual, group, and/or organizational goals”. The need for leadership is subjective, as it depends on how the employee evaluates a particular environment. If employees believe that they have the competence they need, leaders will not seek intervention and, in Bugenhagen’s (2006) words, will be left to fend for themselves. However, there is a need for the leader to continuously motivate both himself and the organization with an innovative perspective (Altay Morgül & Oral Ataç, 2024).

The point to be taken into account here should be the leadership needs of the followers. If subordinates lack competence and other resources, a laissez-faire leadership style may not meet the needs of the followers, and leadership deficiency may be mentioned, but if subordinates are able to cope with the problems, deficiency will not be felt (Skogstad et al., 2014).

Leader-member interaction is a well-established construct proposed by Graen et al. (1973) that assumes that leaders establish social exchange relationships with followers that are of higher quality than individual, low-quality economic exchange relationships. When laissez-faire leaders are viewed in the context of leader-member interaction, followers are likely to feel ignored and isolated and therefore focus on the economic exchange aspect rather than on high-quality individual relationships (Buch, Martinsen, & Kuvaas, 2015).

Laissez-faire leadership can lead to certain workplace stressors such as role conflicts, role ambiguity, and low-quality interpersonal relationships within the organization, which can sometimes lead to tensions (Skogstad et al., 2007; Zhang et al., 2023). Another unfavorable situation may be the intense competition among subordinates for the power that the leader has relinquished (Deluga, 1990).

### 4. Reflections of Laissez-Faire Leadership in the Literature

Although studies on laissez-faire leadership are more limited than those on other types of leadership (Judge & Picollo, 2004; Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008a; Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008b; Skogstad et al., 2014), a few studies reveal the striking prevalence of this type of leadership in working life (Skogstad et al., 2007). Eagly et al. (2003) found that male leaders are more likely to use laissez-faire leadership than female leaders.

In the literature, there are also studies suggesting that laissez-faire leadership behavior is a destructive leadership behavior (Skogstad et al., 2007; Aasland et al, 2010). According to this view, the failure to encourage or even the systematic absence of positive behaviors in the organization is conceptualized as destructive leadership behavior, and laissez-faire type of leadership can harm the organization and followers due to its failure to meet and violate the interests of the organization and the legitimate expectations of the followers, regardless of reasons such as incompetence, lack of knowledge or intentional harm (Aasland et al., 2010; Buch et al., 2015).

The key defining characteristic of laissez-faire leadership is that the leader does not react to potential stimuli, followers' needs, and good or poor performance (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008b). However, the management literature has a rich body of research on the fact that not reinforcing expected performance or not punishing underperformance and negligence in organizations will eventually lead the organization into a bad situation. Laissez-faire leadership does not prevent the repetition of undesirable behaviors by not reacting, and does not ensure the repetition of desired behaviors. However, it is widely believed that leaders must be able to shape the behavior of their subordinates in order to be effective (Peyton et al., 2019).

According to Bass and Riggo (2006), when followers do not have the capacity to solve problems, laissez-faire leadership can lead to an exponential increase in existing problems. Laissez-faire leadership is associated with low productivity, lack of innovation, more conflict within the organization, and lack of cohesion among employees. Skogstad et al. (2007), in addition to defining laissez-faire leadership as a kind of lack of presence and leaderlessness, recognize it as a failure to meet the legitimate expectations of subordinates and/or superiors. Similarly, Leymann (1996) states that a non-interventionist leadership will lead to high levels of conflict and mobbing in the organization due to role ambiguities. Laissez-faire leadership behavior is considered a less ethical leadership behavior because the leader is indifferent, does not provide any guidance, and the followers are left unattended (Vullings et al., 2020).

Exploring the positive aspects of laissez-faire leadership, Yang (2015) emphasizes the need to examine the behavior of leaders through the eyes of their followers, noting that this type of leadership style can be regarded as a sign of respect for subordinates rather than a lack of leadership and can have a possible positive effect, leading to a sense of autonomy and self-control in subordinates.

Laissez-faire leadership involves less risk when subordinates are highly qualified, experienced, and have a desire for self-actualization (Bhattacharya, 2012). The most important factor in determining the leader's leadership style is the followers' personalities, expectations, and performance-based needs. It is known that followers with low performance, lack of commitment, and motivation generally need a more directive leadership style.

If a leader is not responsive to the performance of his/her followers, their performance may be controlled by factors outside the leader, and this situation may become unacceptable for the organization, as well as creating inconsistencies (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008b).

## 5. Conclusion

Leading in organizations means being able to deal with a web of relationships with a great need for emotional management (Kets de Vries, 2013). Today, many organizational leaders choose to involve organizational members in decision-making and problem-solving processes (Lunenburg, 2012).

Laissez-faire leadership is based on trust in followers. As such, the leader avoids taking responsibility and leaves all decision-making and implementation to the followers, and does not provide them with feedback. Such leadership requires followers to be experts in their fields, success-oriented, and capable of making decisions on their own and facing the consequences of those decisions. As mentioned above, it is common for followers in such an organizational structure to be exposed to intense stress. In addition, situations such as a lack of feedback, communication problems, and perhaps the desire to own the idle power may cause the organization's productivity to decrease and fail, work may not be done on time, and strategic goals may not be achieved.

On the other hand, in such an organization, the fact that decisions are made and executed by qualified people who are personally involved in the work, that decision-making processes are distributed within the organization, and that the organization can move faster by moving away from a centralized structure have the potential to provide such organizations with a relative advantage. It can yield extraordinary results in some organizations, especially in terms of encouraging creativity, making the individual feel like the owner of the business, and keeping the paths of personal development open. There is evidence in the literature that it can lead to positive job shaping behaviors (Oprea et al., 2022; Pahi et al, 2018; Tong, 2020; Zheng, 2024), especially in organizations where superior employees work.

When we look at the fields of business, art and science, we can see that there is a considerable number of laissez-faire leaders such as Warren Buffett, Steve Jobs, Walt Disney, Albert Einstein and Niels Bohr, who trusted the creativity of their followers and gave them the opportunity to develop their own ideas, offered a completely free workspace, and had little or no interference in decision-making processes.



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## Transformational Leadership 8

Selen Uygungil-Erdoğan<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Today's world is shaped by change and transformation. Today's organizations are forced to adapt with structural changes in the face of environmental uncertainty and unpredictable and sudden changes, in other words, transformation. Leadership, as a prominent concept in managing these transformation processes, draws attention in the management literature in directing both the success of organizations and social and individual transformation processes. Organizations that have to change and restructure in order to survive in an ever-changing dynamic environment need leaders who can pioneer radical changes. Leadership is an ancient phenomenon that is intertwined with human history and is constantly transforming in line with the needs of the time. Visionary and innovative leaders who manage the transformation process in organizations, put the interests of the organization above their personal interests, create organizations with employees who constantly renew themselves, and prepare the necessary conditions for transformation are called transformational leaders.

### 1. Introduction

Until the late 1970s, leadership theorizing and research focused on supervision as a way of achieving incremental improvements in the performance of stable or smoothly growing business units (Behling & McFillen, 1996). In the early approaches, leadership was mostly explained in terms of structural elements such as authority, delegation of tasks, and supervision of performance; with the modern era, this perspective was replaced by a people-oriented and visionary perspective. The transformational leadership approach that emerged in the late 1970s is one of the indicators of this transformation in perspective. The transformational leadership approach, which considers leadership characteristics, leadership behaviors

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1 Assoc.Prof.Dr., Osmaniye Korkut Ata University, [suyungilerdogan@osmaniye.edu.tr](mailto:suyungilerdogan@osmaniye.edu.tr), 0000-0002-7916-1709.

and the results of leadership as a whole (Karip, 1998), draws attention to the fact that the leader is not only an actor in managing tasks, but also a change agent who positively shapes the beliefs, values and behaviors of followers (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985; Northouse, 2022). In sum, this leadership approach emphasizes identification with human values (Çelik, 1998).

In his book “Leadership”, Burns (1978) analyzed leadership under two main headings: transactional and transformational. According to the author, a transactional leader manages a reward-punishment-based change process, while a transformational leader motivates his followers and unites them around a higher purpose. Bernard Bass (1985) took this approach at the organizational level and defined four basic components of transformational leadership: idealized influence (charisma), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation (mental stimulation), and individual attention. Thus, leadership has evolved from a managerial skill to a value system that enables transformation in organizational culture. The essence of transformational leadership is that these leaders “take ordinary people to extraordinary levels”, “enable their followers to do more than expected,” and “set the stage for them to perform beyond expectations” (Bass, 1985; Boal & Bryson, 1988; Yukl, 1989; Podsakoff et al., 1990).

Today, the transformational leadership model has become one of the most influential theoretical frameworks in the field of organizational behavior. The main reason for this is that the change, innovation, and sustainability requirements of contemporary organizations are compatible with the basic dynamics of this model. In particular, digitalization, ethical management, global crises, and the transformation in social expectations require leaders to assume not only managerial but also visionary and inspirational roles. (Avolio & Bass, 1991; Antonakis & House, 2014; Northouse, 2022).

In this framework, it is possible to say that transformational leadership is not only a management style that manages change in organizations, but also a form of interaction that focuses on the development of employees and aims both collective learning and the strengthening of common values; and that a transformational leader is a person who recognizes the desires or needs of potential followers, meets these desires or needs, understands how to motivate followers and enables followers to move towards higher goals (Ayrancı & Öge, 2010). In this section, firstly, the concept of transformational leadership will be clarified, and its historical development and theoretical foundations will be mentioned. Then, the dimensions of transformational leadership and its reflections at the organizational level will be discussed.

## 2. Transformational Leadership Concept

As an inclusive approach, transformational leadership can be used to describe a wide range of leadership, from very specific attempts to influence followers individually to more comprehensive attempts to influence entire organizations, even entire cultures and societal change (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2022). Although the literal meaning of transformation is “a complete change in composition and structure”, the concept of ‘transformation’ here emphasizes “change for the better”, not just a change in goals, structure, functioning, and leader-follower relationships (Leithwood et al., 1996). Sharma (2007) argues that leadership applies to all aspects of life and is not a philosophy restricted to a particular field, group, regime, or mission. The author underlines that while managers in the organization, the first thing that comes to mind can be great leaders, teachers (Bolkan, Goodboy & Griffin, 2011), doctors, dedicated scientists, or caring mothers can also be great leaders, just as coaches lead sports teams (Keçeci & Çelik, 2021; Altıntaş, 2024; Ozdemirkol, 2025) and politicians lead society.

In the organizational context, transformational leadership refers to an approach that integrates the managerial understanding and action styles required in the restructuring and change processes of organizations. Accordingly, transformational leaders transform environmental changes into opportunities by preparing the necessary organizational conditions as well as the new vision they create in order for organizations to achieve their future goals (Özalp & Öcal, 2000; Önen & Elkırmiş, 2022).

The concept was first used in the literature in 1978 by James MacGregor Burns, a political scientist, to explain political leadership in his book titled “Leadership”. Burns categorized political leadership under two headings: transactional and transformational, and stated that the transactional leadership process begins when an individual engages with others to mutually change some elements. While work-oriented leadership focuses on the idea that followers can achieve their individual goals with the realization of the leader’s goals and expectations (high performance, votes), transformational leadership links the realization of the organization’s goals and vision to the change in the needs and values of the followers (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). Özalp and Öcal (2000) define transformational leadership as the process of activating the structure by initiating a transformation process required by the changing environmental conditions in the organization; influencing the beliefs, attitudes, and values of the followers with characteristics that arouse respect, trust, and courage; and achieving the mission and goals of the organization.



Transformational leadership stems not from a commodity exchange between leaders and followers but from the personal values and beliefs of leaders, and refers to the leader's ability to deeply influence the attitudes, values, and behaviors of followers and mobilize them towards a higher purpose and common vision (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). This approach is based on the positioning of the leader as an actor who not only takes part in the management of tasks but also unlocks the potential of employees, supports their development, and leads the organization to a holistic change process (Bass, 1985; Avolio & Bass, 1991). The transformational leader strengthens the intrinsic motivation of the followers, enables them to identify with organizational goals beyond individual interests, and thus creates lasting change at both individual and organizational levels (Northouse, 2022).

Transformational leadership, which can be defined as the ability to create fundamental change (Erkuş & Günlü, 2008), differs from traditional approaches especially in terms of ethical values, visioning, and encouraging innovation. Unlike transactional leadership, transformational leadership focuses on internal fulfillment, inspiration, and meaning-making processes rather than external and commodity-based rewards. The interaction between leader and follower represents a trust-based and mutual development-oriented relationship that goes beyond short-term performance expectations or increases, and takes leadership to the next level. Transformational leadership involves creating a common vision and goal for an organization or unit, acting in line with this vision and goal, generating innovative solutions to potential problems, and developing the leadership capacities of followers by both challenging and supporting them through coaching and mentoring (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2022).

### **3. Development of Transformational Leadership**

The concept of transformational leadership was first mentioned by sociologist James W. Downton (1973) in his book "Rebel Leadership: Commitment and Charisma in the Revolutionary Process" and laid the foundations of the transformational leadership concept by addressing the leader-follower interaction on the axis of charisma and commitment (Erden, 2023). However, the roots of the concept of transformational leadership were shaped by the work of James MacGregor Burns in the 1970s. Based on examples of political leadership, Burns (1978) examined leadership behaviors under the headings of transactional leadership and transformational leadership. According to the author, transactional leaders focus on maintaining the existing order and interact through reward and punishment mechanisms. In other words, it is a type of leadership in which the leader

rewards or disciplines followers in line with the adequacy of their behavior or performance (Avolio, 2011). Transformational leaders, on the other hand, go beyond these limits and unite their followers around a broader purpose by raising their morale and motivation levels. Transactional leaders are more compliant with rules and their implementation, or are guided by external conditions. Transformational leaders are more introverted, while transactional leaders are more extroverted (Avolio & Bass, 1995). Burns' approach is closely related to the political and social transformation environment of the period. Increasing civil rights movements, democratization processes, and changes in organizational structures in the 1960s and 1970s paved the way for a reinterpretation of the concept of leadership. This process showed that leadership is not only about the exercise of authority but also about social influence and ethical responsibility (Goethals, Sorenson & Burns: 2004).

In sum, early work on transformational leadership was informed by the findings of military and political leadership research. However, over time, this approach has expanded its scope to include leadership styles in the business world and leadership practices in public institutions, education, health, and non-profit organizations. Although most of the research was initially conducted in the United States, subsequent studies have been conducted in different countries and cultural contexts. This diversity reveals that transformational leadership is a universally applicable model. As a matter of fact, the existing literature shows that this leadership style produces effective results in different geographies and sectors (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Crede et al., 2019; Northouse, 2022).

Bernard Bass (1985) developed an approach in the organizational context by making Burns' theory a more comprehensive model. The author defines the transformational leader as an actor who enables followers to exceed their expectations, encourages innovative thinking, and transforms organizational vision into concrete actions. This approach encompasses both cognitive and affective dimensions of leadership and argues that the interaction between leader and follower mutually creates transformation (Bass, 1990).

In the 1990s, Avolio and Bass (1991) introduced the Full-range Leadership Model to examine the abilities and behaviors of leaders in different working conditions. The full-range leadership model, which also includes transformational leadership, evaluates leadership in a holistic approach with both transformational leadership behaviors and transactional and laissez-faire leadership behaviors. The model is based on Burns' (1978) trait-based leadership approach, which Bass (1985) also utilizes extensively. In the model, all leadership approaches are examined with a focus on

motivation, encouragement, and influence (transformational leadership); management by exception; contingent reward (transactional leadership); and actual denial of leadership responsibility (passive-avoidant or laissez-faire leadership behaviors) (Serrat, 2021).

#### 4. Components of Transformational Leadership

Transformational leaders strive to create and communicate a vision of where their group, unit, or organization should go, rather than focusing only on the status quo and ways of managing day-to-day operations. They focus on seeing problems as opportunities and take an active interest in the individual development of followers. Transformational leaders are keenly interested in expanding the boundaries of their followers' and their own ideas, helping them to move from concerns for existence and security to higher-order concerns for achievement and growth. They strive to increase their followers' awareness of the needs of the organization and their own individual needs. Awareness of needs will ultimately form the basis for raising these needs. Accordingly, the salient characteristics exhibited by transformational leaders are categorized under the components or dimensions of transformational leadership (Avolio, Waldman & Yammarino, 1991).

While the first studies on the Transformational Leadership model were shaped by the dimensions of idealized influence/charisma, intellectual stimulation/mental stimulation, and individualized attention, later studies added the leader's inspirational behavior to the model. In the current literature, the transformational leadership model is explained through four basic dimensions: idealized influence (charisma), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation (mental stimulation), and individualized attention (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1990; Bass & Avolio, 1994):

***Idealized Influence/Charisma:*** The idealized influence dimension, which is based on the creation of values that inspire followers, give meaning, and instill a sense of purpose (Sarros & Santora, 2001), refers to the charismatic role modeling behaviors of transformational leaders. Since transformational leaders act as role models for their followers (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999), followers admire and respect their leaders and trust them because of their exemplary behavior (Behling & McFillen, 1996). Followers identify with their leaders, want to be like them, and believe that their leaders have extraordinary abilities, patience, and perseverance. Therefore, idealized influence has two aspects: the leader's behaviors and the elements attributed to the leader by followers or other employees. In this context, leaders with high levels of idealized influence are trusted to do the right thing and to

have high standards of ethical and moral behavior. In this respect, Özalp & Öcal (2000) argue that the idealized influence/charisma dimension is one of the factors that make transformational leaders effective, and that mobilizing the energies of followers in the direction of radical changes depends to a significant extent on the charismatic characteristics of the leader that are valued by the followers.

***Inspirational Motivation:*** Increasing the level of awareness of the followers about the mission and vision of the organization and encouraging them to understand and adopt this vision is a fundamental element of inspirational motivation (Sarros & Santora, 2001). Transformational leaders exhibit behaviors that motivate and inspire their followers and create a team spirit. This situation brings enthusiasm and optimism (Avolio, Waldman, & Yammarino, 1991). Leaders, together with their followers, present an impressive, attractive, or thought-provoking vision of the future, show commitment to this vision, and serve as role models for their followers. Leaders with inspirational motivation challenge their followers with high standards, convey optimism about achieving future goals, and give meaning to current tasks (Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

***Intellectual Stimulation:*** It refers to the leader challenging assumptions, taking risks, and asking for ideas from followers (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Transformational leaders redefine problems by questioning possibilities and assumptions. Existing situations are re-evaluated from a new perspective, and followers are encouraged to be innovative and creative. In this process, an environment of psychological trust is created as followers are not criticized for their different ideas (Ogola & Sikalich, 2017).

***Individualized Consideration:*** Individualized consideration, which is related to coaching and mentoring behaviors of transformational leaders, is related to leadership behaviors that involve treating followers as important contributors to the organization (Sarros & Santora, 2001). Transformational leaders act as coaches or mentors, paying special attention to the success and development needs of each follower and allocating time to their followers. This dimension enables followers to reach higher and higher levels of potential. Leaders acknowledge individual differences in needs, wants, and expectations and personalize interactions with followers. For example, some followers are given more incentives, some are given more autonomy, and some are given more assignments. Accordingly, “management by walking around” is practiced in workplaces, and leaders communicate with followers as effective listeners.

## 5. Organizational Reflections of Transformational Leadership

Transformational leaders can be defined as leaders who manage the change process in organizations that need to rebuild the existing understanding in a structural sense. However, they are also considered as those who can convince followers of the necessity of change and ensure that the desired transformation becomes institutionalized and collective (Lin et al., 2022). Transformational leaders help reorganize the values and norms of organizations and support and encourage both internal and external change when necessary (Avolio, Waldman & Yammarino, 1991).

The transformational leadership approach, which is related to the long-term perspective, focuses on the interaction between the leader and the follower at the organizational level and focuses on directing the efforts of employees towards a vision instead of short-term goals based on commodity exchange. The transformational leader is aware that the goals to be realized in the long term will be realized as a result of revealing the talents and skills of the followers, increasing and developing the self-confidence of the followers (Erkuş & Günlü, 2008). In this context, it can be stated that transformational leadership style can positively affect the creativity of followers, and employees with increased creativity can mobilize innovation in the organizations they are members of (Shin & Zhou, 2003; Pardes, 2024). Indeed, Antonakis & House (2014) point out that transformational leadership is important for motivating followers and mobilizing resources to fulfill the mission of the organization and is indispensable for organizational innovation, cohesion, and performance. Transformational leaders can help employees to make valuable contributions to their organizations by intellectually stimulating their followers, encouraging them to think differently, in other words, stimulating their creative thinking in a supportive and free platform where they are not criticized, which will enable them to go beyond routine thought patterns and classical business processes (Pardes, 2024; Eraslan, 2004).

Because followers respect and trust transformational leaders, they align their values with those of the leaders and surrender power to them (Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2004). Transformational leaders motivate followers to do more than they initially intended and often even more than they originally thought, setting more challenging expectations and often achieving higher performances. Moreover, because transformational leaders care about empowering their followers and pay attention to their individual needs and personal development, they also help their followers develop their own leadership potential (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The leader directs the development of followers by delegating tasks and then monitoring

these tasks unobtrusively. They check whether they need additional support or guidance. The salient effect of individualized attention and other transformational leadership behaviors is the empowerment of followers (Behling & McFillen, 1996). Avolio argues that transformational leadership also strengthens the environment of psychological trust in organizations, increases the courage of followers to take innovative initiatives, and has a positive contribution to organizational commitment levels (Avolio & Bass, 1991; Avolio, 2007).

Transformational leadership also exhibits strong relationships with criteria reflecting followers' satisfaction and motivation (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). When followers' values are aligned with those of the transformational leader, they are expected to shift the focus of their motivation from self-interest to considering the interests of the group or organization. By presenting a desirable vision, leaders are able to influence followers' views of their positive role in achieving the mission/vision, and to achieve a higher level of commitment to a common goal for the group (Jung & Avolio, 2000). As a result, transformational leadership behaviors increase the commitment of the followers to the organization and bring about changes in the beliefs, needs, and values of the followers beyond their compliance (Çetin, 2020).

Transformational leadership is not only about thinking, questioning, and taking risks, but also about instilling certain ideas in followers through their own behavior. Transformational leaders have a high level of energy and create an organizational climate suitable for both entrepreneurship and self-development in traditional bureaucracy (Çelik, 1998).

Idealized influence in leadership includes honesty in the form of ethical and moral behavior (Tracey & Hinkin, 1998). In this context, it will be inevitable to observe positive changes in organizational culture as a result of followers taking their leaders as role models.

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## Holistic Leadership

Yaşar Şahin<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This study deals with the holistic leadership approach, which is gaining importance among contemporary leadership theories, at a conceptual level. Holistic leadership defines leadership as a multidimensional process of consciousness by bringing together an individual's inner awareness, ethical sensitivity, cognitive integrity, and systems thinking capacity. The aim of the study is to examine the foundations of holistic leadership and explain why this approach is becoming increasingly important in today's organizational environments dominated by digitalization, complex systems, and multi-stakeholder structures. In this study, firstly, the concept of holistic leadership is discussed on the basis of holism philosophy, system theory, and the holistic thinking approach. Then, through a comparative analysis with contemporary leadership models such as transformational, servant, authentic, and spiritual leadership, it is revealed that holistic leadership constitutes a “superframe” that synthesizes these models. The study emphasized that core competencies such as mindfulness, balance, systems thinking, and ethical sensitivity constitute the behavioral foundations of holistic leadership. In the practice dimension, it was determined that holistic leadership supports innovation and employee engagement in organizations and contributes to ethical and sustainable decision-making processes. In this respect, holistic leadership has a transformative potential not only for managerial efficiency but also for human development and organizational integrity. In this respect, the study reveals that holistic leadership brings a new perspective to the leadership literature and provides a multidisciplinary theoretical basis for future research.

### 1. Introduction

In the 21st century's rapidly changing business world, leadership is being redefined not only as a managerial role but also as a systemic process of awareness and meaning-making (Subrahmanyam, 2025). Digital transformation, globalization, multi-stakeholder structures, and

1 Lecturer Dr., Trabzon University, yasarsahin@trabzon.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0002-5205-3054.

sustainability pressures are pushing the boundaries of traditional leadership approaches (Buonocore et al., 2024). In this transformation environment, it is not enough for leaders to have only technical knowledge or operational skills; they need to be able to comprehend the organization, employees, environment, and society from a holistic perspective (Kodama, 2025). In this context, the concept of holistic leadership emerges as an approach that goes beyond fragmented ways of thinking and bases leadership on multidimensional, systemic, and ethical foundations (Khan, 2025; Quatro et al., 2007).

Holistic leadership is based on the philosophy of “holism”, derived from the Latin root “holos” (whole). Holism argues that in order to understand a system, it is necessary to look beyond its constituent parts and that each part gains meaning only in relation to the whole (Dos Santos, 2023). When this approach is adapted to the field of leadership, it emphasizes that the interactions between leaders themselves, their followers, the organizational structure, environmental dynamics, and the value system should be evaluated as a whole. Therefore, a holistic leader is not only a person who sets goals and gives direction, but also a transformative actor who creates meaning, builds values, has high inner awareness, and makes decisions based on ethical foundations (Avolio, 2010; Khan, 2025).

Today’s organizations operate in environments dominated by the concepts of “uncertainty” and “complexity” due to their complex system structures and constantly changing conditions. With digitalization, information flow has accelerated, and artificial intelligence and automation systems have become effective in decision-making processes. This situation has increased the importance of not only rational and cognitive skills but also holistic qualities such as emotional intelligence, ethical sensitivity, systemic thinking, and awareness in leadership processes (Topcuoglu et al., 2023). In this respect, holistic leadership stands out as a model that strengthens not only organizational performance but also employees’ psychological well-being and organizational resilience (Barr & Nathenson, 2022).

The rationale for the emergence of holistic leadership is largely related to the inadequacy of existing leadership approaches in explaining organizational complexities. Transformational leadership offers a powerful model in terms of motivating employees and developing a vision, but falls short in terms of individual meaning, ethical responsibility, and systemic awareness (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Similarly, although servant and authentic leadership approaches emphasize human-centered values, they offer a limited perspective in terms of environmental sustainability, spiritual balance, and

the integrity of the organizational ecosystem (Kim et al., 2024). Holistic leadership fills this gap and proposes a “meta-framework” (meta-model) that takes into account the interdependence between people, systems, and the environment (Tripathi, 2021).

This study aims to explain the theoretical foundations of the holistic leadership concept and its importance in the organizational context. In this context, it is argued that leadership is not only a task function but also a multidimensional process of awareness and influence. The study first presents the conceptual framework of holistic leadership, followed by a comparative analysis with current leadership models such as transformational, servant, authentic, and spiritual leadership. These comparisons aim to show that holistic leadership offers a holistic leadership model that encompasses, yet transcends, these approaches. Thus, it aims to both contribute to the theoretical literature and to provide a holistic perspective that will guide contemporary leadership practices.

## 2. Holistic Leadership Concept

Holistic leadership is a leadership approach that considers the individual, the organization, and the environment not as disconnected elements but as a dynamic whole that interacts with each other (Wu, 2024). The complex, ambiguous, and multidimensional problems that leaders face in today’s organizations require more applications than classical leadership approaches. In this context, holistic leadership comes to the forefront as an understanding that is not limited to managerial skills, but integrates the individual’s inner awareness, ethical sensitivity, systemic thinking skills, and meaning-making capacity (Sunderman & Orsini, 2024).

Holistic leadership can be defined as “a multi-layered approach to leadership that combines the emotional, cognitive, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of leadership and addresses the individual-organization-environment interaction as a whole” (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2011; Dhiman, 2017). This model focuses not only on performance or outcomes but also on the way the leader makes sense of himself, his followers, the values of the organization, and the whole system. Holistic leaders, on the other hand, have a vision that can establish harmony between the individual’s inner world and the outer world, integrate personal values with organizational goals, and observe ethical balance in their decisions (Khan, 2025).

Conceptually, holistic leadership is a holistic synthesis of transformational, authentic, servant, and spiritual leadership models, bringing together the

visionary aspect of transformational leadership, the internal consistency of authentic leadership, the human-centered perspective of servant leadership, and the meaning and value generation dimension of spiritual leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The philosophical foundations of holistic leadership are based on the philosophy of holism, system theory, and integral thinking approaches (Yücelbalkan, 2024). Holism represents an ontological understanding that prioritizes the whole over the parts. From a philosophical perspective, holistic leadership is based on the cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual integrity of human beings (Gemechu, 2022). Holistic leadership argues that the balance between individual consciousness, cultural values, and systemic structure is the essence of leadership, and assumes that knowledge and meaning are generated not only analytically but also relationally and experientially (Senge, 1990).

Holistic leadership consists of four basic contexts: emotional, cognitive, ethical, and spiritual, and the emotional dimension refers to the leader's capacity to recognize, manage, and balance their own emotions and the emotions of others. Emotional intelligence constitutes the core of holistic leadership and creates an environment of trust within the organization through emotional awareness, empathy, and communication skills (Dhiman, 2018). The cognitive dimension encompasses the leader's systemic thinking, strategic analysis, and the ability to analyze complex relationships (Khan, 2025). Holistic leaders do not limit events to cause-and-effect relationships; they make decisions by considering all stakeholders and processes of the system (Senge, 1990).

The ethical dimension enables the leader to make decisions based on values, responsibility, and justice. In holistic leadership, ethics is not merely a normative concept, but one that is central to the leader's identity and organizational culture. Ethical sensitivity enables the leader to balance the needs of individuals with organizational goals and social responsibility (Evers, 1992). The spiritual dimension represents the holistic leader's capacity to create meaning, enabling them to reconstruct both their own purpose for being and the collective meaning of the organization (Dhiman, 2018).

In summary, the holistic leadership model gives a new meaning to leadership by linking the inner integrity of the individual, the ethical and systemic balance of the organization, and the sustainable development goals of society, and represents not only a performance-based approach, but also a human-centered, value-oriented, and awareness-based leadership paradigm.

### 3. Basic Principles of Holistic Leadership Model

The holistic leadership model argues that the leader is not only a figure who manages organizational processes, but also a guide of meaning that establishes a balance between people, system, and environment (Starik, 2004). This model suggests that a holistic leadership approach should be built not only on skills and knowledge, but also on awareness, ethical consciousness, and sustainable values, and is based on three main principles. The principles of self-awareness and integrity, systemic balance and ethical harmony, sustainability, and value-based management determine the direction of the leader's relationships with self, others, and the system and help to explain the multidimensional nature of the leadership process (Capra, 1997).

Self-awareness is one of the basic building blocks of holistic leadership, and leaders' awareness of their own feelings, thoughts, values, and behaviors emerges as a prerequisite for both personal integrity and leadership effectiveness (Goleman, 2013). Self-awareness enables leaders to establish consistency between their inner world and their external behaviors, and leaders display an authentic stance towards both themselves and their environment (Dhiman, 2018). The principle of integrity refers to the capacity of leaders to create harmony between their values, behaviors, and decisions. The concept of integrity emphasizes the essence of ethical leadership and the trustworthiness of leaders, and reflects the consistency of holistic leaders in their inner world, creating trust-based relationships (Northouse, 2025).

The second principle of holistic leadership, systemic balance, argues that the leader should perceive the organization as a living system (Capra, 1997). Based on the assumption that every organization consists of interdependent subsystems and that the balance of the whole is negatively affected when these systems do not work in harmony, the holistic leader has a vision that can understand these systemic relationships and maintain balance in change processes (Orlov, 2003).

Systemic balance is also related to the leader's ability to manage relationships between stakeholders within an ethical framework, with holistic leaders emphasizing the ethical quality of processes, not just outcomes, and positioning themselves as a facilitator who strengthens connections within the system, not just a controller (Senge, 1990).

The third principle of holistic leadership is value-oriented management based on sustainability. Sustainability is not just an environmental or economic concept, but refers to the capacity to create continuity and

meaning at all levels of leadership, and the holistic leader aims to build long-term values beyond short-term achievements (Kodama, 2025).

In this context, it can be said that the basic principles of the holistic leadership model consist of a holistic philosophy of life that shapes systemic balance, ethical behavior, sustainability, and long-term impact vision, and enables the transformation of the individual, organization, and society together (Topçuoğlu & Kaygın, 2023).

#### **4. Holistic Leadership and Other Leadership Models**

Holistic leadership can be considered a superior model that goes beyond and integrates many contemporary approaches in the leadership literature. This model brings together the basic principles of transformational, servant, authentic, and spiritual leadership approaches. It has the capacity to transform leadership not only as a process focused on individual achievement or performance, but also as an understanding of people, systems, and values (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). In this respect, holistic leadership offers a holistic concept among different leadership models and aims to overcome their limitations.

When holistic leadership is examined in terms of its relationship with leadership types such as transformational, spiritual, and servant leadership, it is seen that it adopts the visionary and motivational aspect of the transformational leadership model and enriches it with emotional, ethical, and spiritual dimensions (Singh, 2002). Transformational leaders are leaders who unite followers around a common goal by mobilizing their intrinsic motivation (Bass & Riggio, 2006). While transformational leadership focuses more on organizational performance and change processes, holistic leadership considers the inner transformation of the individual and systemic harmony (Singh, 2002).

When considered in the context of servant and authentic leadership models, it can be seen that holistic leadership is an approach that incorporates both models. Servant leadership is a model that defines the main purpose of leadership as “to serve”, where leaders use their power not to establish control or authority, but to unleash the potential of others and contribute to society (Meuser & Smallfield, 2023). Authentic leadership, on the other hand, emphasizes the consistency between leaders’ internal values and external behaviors, placing inner awareness, harmony, transparency, and ethical consistency at the center of leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Holistic leadership is an approach that incorporates both models, combining the human-centered sensitivity of servant leadership with the inner integrity



of authentic leadership, and also balancing ethical responsibility and social sustainability while integrating these two approaches.

When holistic leadership is considered with spiritual leadership, it is seen to be compatible in terms of its value and purpose-based aspect. Spiritual leaders help individuals to connect not only to their work but also to a higher purpose (Samul, 2024). While holistic leadership is based on the meaning and value creation aspect of spiritual leadership, spiritual leadership represents the “spiritual depth” of holistic leadership, whereas holistic leadership offers a more inclusive concept that extends this depth with the dimensions of systemic awareness, balance, and sustainability (Subhaktiyasa et al., 2023).

Holistic leadership is a synthesizing framework that incorporates and connects each of the aforementioned leadership models. This synthesis transforms leadership into a philosophy of life based on awareness, ethical consciousness, systemic thinking, and emotional integrity, rather than merely a form of behavior or personality trait (Senge, 1990). This multidimensional structure of the holistic leader transforms organizations from being structures that only produce economic value to systems that act with ethical, social, and environmental responsibility. In this respect, holistic leadership can be considered as a holistic model that feeds on each of the contemporary leadership theories, but combines them in a holistic paradigm by removing them from being singular categories (Dhiman, 2018).

## 5. Key Features of Holistic Leadership

Holistic leadership suggests that leadership is not just a position but encompasses concepts such as awareness and ethical responsibility. In this approach, leaders’ effectiveness depends not only on their technical knowledge but also on the quality of the relationship they establish with their inner world and their environment. The holistic leader advocates an approach that can combine his/her own inner values with organizational goals and societal expectations in harmony and create meaning and integrity (Kodama, 2025). In this context, four key elements that determine the effectiveness of a holistic leader stand out: awareness, balance, systems thinking, and ethical sensitivity (Zohar & Marshall, 2004).

Mindfulness is the most fundamental competency at the center of holistic leadership. Defined as the ability to recognize and make sense of one’s own inner state, feelings, and thoughts, and to manage their impact on behavior, mindfulness includes environmental and systemic awareness as well as individual awareness in terms of holistic leadership (Oktaysoy, 2025).



Mindfulness helps the leader to manage conflicts within the organization, develop empathy and make ethical decisions, and nourishes the leader's visionary capacity (Khan, 2025).

The second core competency of holistic leadership is the ability to establish balance, which refers to the leader's capacity to pursue a fair, harmonious, and sustainable path in environments where different stakeholders, values, and goals conflict (Northouse, 2025). This balance has both intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions; intrinsic balance enables leaders to establish consistency between their emotional states, stress levels, and decision-making processes, while extrinsic balance represents the leader's ability to create harmony between the organization, the environment, and stakeholders (Kodama, 2025). Holistic leaders maintain this balance by basing their decisions not only on rational analysis but also on emotional intuition and ethical awareness, which helps them to achieve both organizational efficiency and the psychological well-being of employees (Yaraş & Özcan, 2019).

Systems thinking is a cognitive competence that enables the holistic leader to understand and manage a complex network of relationships, and for the holistic leader, this competence is the ability to see the whole and not the parts. Systems thinking also strengthens the holistic leader's strategic foresight and problem-solving skills (Northouse, 2025). This skill enhances the leader's ability to act strategically, especially in the face of digitalization, globalization, and the complexity of multi-stakeholder structures, and enables the continuous development of both individuals and organizations through systems thinking (Fry, 2008).

Ethical sensitivity refers to the conscientious dimension of holistic leadership, arguing that the leader should consider not only the consequences of his/her actions but also the impact of these consequences on people, society, and the environment (Gemechu, 2022). Ethical sensitivity ensures that leaders adhere to the principles of empathy, fairness, transparency, and responsibility in their decision-making processes, and the holistic leader sees ethical sensitivity not only as a personal value but also as a building block that ensures the continuity of organizational culture (Zohar & Marshall, 2004).

In this context, mindfulness, balance, systemic thinking and ethical sensitivity stand out as the four fundamental characteristics of the holistic leader that enable him/her to be not only a "manager" but also a "transformative guide"; taken together, the leadership process is transformed from a technical function into a way of life based on mindfulness, meaning-making and ethical values.

## 6. Application Areas of Holistic Leadership in Businesses

Holistic leadership is not only a theoretical approach but also a management philosophy that can be applied in different organizational contexts. At the heart of this approach is the ability to treat organizations as living systems, to see individuals as meaningful parts of this system, and to guide all decision-making processes with the principles of ethics, awareness, and sustainability. In the business world, holistic leadership is a management approach that integrates the strategic goals of the organization with the employees' search for meaning. Today's businesses are faced with complex decisions in an environment of rapid change, digitalization, and global competition. In these conditions, the success of the leader depends not only on economic performance but also on human factors such as systemic awareness, ethical decision-making, and employee engagement (Zohar & Marshall, 2004).

Holistic leadership creates a cultural infrastructure that increases innovation and commitment in organizations, aligns employees' individual search for meaning with the organizational vision, and ensures that work becomes meaningful, not just done (Fry, 2008). In addition, holistic leadership is the mainstay of sustainability strategies in organizations and makes the leadership process responsibility-oriented instead of production-oriented by evaluating economic, environmental, and social impacts together in decision-making processes. In addition, they create a climate of psychological trust by establishing a balance in work environments with high levels of stress and burnout, and support organizational learning while increasing the level of commitment and productivity of employees (Senge, 1990).

Holistic leadership implies ethical awareness in decision-making processes, participatory management, and the development of sustainable public policies, while leaders are responsible not only for managerial efficiency but also for social justice, transparency, and accountability. Holistic leadership requires managers to have a vision that considers the balance between the individual, the organization, and the environment, while the leader evaluates decisions based on systemic impacts, not just short-term results (Orlov, 2003).

In addition, the implementation of holistic leadership in organizations involves both structural and cultural challenges. One of the most important challenges is that most organizations are still based on hierarchical, performance-oriented, and short-term thinking (Senge, 1990). Another challenge is the inability of leaders to measure and develop qualitative

skills such as inner awareness and ethical sensitivity, which can only be prevented through feedback and organizational learning processes (Evers, 1992). To summarize, holistic leadership is a transformation and integrity-based leadership model with a wide sphere of influence. However, for the sustainable implementation of this model, restructuring the organizational culture around the values of mindfulness, ethics, and systemic thinking emerges as an important element.

## 7. Conclusion and Assessment

Holistic leadership is one of the most holistic approaches emerging in the modern leadership literature. This model considers leadership as a multi-layered level of consciousness by bringing together the inner awareness of the individual, the ethical foundations of organizational processes, and the search for systemic balance. The theoretical framework discussed in the study shows that holistic leadership is not only a management style but also a philosophy of life and a paradigm of organizational transformation. Holistic leadership synthesizes key elements of contemporary approaches such as transformational, servant, authentic, and spiritual leadership and redefines leadership on the basis of meaning, ethics, and awareness. In this way, leadership focuses not only on producing results but also on creating a sustainable balance within the integrity of people, systems, and values.

Holistic leadership is based on four main dimensions of awareness, balance, ethical responsibility, and systemic integrity, and when these dimensions come together, leadership becomes a consciousness-oriented process, not just an action-oriented one. The power of holistic leaders does not come from their authority, but from their inner integrity and systemic awareness.

In this context, it can be said that holistic leadership is not only an individual level of consciousness but also a transformative component of organizational culture. The most distinctive aspect of holistic leadership is that it views the leadership process not as a power relationship but as a process of integration and meaning construction, integrating the leader's self-centered vision and the internal harmony of the organization with the external environment. In addition, for the holistic leadership model to be effective in practice, organizational culture must be restructured to support this approach, and leadership training and human resources policies should focus not only on technical skills but also on human competencies such as mindfulness, ethical sensitivity, and systems thinking.

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## 2. POPULAR LEADERSHIP MODELS IN TODAY'S BUSINESS WORLD





## Servant Leadership

Burcu Turan Torun<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Servant leadership, which is an important leadership approach today, is an approach that prioritizes the expectations of employees. Thanks to this approach, business managers can increase the job satisfaction levels of their employees. They can increase their performance levels. They can increase their commitment to the organization. Thus, they have the opportunity to achieve their goals more easily. This understanding, which has such important effects on achieving goals, is discussed in this study, and firstly, servant leadership understanding is tried to be explained. Then, the importance of this understanding is mentioned, and the characteristics of servant leadership and the advantages and disadvantages of this understanding are explained.

### 1. Introduction

Leadership is an indispensable factor for the success of businesses. Due to the difficulty of achieving success in today's conditions and the number of factors affecting success, as well as the need to change the behavior of human beings in different ways, many leadership models have emerged. One of these leadership approaches is the servant leadership approach that has been recognized today.

As of 1990, the interest of researchers in this understanding has increased, and it has been seen in the research that managers determine the change in the attitudes and behaviors of employees by engaging in servant leadership behaviors (Nal et al., 2020: 843). Servant leadership was mainly based on Greenleaf's studies (Yılmaz & Ceylan, 2016:76). Greenleaf, who introduced this concept, explains it as "The servant leader is a servant first, starting with a natural feeling of wanting to serve, and then a conscious choice leads the person to lead" (Greenleaf, 1977). It can be said that the servant leadership

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1 Assoc. Prof. Dr., Van Yuzuncu Yil University, burcuturan@yyu.edu.tr,  
ORCID:0000-0003-1963-9368

approach is an understanding that involves the leader replacing his/her own interests with their interests in order to ensure the development and happiness of the employees gathered under one roof in order to realize the goals of the organization. Therefore, there is an understanding in which leaders focus on their employees and put them at the center.

Today, servant leadership is an important understanding for employees because this understanding sees employees as valuable and includes them in decisions. Servant leaders who prioritize and strive to serve others and work for the welfare and happiness of employees are individuals who prioritize knowledge and people, are visionary, honest, sincere, compassionate, want the development of their employees, and are successful by exhibiting behaviors in this context.

Thanks to this approach that prioritizes employees and takes their expectations into consideration, managers can achieve their goals more easily because the understanding of serving employees first will increase the motivation of employees, they will be able to reveal more than the expected performance level, and exhibit organizational citizenship behavior for their businesses. In today's fiercely competitive environment, this leadership approach, which increases the chances of success in an environment where success is becoming more difficult to achieve, is considered important. Due to this importance, this leadership approach is discussed. The study aims to contribute to the literature by discussing the definition, importance, characteristics, advantages, and disadvantages of servant leadership.

## **2. The Concept of Servant Leadership**

Servant leadership emerged when Greenleaf read Herman Hesse's (1956) novel *Journey to the East* and published the article "Servant Leader" in 1970 and then published the book *Servant Leadership* in 1977 (Fındıkcı, 2009 cited in Taktak & Bilgivar, 2022: 5). Servant leadership, one of the current leadership approaches, is based on the understanding of serving others (Başar & Gültekin, 2022: 1287).

Servant leadership, which has gained importance among leadership approaches and has been the subject of different studies, is an approach that includes attitudes and behaviors according to the leader's attitude and behaviors by thinking about the employees rather than the leader himself (Özkan, 2019: 3158). The leader devotes himself to the needs of his employees without considering his own interests (Başar & Gültekin, 2022: 1288). In other words, servant leadership is a follower-oriented leadership approach that emerges by prioritizing the individual needs and interests of

followers and addressing their concerns (Eva et al., 2021:43). There is no agreed-upon definition and theoretical framework for servant leadership. Scholars have interpreted servant leadership differently and have revealed its various dimensions (Mittal & Dorfman, 2012:556).

Greenleaf explained servant leadership as “the behavior of the servant leader starts with the natural feelings of the individual and consciously continues these feelings and transforms them into servant leadership” and then defined the servant leader as an individual who is willing to serve rather than being a guide (Nal et al., 2020:844).

According to Greenleaf (1998), servant leadership is a unique, democratic, and participative type of leadership. It claims that the main purpose of the leader’s passion, motivation, and duty is to serve (Yurdakul & Kosa, 2023:1102). This understanding focuses on making employees competent in their duties, serving the society, ensuring self-motivation, and developing the leadership skills of employees (Bolat et al., 2016:78). Thanks to this understanding, employees can contribute to both their organizations and society in a stronger way.

Sendjaya and Cooper, on the other hand, defined servant leadership as a whole and multidimensional leadership approach that includes the rational, relational, ethical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of leaders and followers (Görmezoğlu Gökçen, 2019:10). According to Patterson (2003), servant leadership is similar to transformational leadership. He defined servant leadership as a leader who focuses on followers and puts them first. According to him, a servant leader is a person who is humble, selfless, loving, visionary, reliable, empowering, and serving his/her followers (Okan, 2021:210). Servant leadership is an understanding that requires serving employees, taking their needs into consideration, and creating an environment that will ensure success (Kahveci & Aybay, 2012:20).

Servant leadership refers to an understanding that has emerged with the change and transformation in today’s understanding of leadership. In contrast to the understanding of leadership that prioritizes its own interests, it is an understanding of leadership that directly serves its followers and has become a lifestyle, guiding them (Sarı et al., 2024:63), expresses a sacrificial leadership model that enables change at personal and organizational levels and the development of research cultures (Aslan, 2020:199).

Servant leadership combines characteristics such as total quality, teamwork, service orientation, and participative leadership, which prioritizes the interests of followers, involves followers in decision-making processes,

is people-oriented, and therefore enables employees to treat customers in a people-oriented manner (Baykal et al., 2018:113). Since servant leadership is a follower-centered leadership approach, it has a great potential to help the socialization process of new employees (Bauer et al., 2019:357). In this way, employees can adapt to their organizations faster and take ownership of their work.

In order to successfully implement servant leadership, the structure of the organization must be appropriate. Hierarchy and prioritizing the needs of employees may not be suitable for this understanding. For this reason, managers need to establish organizational structures that can ensure the implementation of servant leadership (Cinnioğlu & Saçlı, 2019:1770). Engaging in servant leadership attitudes and behaviors within a suitable organizational structure will make it easier to achieve success.

### **3. The Importance of Servant Leadership**

In today's world, there is a great need for human and moral qualities, and there is a great need for leaders who can conquer hearts without using force or showing an authoritarian management approach. These leaders are expected to be talented and to do things that will benefit their people. At this point, servant leadership appears as a type of leadership that can meet these expectations (Okan, 2021:209).

This approach, expressed by Greenleaf, has important features such as “employee empowerment and development, humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, direction, and responsible management”. Greenleaf emphasized that this approach aims to meet the expectations of employees and brings positive results to the business in the long term (Özkan, 2019; Elkırımış, 2024). He portrays servant leaders as people who adopt ethical principles and show a deep commitment to putting the needs of their followers at the center of their efforts before their own needs, creating an environment where each follower feels important, committed, and empowered to do and create more. Servant leaders are defined as those who communicate one-on-one with their followers to understand their abilities, needs, goals, and desires (Chiniara & Bentein, 2018: 335).

Servant leaders are listeners, communicators, and problem solvers. He or she empathizes with team members, removes barriers, and creates a positive and inclusive work environment where everyone feels valued and motivated (Claroa & Silva, 2025:1675).

The basis of this leadership model is that the leader considers the interests of the employees before his/her own interests. Although it is also

important in other leadership models to consider the employees and meet their expectations, no leadership approach has prioritized this idea as much as servant leadership. When considered from this perspective, the main difference between the servant leadership approach and other leadership approaches is that the goals of the employees come before the goals of the organization. Therefore, it can be stated that the servant leadership approach puts people more at the center (Bolat et al., 2016:77).

It can be stated that servant leadership will contribute positively to the happiness of employees by encouraging them to take responsibility and reveal their potential, the leader putting himself in the background when the goals are achieved, creating awareness of acting together, being open to criticism and making employees feel valued, exhibiting ethical behaviors, being humble and sincere towards employees and having the ability to persuade instead of being authoritarian (Altinkaya & Selvitopu, 2024:105). It can be said that employees can show a desired level of performance thanks to the contribution to happiness.

Hamilton (2008) stated that a servant leader can have positive contributions such as “task and value orientation, creativity and innovation, responsibility and flexibility, internal and external commitment to work, respect for employees, employee loyalty and tolerance of differences within the organization” (Nal et al., 2020:844). A different feature of servant leadership is the leader’s motivation towards others. The motivation is not the status of the leader, but the development of the followers (Zarei et al., 2022:172).

Since leaders’ attitudes and behaviors are evaluated by followers as reliable and ethical, an environment of trust is created (Ertan & Yalçın, 2023:3). When followers encounter servant leadership behaviors, a servant leadership culture develops. Thus, in return for this value given to them, they show more effort to achieve the goals of the organization. A servant leader can be explained as a leader who attaches importance to teamwork, makes decisions together with employees, focuses on moral and helpful behaviors, and tries to increase the development of employees as well as the development of the business (Nal et al., 2020:844).

Servant leaders develop followers by caring about their development, empowering them, and showing sensitivity to their personal concerns. Thus, trust between servant leaders and followers grows, and these relationships are strengthened. Followers, in turn, come together in teams with strong levels of trust and psychological safety, which improves team interactions, communication, and knowledge, resulting in smoother functioning and

higher levels of success. These effects benefit the entire organization and lead to improved business performance (Meusera & Smallfield, 2023:252).

In servant leadership, followers know that they are valued. In this way, they want to reciprocate the value given to them by adopting the goals of the business and bringing the business to its goals. Encouraging followers and making them see the business as their own is a problem for leaders to consider. Servant leaders overcome this problem by responding to the expectations of their followers and valuing them.

Servant leaders encourage their followers to be frank and open, allowing for a greater exchange of ideas and experiences (Rai & Prakash, 2016:125). Servant leaders exhibit consistent behavior. They keep their promises, give people a sense of trust, and do not manipulate information. They give importance to the common interests of employees. This makes employees more diligent to achieve their goals (Baykal et al., 2018:114). These leaders go beyond themselves and their employees by considering the interests of customers and society (Neuber et al., 2016:897).

The priority of the servant leader is to serve and to operate in the way of spreading service to employees and institutions (Örgev & Saba Sütü, 2018:48). It can be thought that individuals whose expectations are taken into account and met will contribute more to the organization.

The most important factor that makes servant leadership different from other leadership models is that it is holistic. Servant leadership refers to a holistic leadership approach that includes different dimensions than transformative, ethical, and authentic leadership (Özbezek, 2022:586). Since employees in businesses with servant leadership perception are more satisfied, their performance is high, and their organizational commitment is high, it is seen that it has recently started to be seen as important in organizational and academic terms (Cinnioğlu & Saçlı, 2019:1770) and has started to be addressed in research with different topics.

The most important characteristic of a servant leader is the priority of serving people. People are a value for this leadership approach. The servant leader prioritizes the interests of his/her followers rather than his/her own interests. They aim to offer the best to their followers. Considering that servant leadership is a value-oriented and lifelong journey that puts people at the center, is based on the understanding of serving them (Kıral, 2021:84), it can be said that this understanding is a leadership understanding that is needed today.

Servant leaders apply “service” in every aspect of life. Perhaps most importantly, they instill in their followers self-confidence and the desire to become servant leaders themselves. By transforming followers into servant leaders, a servant leadership culture can be created (Liden et al., 2008:162).

4. Characteristics of Servant Leadership

The leader’s interest in employees rather than organizational goals differentiates servant leadership from other leadership approaches (Suçiçeği & Kırıl, 2024:154). Spears (1995), taking Greanleaf’s approach into consideration, stated ten characteristics for servant leaders. These are: (1) Listening and healthy communication, (2) Empathy, (3) Healing, (4) Awareness, (5) Persuasion, (6) Conceptualization, (7) Common sense, (8) Stewardship, (9) Focus on the development of the audience, (10) Community building. In their study, Russel and Stone (2002) identified the characteristics of servant leaders as (1) Vision, (2) Honesty, (3) Integrity, (4) Trust, (5) Service, (6) Forming, (7) Pioneering, (8) Appreciating others, and (9) Empowerment (Öztürk Çiftci, 2022:174, as cited in Kır & Karabulut, 2021:361). Table 1 shows the leadership dimensions of the researchers who contributed to servant leadership.

Table 1. Dimensions of Servant Leadership

Laub (1999)	Russel & Stone (2002)	Patterson (2003)	Dennis & Bocamea (2005)	Barbuto & Wheeler (2006)	Sendjaya, Sarros & Santora (2008)	Van Dierendonck (2011)
Valuing the audience	Vision	Social and moral love	Retrofit	Sacrifice	Voluntary commitment	Retrofit
Developing audiences	Honesty	Humility	Trust	Emotional healing	Transformative impact	Humility
Community building	Integrity	Sacrifice	Humility	Pairing with persuasion	Authentic personality	Preferring followers
Honesty	Trust	Vision	Like	Wisdom	Responsible morality	Authenticity
Providing leadership	Service	Trust	Vision	Organizational servanthood	Voluntary service	Forgiveness
Sharing leadership	Modeling	Retrofit			Transcendent spirituality	Courage
	Leading the way	Service				Courage Servanthood
	Appreciating others					
	Retrofit					

Source: Baykal et al. (2018:115)



Servant leaders are motivated to serve their employees and equate themselves with their followers. Laub (1999) explained the characteristics of servant leadership as giving trust to employees by building strong relationships, having a visionary perspective, and delegating authority to subordinates. Russell and Stone (2002), while explaining servant leadership characteristics, added the elements of effective communication, trustworthiness, competence, visibility, persuasion, listening, influencing, encouraging, delegating, responsible management, and teaching to Laub's (1999) explanations. Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) added the concept of passion to these characteristics. Spears (2010) explained the characteristics of servant leadership as listening, empathy, awareness, healing, persuasion, conceptualization, visioning, bringing people together, serving, and developing followers (Erdağ & Arslantaş, 2021:792).

## **5. The Impact of Servant Leaders on Businesses**

A servant leader is a leader who can create a vision, develop strategies, motivate and inspire followers, and instill confidence and courage (Şafak et al., 2023:195). Servant leaders think of their followers before themselves and the organization, are not selfish, and make sacrifices for the development of their followers. Employees who see this sacrifice also contribute to the leader and the organization with the same sacrifice.

A servant leader is a person who is dedicated to serving his/her employees. Meeting the needs of society, employees, customers, etc., and responding to their expectations is the primary goal. Leadership comes after this stage (Yılmaz & Ceylan, 2016:76). These leaders do not use force against their followers in order to realize their goals; they make efforts to persuade them. The characteristics of these leaders include listening, empathizing, persuading, imposing management, and actively developing the potential of followers (Alp & Sevim, 2024:184). They care about the least privileged in society and try to help others develop as individuals (Neubert et al., 2008:1222).

According to Greenleaf (1977), a servant leader is a person who can empathize with his/her followers, show good listening skills, and support them. Buchen (1998) defines a servant leader as an individual who trusts people, establishes good relationships, and cares about their expectations. Laub (1999) defines it as an individual who sees employees as valuable and takes action for their development. Russell (2001) defined it as a trusted, serving, empowering, visionary individual. For Spears (2004), a servant leader is a person who serves his/her followers, encourages them

to be diligent, and gives employees the power to make decisions (Okan, 2021:210).

Servant leaders “put themselves in the shoes of employees, listen to them, try to understand them, and these leaders have unusual power and resources to support followers” (Karasakal et al., 2024:485). Servant leaders meet the needs of others and serve them. They enable followers to develop and gain credibility and reputation in return (Ludwikowska & Tworeka, 2022:36).

According to Greenleaf, a leader who works for the benefit of society should endeavor to prevent them from being harmed (Görmezoğlu Gökçen, 2019:7), and an individual who expects service should first serve himself/herself and then manage (Kahveci & Aybay, 2012:20). A servant leader has a desire to serve. This person is definitely different from those who want to gain power or who attach importance to material things. This difference stems from the fact that the servant leader prioritizes the needs of others (Küçük & Yavuz, 2018:82).

Stone and his colleagues defined servant leaders as individuals who put followers’ goals before organizational goals, focus on the expectations of their followers, and trust their followers to help the organization achieve its goals (Görmezoğlu Gökçen, 2019:10). Spears (1996) defines a servant leader as someone who engages in teamwork, involves employees in the decision-making process, exhibits ethical behavior, and empowers employees (Küçük & Yavuz, 2018:82). Servant leaders implement their decisions by serving rather than ordering (Sarı et al., 2024:64). Thanks to their service, they try to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage by obtaining positive outputs from employees.

## 6. Advantages and Disadvantages of Servant Leadership

Researchers have found that servant leadership behavior increases organizational effectiveness in various ways by facilitating job performance, encouraging creativity, and organizational citizenship behaviors of employees (Stollberger et al., Bosch, 2019:158). With the implementation of the servant leadership approach, it has also been evaluated that this approach has some advantages and disadvantages. Table 2 below presents some of the advantages and disadvantages of servant leadership.

Table 2. Advantages and Disadvantages of Servant Leadership

Advantages	Disadvantages
Leaders value their employees and see them as an end, not just a means to an end.	It is similar to the transformative leadership approach.
They support their employees to innovate and develop.	Fail in purpose-based organizations.
They give promises for the future.	They can damage the hierarchical order.
They are always smiling in environments where communication is intense.	It is likely to be perceived as religious and may be alien to modern sensibilities.
Terms of protection and safeguarding are important.	The word “servant” can harm some employees, such as nurses.
They choose facilitation and encouragement instead of power and authority.	The humility shown may be seen as weakness.
They guide and develop their employees and increase their performance.	Some employees may be indifferent to this approach.

Source: Bulut (2025:44).

Servant leaders act by putting the expectations of their followers ahead of their own expectations. As a result of this behavior, leaders do not seek fame, power, or any personal goals. Servant leaders act sensitively by considering how their decisions will affect their followers. This sensitivity comes from within the leaders (Bektaş, 2016:49).

Servant leadership has some disadvantages such as not reflecting the reality in business life, making leaders passive, causing negative thoughts such as considering servanthood as slavery and characterizing leaders as weak (Güler, 2024:24). Being a servant is seen and criticized as contradictory concepts with leadership (Çakadaş, 2024:42). The terms leader and servant are contradictory because they play two different roles at the same time: Serving and leading. As leaders, it can be difficult to accept that they also serve (Rachmawati & Lantu, 2014:388). Another criticism of servant leadership is the lack of organizational structure boundaries that explain the impact of servant leadership behaviors on followers (Eva et al., 2021:43). Therefore, it can be said that it cannot be applied everywhere and may not be efficient.

7. Conclusion

Servant leadership is one of the most important leadership approaches affecting the structure and functioning of organizations today. As a result of

this understanding, leaders put their needs and expectations ahead of their own in order to increase the welfare and happiness of their employees. Thanks to this understanding, leaders achieve positive outputs in the organization.

First of all, employees who are valued start to see their work as their own. Accomplishing a job becomes an obligation for them because it is ingrained in their minds not to be embarrassed and not to frustrate the good intentions of their leaders. They act with the awareness that they need to demonstrate a high level of performance in order to complete their jobs successfully. Organizational identification with their businesses takes place, and they volunteer to do jobs other than their own; in other words, they start to exhibit organizational citizenship attitudes and behaviors.

The servant leadership approach, which is based on persuading employees and involving them in the decisions taken, may have some negative aspects in addition to these positive aspects. Especially if the servant leader exhibits a humble personality, it may be seen as a weakness. In addition, the suitability of the structure of the organization is also important for the success of this leadership approach.

Despite these negativities, the servant leadership approach is important because it emphasizes the issue of valuing people, which is the most needed in today's world conditions, and has centered this as the most important feature. In addition, considering that the most important factor in success is the human element, it can be said that this understanding is an important one suitable for today.

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## Visionary Leadership

Ethem Topçuoğlu<sup>1</sup>

Erdi Bozkır<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

Leadership has been at the center of social and organizational life throughout history and has been shaped under various approaches in different periods. Among these approaches, visionary leadership has become a prominent theoretical and practical leadership approach, especially since the last quarter of the 20th century. Visionary leadership involves not only creating a strong and inspiring vision of the future but also sharing this vision with organizational members and motivating them towards a common goal. In this respect, it is considered a strategic necessity for contemporary organizations to survive in an environment of change, uncertainty, and competition. This study examines the concept of visionary leadership through a literature review and discusses its basic components, its relationship with other types of leadership, and its functions in today's organizational context. The review of the literature reveals that visionary leadership guides organizations in strategic, psychological, cultural, and communicative dimensions and is closely related to factors such as corporate culture, innovation, and employee engagement. In addition, visionary leadership provides long-term competitive advantage to organizations in relation to current issues such as digitalization, sustainability, and crisis management. The study considers visionary leadership as an organizational reflex and a cultural construct rather than an individual quality and emphasizes that the concept should be understood not only as leader-centered but also as a shared and institutionalized vision. This approach provides a theoretical framework for the literature and a holistic view of the stages of vision development, sharing, realization, and maintenance for practitioners.

1 Assoc.Prof.Dr., Giresun University, ethem.topcuoglu@giresun.edu.tr,  
ORCID: 0000-0003-3563-0566

2 Research Assistant, Iğdır University, erdibozkir@gmail.com,  
ORCID: 0000-0002-5411-9133

## 1. Introduction

Leadership has been one of the most important elements of social and organizational life throughout human history. Guiding communities, managing change processes, and achieving common goals largely depend on the phenomenon of leadership. However, it is seen that leadership is not a uniform approach; different leadership approaches have emerged in the historical process. Following different paradigms such as charismatic leadership, authentic leadership, ethical leadership, and transformational leadership, the concept of visionary leadership has come to the fore in a remarkable way, especially since the last quarter of the 20th century. In its simplest form, visionary leadership can be defined as the ability to create a strong vision of the future, to share this vision with followers, and to enable them to take action by believing in this vision (Nanus, 1992).

In today's world of globalization, digital transformation, intensified competition, and increased uncertainty, the survival of organizations depends not only on the effective use of existing resources but also on having a strategic perspective towards the future. In this context, visionary leaders are not only managers but also individuals who guide their organizations, prepare them for the future, and inspire their employees.

In today's organizations, visionary leadership plays a critical role in successfully managing change and transformation processes. Developments such as digitalization, sustainability, artificial intelligence, green economy, and industry 5.0 require organizations to think not only about the present but also about the future. At this point, visionary leaders come to the fore as "road compasses" who can turn the uncertainties of the future into opportunities and mobilize employees towards common goals (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

The aim of this chapter is to examine the concept of visionary leadership in all its dimensions, to examine different approaches in the literature, to reveal the characteristics of visionary leaders, and to evaluate the effects of this leadership style on organizational performance, innovation, employee engagement, and social transformation. In addition, the findings of different academic studies on visionary leadership will be discussed, and a holistic perspective on the concept will be presented by addressing different orientations and trends.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

### 2.1. Concept of Vision

The concept of “vision” derives from the Latin verb *videre* (to see) and has the meanings of envisioning the future, determining direction, and mentally visualizing the target point. In general terms, vision is defined as a clear, meaningful, and inspiring picture of the ideal future that an individual, group, or organization wants to achieve (Nanus, 1992). This picture is not only an abstract dream but also serves as a compass that guides organizational decisions, prepares the ground for strategic planning, and mobilizes individuals towards common goals. Vision is a phenomenon that manifests itself at both individual and organizational levels. Accordingly, while individual vision includes one’s goals, values, and long-term expectations for one’s own life, organizational vision refers to the place the organization wants to be in the future, its social role, and strategic expectations.

According to studies emphasizing the importance of vision in the organizational context, there are some basic characteristics of an effective vision. Some of these can be listed as follows (Collins & Porras, 1996):

- *Clarity*: It should be easily understandable by the members.
- *Inspiration*: The organization should create motivation in its members and provide them with a meaningful purpose.
- *Realism*: It should be attainable, but with a challenge that transcends the status quo.
- *Inclusiveness*: Involve all stakeholders of the organization and create a shared sense of belonging.

Vision also has a cultural meaning. The visions of societies and nations shape their development strategies, development goals, and expectations for the future. For example, while the goals set out in national development plans reveal the social vision of a country, this vision is strengthened by the discourses of leaders (Yakısır, 2024; Geçgin, 2022). Therefore, the concept of vision is directly related to leadership. The formation, development, and adoption of the vision by the members of the organization largely depend on how the leader expresses and conveys this vision. The leader should not only define the vision, but also keep it alive and integrate it into the organizational culture. In this context, vision is a key concept in leadership literature that underlies charismatic, transformational, and especially visionary leadership approaches (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

## 2.2. Visionary Leadership

Visionary leadership is one of the most prominent types of leadership among contemporary leadership approaches and is of critical importance for organizations, especially in environments of change and uncertainty. In the most general terms, visionary leadership can be defined as the process of developing an inspiring, achievable, and meaningful vision of the future, conveying this vision to followers, making them believe in this vision, and mobilizing them (Nanus, 1992). Visionary leaders play an active role not only in managing the current situation but also in shaping the future. Therefore, visionary leadership can be considered as one of the approaches that makes the difference between management and leadership most visible.

In the literature, visionary leadership has been addressed by different researchers with various dimensions. According to Nanus (1992), a visionary leader is “a person who creates a strong and attractive vision of the future and unites organizational members around this vision”. According to Bennis & Nanus (1997), visionary leadership is “the ability to foresee the future, integrate this future with the values of the organization, and provide a meaningful direction to the members of the organization”. Kouzes & Posner (2007), on the other hand, define a visionary leader as “a person who not only envisions the future, but also shares this future with others and enables them to be part of this dream”. Ylimaki (2006) defines a visionary leader as “a leader with strong intuition, perception, understanding, and holistic perspective”.

Considering all these definitions, three main functions of visionary leadership stand out. These are:

- *Designing the future*: Setting long-term direction amidst uncertainties.
- *Sharing the vision*: Communicating the vision to organizational members in a clear, understandable, and inspiring way.
- *Mobilizing followers*: Motivating employees by making them believe in the vision and creating a collective sense of purpose.

In addition, when the definitions above are examined, it is noteworthy that there are some dimensions that constitute the essence of visionary leadership. These dimensions can be listed as follows;

**Strategic Dimension:** Visionary leadership is not limited to short-term goals. It involves determining the future direction of the organization and focusing on long-term success. Visionary leaders can foresee future opportunities and threats by analyzing current trends and environmental

factors. In this context, the vision forms the basis of the strategic plans of the organization. The strategic dimension requires the leader to think and foresee not only the present but also the distant future (Maxwell, 2007; Mascareño et al., 2020).

***Psychological Dimension:*** Vision is not only a rational list of goals, but also an important force that appeals to the emotions of employees. Visionary leaders create a sense of belonging, hope, and trust in organizational members. In this respect, vision serves as an “emotional bond”. Employees do not just see the vision as a text or a slogan; they make it a part of their lives. The psychological dimension becomes especially important in times of crisis and uncertainty. Under difficult conditions, the visionary leader strengthens motivation and organizational commitment by instilling in employees the belief that “the future will be better” (Elenkov, Judge, & Peter, 2005).

***Cultural Dimension:*** Vision is an important carrier of organizational culture. In organizations, vision becomes an element of identity and belonging when it is integrated with values, beliefs, and norms. Visionary leaders not only set strategic goals but also align these goals with the values of the organization. For example, a leader who adopts a vision of sustainability makes not only economic performance but also environmental and social responsibility an integral part of the organizational culture. Thus, the vision creates a common identity among organizational members and becomes an element of trust in relations with stakeholders (Kalyoncu, 2008).

***Communicative Dimension:*** One of the most important features of vision is that it not only remains in the mind of the leader but can also spread throughout the organization. This requires strong communication skills. The visionary leader should express complex future visions in a simple, understandable, and inspiring way. Metaphors, storytelling, and symbols are often used in this process. Effective communication ensures that the vision is not only communicated but also embedded in the hearts and minds of employees. The communicative dimension also means that the vision is constantly reiterated and integrated into organizational processes (Osborne, 2008). Thus, the vision becomes not only a written document but also a part of the daily life of the organization.

### **2.3. The Relationship of Visionary Leadership with Other Leadership Approaches**

Visionary leadership is not an isolated approach that exists alone in the leadership literature. On the contrary, it intersects with and feeds on other

leadership paradigms such as charismatic, transformational, authentic, and ethical leadership. Therefore, understanding visionary leadership requires a comparative analysis with other types of leadership. From this point of view, under this heading, the main leadership approaches related to visionary leadership are mentioned, and an attempt is made to draw a common denominator between these approaches and visionary leadership.

### **2.3.1. Relationship with Charismatic Leadership**

Charismatic leadership refers to the leader's personal charm, self-confidence, and impressive communication skills that create a strong impact on followers (Putra & Sari, 2024). While charismatic leaders influence their followers with their personal charisma, visionary leaders mobilize organizational members with the power of their vision for the future. However, the success of visionary leadership is not independent of charismatic characteristics. Leaders may need to have charismatic elements that can influence their followers to adopt their vision. Therefore, visionary leadership does not exclude charismatic leadership but deepens its future-oriented dimension.

### **2.3.2. Relationship with Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership is a leadership style that motivates employees, unleashes their potential, and supports organizational change (Suryadi et al., 2024; Özdemirkol, 2025). Visionary leadership is also closely related to transformational leadership. While transformational leadership focuses on moving organizational members beyond the existing boundaries, visionary leadership determines the goal towards which this transformation will be directed. In other words, while transformational leadership activates the "change process", visionary leadership determines the "direction of change". In this respect, visionary leadership is a strategic and long-term complement to transformational leadership.

### **2.3.3. Relationship with Authentic Leadership**

Authentic leadership is based on the leader's sincerity, transparency, and ethical values that inspire confidence in the members of the organization (Ozturk et al., 2025). The success of visionary leadership also largely depends on the authenticity of the leader. Because an inauthentic vision loses its credibility with employees. The visionary leader facilitates the acceptance of the vision by the members of the organization by using authentic leadership characteristics. Thus, the vision becomes a shared sense of purpose, rather than merely a managerial tool.

#### **2.3.4. Relationship with Ethical Leadership**

Ethical leadership is based on the principles of justice, integrity, responsibility, and honesty (Arslantaş & Dursun, 2008). The relationship between visionary leadership and ethical leadership emerges at the point of integration of vision with values. A vision that is not based on ethical foundations may create excitement in the short term, but it is not sustainable in the long term. Therefore, visionary leaders have to harmonize their vision with ethical values. Otherwise, the vision may lead to a loss of trust among employees.

#### **2.3.5. Common Points**

These comparisons show that visionary leadership is not completely independent from other leadership approaches. On the contrary, it draws on the influencing power of charismatic leadership, the capacity for change of transformational leadership, the trust-building quality of authentic leadership, and the value-based approach of ethical leadership. But what makes visionary leadership unique is its ability to integrate these elements around a meaningful and inspiring vision of the future.

#### **2.4. Visionary Leadership in Contemporary Context**

Today, when globalization is accelerating, digitalization is transforming business processes, and uncertainty has become a fundamental dynamic for organizations, visionary leadership has gained more importance than ever. It is not only sufficient for organizations to maintain their current performance, but they are also expected to achieve sustainable success by preparing for the conditions of the future. At this point, visionary leadership stands out as a leadership approach that both provides strategic direction to organizations and instills confidence and hope in employees.

Visionary leadership plays a critical role, especially in our age of accelerating digitalization and technological developments. With Industry 4.0 and Industry 5.0, technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data, Internet of Things (IoT), automation, and blockchain have become an integral part of the business world. Visionary leaders view these technologies not only as tools for operational efficiency but also as strategic elements for redesigning the future of the organization. In this way, vision serves as a roadmap that turns technology into an opportunity rather than a threat (Wu, Liu, & Liang, 2024).

In addition, global problems such as climate change, depletion of natural resources, and social inequalities have made sustainability a necessity for



organizations. By making environmental and social sensitivity an integral part of their organizational vision, visionary leaders both reassure stakeholders and enable organizations to fulfill their social responsibilities (Fry & Egel, 2021). Thus, visionary leadership is shaped as an approach that prioritizes environmental and social contribution beyond economic performance.

Crises and uncertainty are also defining factors for today's leadership. The COVID-19 pandemic, disruptions in global supply chains, and economic fluctuations have made it imperative for leaders not only to produce short-term solutions but also to put forward a long-term vision. In this context, visionary leaders guide their organizations in times of crisis and strengthen organizational resilience by creating a sense of confidence in the future (Guan et al., 2023; Elkırımıř, 2024). In addition, with globalization, the workforce has become increasingly diverse and multicultural. As diversity management becomes a strategic imperative for today's organizations, visionary leaders bring together employees from different cultures, genders, and generations with inclusive visions. This vision sees diversity as a richness that enhances creativity and innovation.

In an intensely competitive environment, innovation is one of the key components of visionary leadership. Visionary leaders build an innovative culture within the organization by encouraging their employees to continuously learn, think creatively, and develop innovative solutions. In this context, vision is not only an indicator of future direction but also a strategic element that enables organizations to differentiate and gain sustainable competitive advantage (Zhang & Chen, 2024). In today's context, visionary leadership has become a strategic imperative for organizations in terms of seizing the opportunities offered by digitalization, placing sustainability goals at the center of organizational culture, managing crisis and uncertainty, integrating diversity with an inclusive vision, and encouraging innovation (Karadeniz et al., 2018; Bektař ve elik, 2021). Visionary leaders play a guiding role in the transformation of not only their organizations but also societies with their perspectives on the future.

## **2.5. Visionary Leadership Process**

Visionary leadership is not just about an inspiring vision of the future. In this leadership approach, the vision needs to be developed, shared, realized, and sustained in a systematic process (Dhammika, 2016). In the literature, the functioning of visionary leadership is generally discussed within the framework of four basic stages. These can be listed as developing vision, sharing vision, realizing vision, and sustaining vision.

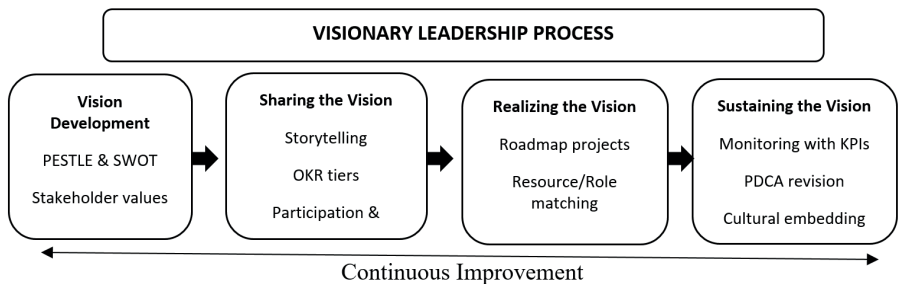


Figure 1. Visionary leadership process.

*Continuous Improvement*

**Vision Development:** The first stage of visionary leadership is the creation of a strong vision that will shape the future of the organization. This process requires an analysis of the current state of the organization and environmental factors. The leader draws a meaningful future picture for the organization by taking into account internal resources, sectoral trends, technological developments, and societal expectations. In developing the vision, not only the leader’s individual foresight, but also the values of organizational members and stakeholders’ expectations should be taken into account (Nsengiyumva, 2024). Therefore, vision development is a multidimensional process that brings together analytical thinking, strategic foresight, and creative imagination (Nanus, 1992).

**Sharing the Vision:** For a vision to be effective, it is not enough for it to remain only in the mind of the leader. The vision needs to be understood and adopted by all members. This stage is directly related to the leader’s strong communication skills. The visionary leader conveys the vision to the members of the organization in a clear and inspiring way. In this process, communication tools such as storytelling, metaphors, and symbols make the vision more understandable and effective. In addition, it is of great importance that the leader supports the vision not only with words but also with behavior. Thus, the vision can turn into a collective sense of purpose among organizational members (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

**Realizing the Vision:** Vision can only gain its true value when it is transformed into concrete actions and strategies. At this stage, the visionary leader develops strategic plans to achieve the set goals, uses resources effectively, and restructures organizational processes in line with the vision. This stage also involves change management. Because the implementation of a new vision often requires questioning existing habits and transforming organizational culture (Hermawan et al., 2024). In this change process, the

visionary leader manages the resistance of employees, motivates them, and integrates the vision into daily practices.

***Sustaining the Vision:*** Vision is not a static element that is created once and for all. It must be constantly reviewed, adapted to circumstances, and kept alive with the members of the organization. Therefore, the sustainability of the vision depends on the ongoing efforts of the visionary leader. The leader should regularly measure the progress of the vision, revise it when necessary, and ensure that it becomes an integral part of the organizational culture. In this way, the vision serves as a long-term roadmap for the organization, not just a periodic goal.

## **2.6. The Effect of Visionary Leadership on Organizational Culture and Performance**

Today's organizations are in an effort to adapt to rapidly changing environmental conditions and to achieve sustainable success. In this context, the role of leadership is not limited to making managerial decisions, but has become a strategic element that shapes the values, beliefs, and direction of the organization. In particular, visionary leadership is a leadership approach that attracts attention with its power to transform organizational culture and its capacity to increase employee performance (Mulyadin et al., 2023). Under this heading, the impact of visionary leadership on organizational culture and its reflections on organizational performance are discussed with a holistic approach.

Visionary leadership, as mentioned earlier, not only creates a vision of the future that inspires the organization but also has the power to unite employees around a common purpose by sharing this vision (Geçgin & Gülsoy, 2024). This form of leadership provides guidance, especially in times of change, while at the same time leading to the redefinition of organizational norms and cultural transformation. This type of leadership strengthens the psychological bonds that employees establish with the organization and creates a collective consciousness in achieving common goals (Casida et al., 2012).

Corporate culture, as a basic system that directs the behaviors of individuals within the organization, is a structure that has a direct impact on performance outcomes (Kanat & Geçgin, 2025). Visionary leadership positively shaping this cultural structure also results in increased performance. In this direction, a quantitative study conducted in a vocational high school in Indonesia revealed that visionary leadership had significant and positive effects on both organizational culture and teacher performance (Kurniadi et al., 2020).

Similarly, in another study conducted in another educational institution, visionary leadership was found to increase employee performance along with organizational culture and work discipline (Mulyadin et al., 2023).

The impact of visionary leadership is not only limited to direct performance improvement, but also contributes to performance indirectly through organizational culture. A study of small and medium-sized enterprises found that organizational culture significantly mediates the relationship between leadership and operational performance (Shah et al., 2022). This finding suggests that culture is not only an outcome but also a mechanism of influence. The impact of visionary leadership on organizational culture and performance is not limited to education or service sectors. Qualitative research in large public organizations, such as LEMHANAS, has shown that visionary leadership supports structural reforms, provides flexibility in decision-making processes, and fosters the development of a performance-oriented culture (Hermawan et al., 2024). These findings are noteworthy in that they show that visionary leadership can be similarly effective at different scales and sectors.

All these findings suggest that visionary leadership has a multi-layered impact that reshapes organizational culture and thereby increases employee engagement, motivation, and performance. This form of leadership enables not only individual achievements but also the holistic transformation and development of the organization. Therefore, visionary leadership is considered an inevitable strategic tool for organizations that want to build a sustainable and high-performance organization.

### **3. Conclusion**

In the 21st century, organizations are responsible not only for keeping pace with change but also for leading it. Leadership is no longer a choice but a strategic necessity for organizations that want to survive, be innovative, and achieve sustainable success in this era of transformation. At this point, the visionary leadership model, which goes beyond classical managerial approaches, inspires, directs, and internalizes transformation, occupies a central position in contemporary management literature.

The literature analysis, theoretical discussions, and field research discussed throughout this chapter strongly suggest the potential of visionary leadership to transform organizational culture and improve performance. Visionary leaders not only set a goal but also make this goal meaningful to the entire organization, create a sense of common purpose among employees, and shape the dynamics of the organization with a long-term perspective. In

this respect, visionary leadership is not only a management style but also a culture-building practice.

Research shows that the open and motivating environment created by visionary leaders increases employee engagement, innovation, and overall organizational performance (Kurniadi et al., 2020). However, despite this positive picture, it should not be overlooked that visionary leadership can also have some potential problematic aspects, such as context sensitivity, leader-centeredness risk, and sustainability. This fact reveals the need for a more critical and multidimensional approach to the concept.

How visionary leadership differs across organizational structures, cultural codes, and sectoral dynamics is one of the main variables that determine its impact. The participatory nature of the organization, its openness to change, and the extent to which the vision is internalized are as important as the leader's personal charisma or oratorical power. Indeed, in some contexts, visionary leadership can be a driver of cultural transformation, while in others it can become an externalized agenda that puts pressure on employees (Saba et al., 2017). Therefore, the power of visionary leadership lies not only in the content of the vision but also in how this vision is created and shared.

Today, organizations need to produce not only strong leaders but also institutionalized visions. Not a vision that disappears with the departure of the leader, but a vision that is continuous and intertwined with values can carry organizations beyond time. From this point of view, visionary leadership should not just be an individual's qualities, but should become an organizational reflex, a culture of governance. In this framework, the following recommendations have been developed for a more effective, inclusive, and sustainable implementation of visionary leadership:

*Creating the Vision in a Shared and Participatory Way:* Leaders building the vision together with employees, rather than alone, will facilitate its adoption and spread throughout the organization.

*Strengthening Institutionalization Processes:* For vision to be sustained, it must be supported by institutional values, norms, and systems. The impact of visionary leadership will become permanent as the structure becomes institutionalized.

*Leadership Development Programs:* Organizations should systematically develop visionary leadership through holistic training and development strategies that include not only current leaders but also potential leaders.

*Context Sensitive Practices:* The impact of visionary leadership is not independent of the cultural and organizational context. Therefore, leadership practices should be designed in accordance with the environmental conditions and social structures of the organization.

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## Agile Leadership 8

Talip Bektaş<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Agile leadership is a contemporary leadership approach that stands out in today's business world of uncertainty, rapid change, and complexity. Developed as an alternative to traditional hierarchical and rigid management models, this approach focuses on flexibility, adaptability, participatory decision-making, and innovation. Instead of focusing only on task and process management, agile leaders tend to unlock the potential of team members, strengthen the culture of collaboration, and support the learning organization approach. In this context, empathy, open communication, creating an environment of trust, and developing employees' competencies are among the basic principles of the agile leadership approach. In addition, agile leadership considers change not as a threat but as an opportunity for organizational development and competitive advantage. Accordingly, agile leaders do not ignore long-term sustainability while adopting short-term adaptation strategies. As a result, agile leadership is a leadership model that contributes to a more resilient and innovative structure in the face of change, with its structure that can react quickly to dynamic environmental conditions, making learning continuous, and encouraging employee participation. Agile leadership focuses on responding quickly to change regardless of the sector, supporting a culture of learning and creating collaborative organizations. It is a critical 21st-century leadership model for sustainable success in dynamic and uncertain environments.

### Agile Leadership Concept and Definition

Agility is defined as the ability of businesses to adapt to changes in market conditions by monitoring new opportunities emerging in their environment and to develop accurate, timely, and effective responses to these changes (Swafford, Ghosh & Murthy, 2006). In other words, agility is the capacity of an organization to perceive the developments (e.g., opportunities or

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1 Lecturer, Kafkas University, talip.bektas@kafkas.edu.tr, ORCID:0000-0002-9351-6721

threats) in its social and economic environment, to produce rapid solutions for consumers and other stakeholders, and to reshape its processes, resources, and strategic methods in this direction (Ganguly, Nilchiani & Farr, 2009). Equipping businesses with dynamic capabilities enables them to create and sustain value in innovation processes and strengthen their competitive advantage over time (Fabrizio, Kaczam & de Moura, 2022). In addition, agility offers advantages to businesses in various aspects, such as openness to change and innovation, providing safe working conditions, gaining technological knowledge and skills, strengthening teamwork, increasing the emotional flexibility of employees, and acting by anticipating future risks. In creating such an agile work environment, the behaviors exhibited by leaders play a critical role (Özdemir & Çetin, 2019).

Today, the continuous development of technology, the emergence of new markets, and the proliferation of competitors intensify competition among businesses. As environmental change accelerates, both the need for innovation and the level of uncertainty increase, making it difficult for managers to predict future opportunities and threats. Therefore, in order to achieve sustainable success, it becomes imperative for businesses to develop an organizational agility that will adapt to the increasing level of change and complexity in the business environment. In other words, for long-term success, firms need to have an agility capacity compatible with change and complexity. However, there is a strategic and operational agility gap in many organizations. This gap stems from a lack of ability to recognize new opportunities in a timely manner and to quickly gather the necessary information and relationships to transform them into a competitive advantage. The main reason for this agility gap is that businesses need more agile leadership (Özdemir & Çetin, 2019).

Agile leaders stand out with their ability to provide strategic direction, open communication, monitor performance, and motivate their teams in fast-changing business environments. This leadership style plays a critical role in increasing the agility and competitive advantage of organizations (McPherson, 2016). A leader's ability to demonstrate agility depends on his/her ability to closely monitor technological and environmental developments and to produce new strategies in line with these changes. In this process, the leader needs to constantly think innovatively, organize, and manage processes. In addition, in order to be successful, he/she must have the capacity to provide fast, practical, and personalized solutions on a large scale. An agile leader acts like a living organism that can seize new opportunities, bring additional value to customers, continuously develop and transform, grow, and adapt to change easily.

In general, the ability of businesses to achieve their long-term goals and objectives depends on their emphasis on short-term goals, teamwork, and adaptation to environmental changes. This approach, which forms the basis of agility, plays a critical role in achieving the goals set by leaders. In other words, factors such as constantly changing environmental conditions, crises that last longer than expected, or political transformations in the country force businesses to a continuous process of adaptation and change. Being able to adapt to these factors necessitates agility in order for businesses to maintain their continuity, sustainability, and gain a competitive advantage. The people who can realize this agility capacity of businesses are agile leaders. Therefore, managers' adoption of the agile leadership approach is of great importance for businesses (Akkaya et al., 2020).

### Historical Development of Agile Leadership

Fabricated production, which replaced manual production after the Industrial Revolution, has led to the emergence of different production styles over time, and this process has dragged businesses into an intense competitive environment. In order to gain an advantage in competition, enterprises have developed new production models in different periods. In this direction, the mass production model came to the fore until the 1990s, the lean production model in the 1990s, and the agile production model in the 2000s. Today, organizational agility models that advocate the adoption of agility in all units of enterprises have started to be developed (Akkaya et al., 2020).

Today, the pace of change is faster than at any other time in history. Technology is advancing at a dizzying pace, and what is considered the newest technology can become obsolete within a few months (MacIntyre, 2017). This rapid change increases complexity and interdependencies. Organizational change experts have long been aware of these powerful trends and have emphasized the need to develop “agile businesses” that can manage technical and stakeholder complexity, anticipate changing conditions, and adapt quickly (Joiner & Josephs, 2007). In addition, the concept of VUCA was introduced to explain the need for the agility of businesses. VUCA, which stands for “Volatility”, “Uncertainty”, “Complexity” and “Ambiguity”, is used to describe the uncertain and turbulent nature of today’s business world. Experts and leaders argue that we now live in a “VUCA world”. While this poses many risks for leaders, optimists argue that if the challenges can be overcome, businesses can reap significant benefits. In addition, the VUCA environment poses a significant risk for many organizations, and

organizations need to develop more agile and innovative strategies to manage these uncertainties (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014).

Given the changing market conditions and rising performance demands, agility is recognized as one of the most important challenges facing firms in the global business environment (Teece, 2007). According to Rodriguez and Rodriguez (2015), the current leadership structure (millennials, baby boomers, and Generation X), combined with the VUCA era, requires a new understanding, wisdom, and a different leadership approach, especially for top management. The VUCA environment, therefore, clearly demonstrates the need for a specialized leadership model in the style of agile leadership. This approach increases intergenerational collaboration and contributes to eliminating biases in communication. This more participative and collaborative leadership approach strengthens the agility, innovation, and flexibility of organizations, enabling them to make the right decisions in a world full of uncertainty (Setiawati, 2021).

### **The Importance of Agile Leadership for Businesses**

The prominence of agility in management enables quick decisions to be made and business processes to be concluded more effectively and efficiently. The fact that businesses in Turkey have turned towards the agile approach in recent years can be considered as an indicator that this understanding will develop further in the future. However, in order for agility to settle in the management culture, first of all, a comprehensive change process is needed in enterprises that do not show flexibility. Because agility can only be realized with leaders and team members who adopt this understanding. The way to be strong and effective in global markets is to be able to adapt to rapid changes, which is only possible with agile managers and employees (Şanal, 2018).

The difference between the operating environment of companies and the level of agility needed reveals the extent of the agility deficiency. Therefore, businesses need to develop agility at a level that will overcome existing deficiencies. At this point, it is critical for companies to increase their agility capacity above their current levels. However, if agility cannot be increased within the framework of existing resources, companies should first identify their weaknesses (Durmuşoğlu & Ersoy, 2016).

Although it is becoming more difficult to predict future developments with certainty, the pace of change is increasing, and complexity and interdependence are deepening. Change experts have long been aware of these strong trends and emphasize the need to create agile organizations that

anticipate and respond quickly to change. In order to achieve sustainable success, it is inevitable for businesses to improve their level of organizational agility. However, for many companies today, strategic and operational agility is more of a desired goal than a tangible reality. Therefore, it is important for senior executives to be aware that agility is one of the most critical issues. The leadership capacity needed in today's conditions is the ability to lead effectively in rapidly changing environments (Joiner & Josephs, 2007).

### Characteristics of Agile Leaders

The responsibilities of agile managers are analyzed under certain categories:

- Style of Interaction,
- Innovation/Exploration Tendency,
- Change Approach,
- Information Acquisition Mode and
- Visionary Talent is classified as a dimension (Bonner, 2010).

***Style of Interaction:*** It addresses the way an individual relates to others and is critical for agile management. This dimension covers a large part of coaching and leadership behaviors. For example, while individuals with a controlling interaction style may tend to direct rather than develop common solutions, the prominent interaction style of agile leaders is to trust employees and believe that they can do good work (Vandenbosch, Fay & Saatçioğlu, 2001; Bonner, 2010). Agile leaders are those who motivate employees to go beyond the norms and develop creative methods, provide continuous guidance, strengthen the bonds between teams, inspire, and ensure the progress of work without resorting to an authoritarian control mechanism. However, they do not hesitate to intervene when necessary (Highsmith, 2004).

***Innovation/Exploration Tendency:*** Agile leaders are open to going beyond traditional leadership norms and adopting different perspectives and solution strategies. This involves the manager “looking outside the box” and embracing innovative ideas. Encouraging employees to change and innovate is also an important part of this trend. Agile leaders exhibit a high motivation for exploration while providing environments where innovation can flourish (Highsmith, 2004).

***Change Approach:*** This dimension refers to how the leader approaches and manages change. Agile managers embrace change rather than

maintaining the status quo and initiate change when necessary. They see change as a gateway to innovation and an opportunity to find quick solutions to problems. In addition, ensuring that team members accept change and transforming their perspectives are among the responsibilities of the agile leader (Vandenbosch, Fay & Saatçioğlu, 2001; Highsmith, 2004).

***Information Acquisition Mode:*** This dimension encompasses the leader's information-gathering methods and includes the capacity to obtain data from different sources. While some leaders use information only to support their point of view, agile leaders use it as an opportunity for conflict resolution and strategic decision-making. Agile managers have an outward-looking perspective and constantly monitor and interact with environmental conditions. They are also leaders who are continuous learners, able to analyze customer needs, manage conflicts within the team, master new technologies, and use agile methods based on current knowledge (Bonner, 2010; Krievsky, 2002).

***Visionary Talent:*** Visionary ability refers to the extent to which a leader is able to look far into the future and design desired future conditions. Leaders with this capability can envision possible scenarios based on past experiences, set goals, and share their vision with their teams. Agile managers guide projects, make changes when necessary, and ensure project sustainability. They also set goals and constraints and share this vision with team members, creating a favorable environment in which goals can be achieved (Highsmith, 2004).

### **Sub Dimensions of Agile Leadership Concept**

The concept of agile leadership is analyzed through six basic dimensions: result orientation, team orientation, competence, flexibility, speed, and change orientation. Results orientation, one of the main dimensions of agile leadership, prioritizes developing a strategic vision and planning short-term goals that will enable businesses to achieve their goals and objectives. In this dimension, the leader acts as a role model to his/her employees, provides appropriate work environments where they can develop their talents and skills, and directs people to the right tasks at the right time. In addition, they increase performance and motivation by rewarding innovative ideas and suggestions from employees (premiums, bonuses, promotions, etc.) (Akkaya et al., 2020).

***Result Orientation:*** The result-oriented leader clearly defines the duties and responsibilities of employees within the organization and guides them to achieve the targeted goals. By establishing strong communication with

employees and giving them importance and trust, he/she supports high performance (Kalsoom, Khan & Zubair, 2018). At the same time, the leader supports and trains employees, leads with innovative and productive behaviors, and provides encouraging actions and directions to achieve the set goals.

In general, in the results orientation dimension, the leader allocates tasks according to the skills and abilities of employees, explains performance expectations, plans short-term goals, and manages and coordinates the whole team to achieve these goals. They also organize the necessary tasks to make the work effective (Yukl, 2008). Leaders provide direction and order in the organization and clearly communicate tasks, goals, and expectations to employees; this facilitates the achievement of organizational goals (Yukl & Lepsinger, 2005).

**Team Orientation:** The team-oriented approach prioritizes group and team work rather than individual work. Within this framework, the leader increases employee motivation by rewarding the success and performance of the team. It also strengthens cooperation with different units within the organization and provides employees with advantages such as favorable working conditions, social opportunities, and job security. It allows employees to develop and demonstrate their talents and encourages their active participation in the pre-production, production, and post-production stages of the processes (Salas, Sims & Burke, 2005).

Team-oriented leadership plays a critical role in improving production quality, ensuring customer satisfaction, expanding the business vision, and supporting the continuous development of employees. In this context, leaders should effectively manage team conflicts, deal with obstacles, guide the team's goal and objective setting processes, distribute tasks and responsibilities fairly, and increase motivation by rewarding achievements (Aaberg et al., 2025). Team-oriented leaders maintain intra-team communication by clearly defining tasks and roles, providing appropriate support for members' strengths and weaknesses, eliminating external obstacles, and promoting goal achievement through continuous interaction (Friedrich, Peterson & Van Doorn, 2024).

**Competence:** Competence is defined as a set of knowledge, skills, and behaviors that support organizations to achieve their strategic goals and contribute to the increase in productivity, efficiency, and performance (Wijayanti & Sari, 2023). Competence, which has an important place among the dimensions of agile leadership, refers to the applicability of the concepts of responsiveness, flexibility, and speed. The leader's ability to create



collaborative environments suitable for internal or external changes plays a critical role in the realization of long-term goals. In addition, the effective use of technological resources and optimization of internal structures are of great importance for the business to meet customer needs (Özeroğlu, 2019).

The competence dimension enables the agile leader to gain potential access to different markets and also contributes to the perceived consumer value of the end product or service. This dimension includes core competencies that are difficult to imitate by competitors (Mills, Platts & Bourne, 2013). Therefore, the agile leader should be customer-oriented and success-oriented, be able to influence and develop those around him/her, communicate correctly with employees, act responsively, make the right decisions, and have the ability to analyze.

***Flexibility:*** Flexibility is defined as the capacity to provide predetermined responses to changes within or outside the organization (Oosterhout, Waarts & Axelsson, 2006). In other words, flexibility refers to the ability of businesses to respond quickly and effectively to environmental changes and the diversifying demands of customers, and plays a critical role in ensuring the continuity of businesses (Özeroğlu, 2019).

Service-oriented businesses face frequent demand fluctuations due to product diversity and differences in customer demands. To adapt to these fluctuations and maintain a competitive advantage, businesses need to have a certain level of flexibility (Kamble, Gunasekaran & Sharma, 2020). The capacity of businesses to respond quickly to changing demands and the ability to create resources for new or existing business models are among the key elements that shape flexibility. In addition, flexibility is also considered the capacity of an organization to perform different tasks and achieve various goals. This dimension includes elements such as production volume flexibility, organizational flexibility, product design and configuration flexibility, and human resource flexibility (Husain, 2024). In general, the flexibility dimension can be defined as the capacity of the business to develop dynamic capabilities against environmental factors and to respond to the changing demands and needs of consumers at the right time and in the right way by using internal resources such as employees, machinery, equipment, and other assets effectively. The process of adapting to these changes and ensuring the sustainability of business dynamism is made possible by developing the dynamic capabilities of all employees, especially leaders. In other words, the leader should have the ability to respond quickly to the demands of consumers, adapt to changing environmental conditions, and manage interactions that require business dynamism (Akkaya & Tabak, 2018).

**Speed:** The speed dimension of agile leadership is defined as the ability to complete tasks and responsibilities effectively and quickly. This dimension includes elements such as shortening the time to market of new products, timely delivery of products and services, and rapid execution of operational processes (Soto-Acosta, Popa & Palacios-Marqués, 2022). In other words, speed refers to the capacity to meet all agile requirements as soon as possible. In addition, the ability to learn quickly, implement tasks and procedures in a timely manner, and quickly implement necessary changes is also an important part of this dimension (Sherehiy, Karwowski & Layer, 2007). Therefore, speed stands out as a critical agile leadership dimension that increases the leader's capacity to innovate in response to changes within the organization.

The speed dimension refers to the fact that the response times of businesses to consumer demands and the speed of preparation of products and services are shorter compared to their competitors in constantly changing and developing competitive conditions; this provides a competitive advantage to businesses (Özeroğlu, 2019). The ability of businesses to respond quickly to changes depends on the strategic decisions taken by the leader. In general, the speed dimension in agile leadership refers to the capacity of managers to quickly adapt to environmental and technological changes and to meet customer demands in a timely and effective manner (Chowdhury, Paul, & Choudhury, 2023).

**Change orientation:** The last dimension of agile leadership, change orientation, involves following environmental and technological changes and responding quickly to the opportunities and threats created by these changes. In this dimension, the leader has the knowledge, experience, and skills to adapt constantly developing technological products and services to the organization. They also have the capacity to respond to the changing expectations and needs of consumers in a short time (Akkaya et al., 2020).

A change-oriented leader can make the organization open to innovation and change, anticipate possible changes in advance, and adapt employees to these changes. At the same time, he/she can make the employees adopt the benefits that the changes will provide to the organization and involve them in the process (Özdemir & Çetin, 2020). Agile leadership enables managers to meet customer demands in a timely and effective manner by rapidly adapting to environmental and technological changes; in this process, it allows employees to develop their knowledge, skills, and competencies (Brown & Hennny, 2025).

Since the concept of change involves uncertainty and takes people out of their usual situations, it may create difficulties for employees to adapt to this

process. For this reason, it is of great importance that changes in organizations are carried out within the framework of a specific plan and process. On the contrary, unplanned changes may increase employees' intention to quit their jobs. In this context, the leader should implement the changes in the business in line with a systematic plan and program (Demirağ & Çelik, 2019). In general, leaders must quickly adapt to environmental changes in order to achieve high performance and continuous improvement. Therefore, leaders should monitor changes, support innovative thinking, inspire employees, and increase their trust and commitment to the organization (Chowdhury, Paul, & Choudhury, 2023).

### **Agile Leadership Application Areas**

Agile leadership is not limited to the private sector; it is a leadership approach that can be effective in all areas that require change, uncertainty, and rapid decision-making. In this context, agile leadership offers a framework that can be applied in a wide range of fields, from business to public administration, from educational institutions to the health sector. Each field implements the principles of agile leadership in different ways in line with its own dynamics.

***Agile Leadership in Business:*** Agile leadership approach has become a strategic necessity, especially in the private sector, where competition is intense and change is constant. Today's businesses adopt agile leadership principles in order to quickly adapt to uncertainties in market conditions. Instead of limiting their employees to fixed procedures, agile leaders encourage innovative thinking and experimental learning. This facilitates organizations to become learning organizations (Denning, 2018). In addition, agile leaders encourage a team-based culture of collaboration by minimizing hierarchical constraints in decision-making processes. In this way, both organizational performance and employee engagement increase (Joiner & Josephs, 2007).

***Agile Leadership in the Public Sector:*** Public administration has traditionally been seen as a field resistant to change due to its bureaucratic structure. However, digitalization, increased citizen expectations, and crisis management requirements have led public administrators to adopt a more flexible and innovative leadership approach. Agile leadership accelerates decision-making processes in public organizations, improves service quality, and strengthens stakeholder participation (Rigby, Sutherland & Takeuchi, 2016). Especially within the scope of local governments and e-government

practices, agile leadership principles offer a ground compatible with citizen-oriented service design and participatory governance models.

***Agile Leadership in Educational Institutions:*** Educational institutions also need an agile leadership approach in an environment of increasing change pressure and uncertainty in recent years. With the pandemic process, digital transformation, distance education, and blended learning models have made it mandatory for school administrators to have agile leadership skills (Horney, Pasmore & O'Shea, 2010). Agile school leaders facilitate teachers' and students' adaptation to change, support innovative practices in learning processes, and dynamically shape the vision of the school. Moreover, agile leadership in educational institutions fosters a culture of collaboration and encourages teamwork among teachers.

***Agile Leadership in Healthcare:*** Healthcare is a field that requires high levels of uncertainty and crisis management. The COVID-19 pandemic has once again demonstrated the importance of agile leadership in healthcare organizations. Healthcare leaders need to be able to react quickly to sudden changes, show flexibility in decision processes, and coordinate teams from different disciplines (Denning, 2018). The agile leadership approach supports healthcare organizations to adapt to changing patient needs, accelerate process improvements, and increase patient safety.

***Agile Leadership in Technology and R&D:*** Technology and R&D based sectors are among the areas where the concept of agility was adopted the earliest. Agile methods used especially in software development processes have also transformed the understanding of leadership. In these sectors, agile leaders adopt a leadership style that encourages innovation, prioritizes learning agility, and provides opportunities for employees to learn through trial and error. In addition, agile leaders have the capacity to continuously update their strategic vision by rapidly adapting to technological developments (Rigby et al., 2016).

In conclusion, agile leadership is a leadership model that can be flexibly applied according to the specific conditions of different sectors. The common denominator is rapid response to change, supporting a learning culture and creating a collaborative organizational structure. In this respect, agile leadership offers a critical leadership approach for sustainable success in all sectors in the dynamic and uncertain working environments of the 21st century.

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## Toxic Leadership

Vurgun Topçuoğlu<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Toxic leadership refers to a process in which leaders create a lasting negative impact at different levels, from individuals to organizations, due to their damaging behaviors and inadequate personal characteristics. This leadership approach creates a toxic environment characterized by fear, mistrust, and dysfunction. The effects of toxic leadership go beyond the individual level and have serious organizational consequences, such as weakened organizational commitment, decreased job satisfaction, increased absenteeism, and loss of qualified workforce. The Enron scandal, the Volkswagen emissions crisis, the Theranos case, and various Ponzi schemes are striking examples of the effects of toxic leadership. There are various precautionary mechanisms that individuals and organizations can take to combat toxic leadership. Transparency, accountability mechanisms for managers, strong organizational culture, strategic human resources policies, and informing employees and managers about toxic leadership play a critical role in effectively combating toxic leadership. Although toxic leadership studies have been conducted in education, health, and various business sectors, there are gaps in the literature on the subject. In the future, it is expected that toxic leadership studies should be further investigated by researchers, and it is also expected to contribute to creating a healthier and more sustainable work environment by making comparisons with positive leadership models.

### 1. Introduction

The process in which leaders produce lasting and negative effects at different levels, from individuals to communities, due to their damaging behaviors or dysfunctional personal characteristics, is referred to as toxic leadership in the literature. The concept of a toxic leader was first introduced in the literature by Marcia Lynn Whicker in 1996 (Konan & Kirbaç, 2023).

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<sup>1</sup> Research Assistant, Istanbul Nisantasi University, [vurgun.topcuoglu@nisantasi.edu.tr](mailto:vurgun.topcuoglu@nisantasi.edu.tr), ORCID:0009-0005-3727-1431



The concept of toxic leadership was used by Jean Lipman-Blumen to express the malicious leadership behaviors seen in different examples, from politicians who rule individuals through fear to managers who lead their companies to bankruptcy with wrong decisions, and with this use, it has become widespread in the literature (Lipman-Blumen, 2005).

Toxic leadership encompasses a set of behavioral traits in which leaders create a toxic atmosphere characterized by fear, mistrust, and dysfunction rather than adding value to their teams (Octavian, 2023). It is a pattern of leaders acting with a self-centered intention, often to hide their own inadequacies and protect their position, rather than with the deliberate intention to harm others (Labrague, 2024).

## **2. Toxic Leadership Definition and Dimensions**

Toxic leaders exhibit common characteristics that can be both directly observed and recognized over time. These characteristics include managerial incompetence, excessive ego, passive or aggressive behavior, a tendency to look out only for their own interests, expectations disconnected from reality, acting without considering the possible consequences of actions, being closed to reporting, and blame-seeking behavior when problems arise. In addition, overt aggression, harassment, mobbing, and illegal actions can also be part of this leadership style (Octavian, 2023). Not all toxic leaders exhibit all of these behaviors at the same time; leaders' behaviors may vary depending on personal differences and the level of toxic leadership. However, certain conditions need to be in place for a toxic leader to create a negative atmosphere in the workplace. Situations such as power imbalances within the organization, ineffective control mechanisms, or employees' preference to remain silent against the actions taken can strengthen the effects of toxic leadership (Ozdemirkol, 2025).

The combination of the toxic leader's personal tendencies and circumstances creates various negative repercussions in the work environment. Toxic leaders make employees feel worthless with their intimidating, humiliating, and ignoring them. They also create a negative atmosphere in the workplace with their actions, such as creating artificial crises and gossip. They damage the harmony within the organization by excluding, intimidating, and marginalizing individuals who do not serve their interests. While their authoritarian and arrogant attitudes reduce employees' loyalty to the workplace, their attribution of successes only to themselves and ignoring the contributions of employees has a destructive effect on motivation and job satisfaction.

When toxic leadership definitions are analyzed, Schmidt's studies are generally accepted in the literature. According to Schmidt, in order to understand toxic leaders, it is necessary to consider them in 5 basic dimensions (Schmidt, 2008). These dimensions are as follows:

- Abusive and coercive behavior: Oppressive attitudes towards employees, insulting and belittling remarks,
- Self-centeredness and excessive ego: I know everything, and what I say goes,
- Erratic and unpredictable behavior: Inconsistent decisions, sudden outbursts of anger, creating uncertainty for employees,
- Expectations disconnected from reality: Constant pressure on employees by setting unattainable goals,
- Unethical and illegal tendencies: Violating ethical rules or engaging in illegal actions for self-interest,

It is possible to see that these dimensions are included in many academic studies. In a study conducted in the education sector, the toxic leadership scale was adapted, and the behaviors of school administrators were examined. It was determined that principals can exhibit toxic leadership characteristics. In addition, it was concluded that the 30-item toxic leadership scale used in the study can be used as a valid and reliable measurement tool in educational organizations (Güner et al., 2015).

A similar study was conducted in the health sector, especially among nurses. As a result of the interviews with nurses, it was determined that toxic leadership has significant negative effects on employees. In the study, it was reported that nurses experience burnout, job satisfaction decreased, and patients and their relatives were negatively affected by this situation. It has been observed that toxic leadership behaviors lead to a decrease in the quality of health services and satisfaction with the services provided (Labrague, 2024).

## **2.1. Impacts of Toxic Leadership**

The effects of toxic leaders may not be limited to organizations or individuals. Depending on the position of the leader, the organization and the responsibilities assumed, the sphere of influence may expand, and the negative consequences can be listed as deterioration in employee health, increase in absenteeism rates, decrease in individual performance and dominance of grouping, increase in turnover rates, decrease in job

satisfaction, weakening of organizational commitment, weakening of the sense of interactional justice and increase in subordinates' counterproductive behaviors against their superiors. Such negative situations threaten not only the work climate but also the sustainability of organizations (Rocha et al., 2024). As a result of the negative situations that arise, economic losses may cause companies to lose a qualified workforce, which is their most valuable asset, to fall behind in competitiveness, and to damage the sense of trust in institutions and organizations.

Previous studies have shown that toxic leaders weaken the organizational ethical climate and severely damage the environment of trust among employees due to their behaviors. In such an environment, the tendency of employees to follow the rules decreases, and the number of unethical behaviors increases day by day. Toxic leaders often tend to ignore questionable values and standards (Zengin, 2019; Elkırmış, 2024). When leaders themselves engage in unethical behavior or remain silent about unethical behavior, it leads to a decline in ethical standards throughout the organization (Arifin, 2024). Therefore, the attitudes and behaviors of leaders, as a critical factor shaping the organizational climate, are reflected in the behaviors of employees and pave the way for the normalization of unethical practices (Octavian, 2023).

The study conducted by Tepper in 2007 shows that toxic leaders weaken the organizational ethical climate, reduce the sense of trust in employees, and lead to an increase in unethical behaviors. In addition, it was stated that people who work with toxic leaders have decreased job satisfaction, organizational citizenship is negatively affected, and cases such as burnout syndrome are seen, and therefore, job resignations are seen (Tepper, 2007).

Toxic leaders create a climate of fear, insecurity, and injustice within the organization, which leads employees to engage in political maneuvers in order to survive or to protect their own interests. In this context, toxic leaders negatively affect intra-organizational relations by exhibiting behaviors such as intimidation, marginalization, humiliation, and arbitrary punishments. In addition, they create privileged groups that serve their own interests by emphasizing loyalty rather than competence (Octavian, 2023). In addition, their tendency to create uncertainty, withhold information, and distribute resources unfairly weakens the perception of justice within the organization and deepens distrust among employees (Goltz, 2024).

## **2.2. Characteristics of a Workplace with Toxic Leadership**

Workplaces where toxic leadership is effective create a negative environment where employees are both psychologically and professionally

exhausted. In toxic workplaces, poor communication, unqualified and inadequate management skills of the leader, and excessive workload of the employees are frequently observed. Employees' efforts are often ignored and unappreciated by managers. In addition, negative attitudes such as bullying, harassment, nepotism, and exclusion are frequently observed by managers. While limited development and career opportunities increase interpersonal conflicts, work-life balance is also affected. In organizations with a weak trust environment, there is a constant suspicion and unrest (Arifin, 2024). However, not every problematic business environment should be called a toxic business. Even if there are phenomena similar to toxic workplaces in some institutions and organizations, this situation is mostly due to meritless and poor management.

### **2.3. Notable Company Failures where Toxic Leadership Played a Role**

Since the 2000s, there has been a remarkable increase in the incidence of toxicity. Corruption, fraud, and unethical practices have increased, especially in corporate structures, and leadership has become increasingly toxic as facts have been distorted and accountability has disappeared. Corporate failures have often been concealed or legitimized through self-centeredness, excessive ego, and lack of moral values (G. Arbogast & Jadav, 2024). Several international corporate scandals have shown how toxic leadership behaviors can become systemic in organizations. Some of the most well-known examples are as follows.

The Enron scandal is a major case of corruption that resulted in the bankruptcy of the company in 2001, which was founded in 1985 by Kenneth Lay in the United States and quickly grew in the energy market. Company executives hid billions of dollars of debt and made it look like the company was making a profit. Company executives not only falsified the accounting records, but also pressured the auditing firm Andersen to ignore high-risk accounting movements. Even when those within the company who were aware of the situation spoke out against the actions, their efforts were often ignored or suppressed by senior management. Eventually, when misleading profitability and hidden debts were revealed, the company quickly collapsed, resulting in one of the largest bankruptcies in American history (S. V. Arbogast, 2013).

Ponzi schemes are systems that promise extraordinary profits based on new investors paying dividends to previous investors. Ponzi schemes are usually centered around a charismatic leader who promises various

profitable investment opportunities to gain trust. The money invested in the system is spent arbitrarily by the founder and managers of the system and is used for advertising. However, due to the inherently unsustainable nature of Ponzi schemes, the system either collapses after a while or comes under administrative oversight as a result of complaints from its members. These systems not only affect individuals, but also have international implications. For example, in Albania, about one-sixth of citizens lost all their savings in such systems. Similarly, in the case of WinCapita in Finland, more than 10,000 people were defrauded. One of the most well-known examples of this system is the Ponzi scheme run by Bernard L. Madoff. During the 2008 financial crisis, Madoff, whose fraud was exposed, was sentenced to 150 years in prison as a result of the trial (Boyle & Peng, 2025).

The 2007-2009 financial crisis is also known as the mortgage crisis. As a result of lending too much credit to people who should not normally be given credit, it created an insurmountable economic problem in the banking system. The inability to repay the loans created a serious burden on the national economy as the loans were not economically sustainable. Lehman Brothers, one of the leading mortgage lenders, manipulated the company's data in the aftermath of the crisis and made it look like the company was making a profit. Under the influence of the company's CEO, Richard Fuld, the truth was hidden from the public. Those who held company shares were negatively affected and lost money (Wikipedia, 2025).

In the 2015 incident, it was revealed that the exhaust emission values of diesel vehicles with 2.0-liter engines produced by Volkswagen between 2009 and 2015 differed from the real values by playing with software. As a result of the investigations, it was found that these engines released NOx emissions, which are harmful to public health, at a rate 10 to 40 times higher than the figure stated by the company, and that the company deliberately misled the tests using software. After the scandal, hundreds of lawsuits were filed against the company, and the company lost prestige (Lim, 2021).

Developed by Elizabeth Holmes and Ramesh Balwani, the blood testing device was introduced to the public as a revolution in healthcare, claiming to be able to detect hundreds of diseases with just a few drops of blood. The device, the size of a small box, was met with great interest by investors and received a large amount of capital support. Holmes' charismatic and creative visionary rhetoric and Balwani's authoritarian and oppressive management style paved the way for a culture of fear and silence within the organization. Employees were afraid to voice their critical opinions, and even their reports were suppressed, and a constant distrust prevailed in the organization. This

toxic leadership environment, combined with the avoidance of verification processes, strict confidentiality policies, and a company secret approach, allowed the company to continue to make unscientific claims. However, the inaccurate health data that the devices provided to users had serious consequences. Some individuals have suffered deteriorating health conditions and even deaths. In response to the growing number of complaints, the relevant government agencies launched an investigation into the company, which ultimately found that the devices failed to perform as promised and were a case of fraud. Holmes and Balwani were sentenced to prison after legal proceedings (Williams, 2022).

A consumer's post on social media after a chocolate bar was found to be defective in a Patiswiss branded product caused the reactions against the brand to grow rapidly. The insulting response of the company's manager to the consumer further deepened the crisis and created great public anger against the company. The company's products were removed from market shelves, the brand was protested by large masses, and eventually the manager had to be dismissed. Although the company apologized to the public and consumers, the protests continued for a long time, and the brand suffered a serious loss of prestige in this process (Tufan, 2024).

The damages caused by toxic leaders in an organization are likened to an iceberg; the behavior exhibited on the surface represents the tip of the iceberg, while the decrease in productivity and other losses caused by invisible negative effects represent the bottom of the iceberg (Kusy & Holloway, 2009).

#### **2.4. Why Toxic Leadership is Promoted and The Reasons for Its Emergence**

The reasons why people knowingly and willingly support toxic leadership vary according to various factors and the cultural context (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). One of the most common reasons is that followers are in a vulnerable and unprotected position. In this situation, employees may be forced to submit to the authority of leaders in the face of power asymmetry. In addition, the pursuit of self-interest is an important factor in supporting toxic leaders. Some employees aim to gain material and moral benefits by being in the leader's close circle. Especially in success and competition-oriented societies, individuals may tend to support toxic leaders by seeing them as strong and result-oriented. In addition, the desire for approval and acceptance within the organization forces individuals to comply with the policies of the leaders. Misuse of resources and power can also be effective in spreading the

negative effects of toxic leadership in the workplace. Followers' unresolved psychological problems or their tendency to depend on authority may contribute to the normalization and even legitimization of toxic leadership (Akbulut & Yavuz, 2022). In the context of this relationship, it is observed that toxic leadership is shaped not only by the personal characteristics of leaders but also by the attitudes of followers and organizational-cultural dynamics.

### **3. Ways to Combat and Prevent Toxic Leadership**

Leaders play a critical role in preventing the spread of toxic environments and mitigating the effects of negative behaviors. In this context, leaders need to accurately identify the signs of toxicity and develop proactive strategies to reverse such behaviors. Leaders may encounter individuals or groups who resist change, perpetuate toxic behaviors by bridging bad habits from the past, or deliberately undermine organizational efforts. However, if leaders cannot effectively manage toxicity as a result of internal and external pressures, it will not be possible to achieve the desired success and sustainable performance at the organizational level (Şişman, 2024).

One of the biggest obstacles to the effective management of organizations is the established hierarchical and bureaucratic structures. The existence of these structures both slows down decision-making processes and limits participation and communication within the organization. Especially in public institutions and traditional family businesses, such structures are resistant to change (Daswati et al., 2024). On the other hand, the lack of accountability and transparency increases the risk of corruption, malfeasance, and corporate collapse.

The absence or ineffective operation of reporting and feedback mechanisms in organizational structures significantly hinders the evaluation of the performance of individuals, the identification of challenges, and the development of appropriate solutions to organizational problems.

Cultural differences also directly affect managerial processes. Especially the oppressive upbringing and unconditional loyalty to authority, which are common in some societies, prevent individuals in the organization from developing questioning thoughts. As a result, it makes it difficult to adopt a democratic leadership approach (Rocha et al., 2024).

#### **3.1. What individuals can do against a toxic leader**

Individuals need to be aware of some issues when dealing with toxic leaders who use their advantageous position to exert pressure on the organization.



First of all, it should be known that toxic leadership poses a serious threat to organizational health (Whicker, 1996). For this reason, it is important to adopt an attitude that does not use a threatening tone with the toxic leader, but makes them feel that they are aware of them. Individuals should report their concerns and observations through appropriate organizational channels and should always put the situations they encounter in writing. Maintaining productivity despite attempts by leaders to weaken employees will contribute to maintaining individual and organizational resilience. In addition, employees should not be involved in secret meetings or non-transparent agreements within the organization.

Tepper (2007) argued that when the perception of organizational justice is high, employees may be more resistant to toxic leadership behaviors, and the negative effects of these behaviors may be reduced. It should not be ignored that toxic leaders essentially have problematic personality traits and may lead themselves to failure in the long run.

### **3.2. Measures Companies Can Take**

Apart from individuals, organizations and companies can take various steps to avoid toxic people. Especially the organizational culture and level of consciousness in companies play an important role in preventing the emergence of toxic leaders or minimizing the damage when they do emerge. Human resources departments in the company should take responsibility in this regard, and human resources should be more careful in the recruitment process of manager candidates with bad characteristics. They should also gradually conduct audits to prevent toxic leadership from developing and provide practical guidance to management teams on toxic leadership to reduce the perceived level of stress in employees. In addition, there are some measures that can be put in place for leaders. Term limits, regular accountability practices, and mechanisms that protect whistleblowers against toxic leaders can be effective in preventing toxic leadership in organizations.

It is predicted that the relationship between organizational culture and toxic leadership is in the opposite direction and that organizational culture can reduce the negative effects of toxic leadership on employees' turnover intention (Reyhanoğlu & Akin, 2016). Supporting organizational culture is also important in this respect.

## **4. Conclusion**

Due to the opportunities offered by modern life, people are forced to work more closely and with each other for longer periods of time. In the



organizational unity and complexity of work life, people are exposed to the influence of various toxic leaders. The impact of toxic leadership leads to negative consequences that can affect large masses, starting from burnout at individual levels, such as Enron, Theranos, and the 2008 financial crisis.

The literature review revealed that toxic leadership studies have been conducted more recently, but the existing studies are concentrated in specific sectors such as education, health, and tourism. Given the prevalence and potential of toxic leadership, this indicates that there is a research gap for many sectors.

Studies have shown that various measures can be taken to prevent toxic leadership or minimize its effects. In order to reduce the effects of toxic leadership, measures such as training employees and managers on this issue, creating a strong organizational culture, implementing transparent management principles, and implementing effective human resources policies should be taken.

Future research will further deepen our understanding of the root causes of toxic leadership and explore ways to weed out individuals with such negative leadership behaviors from organizational culture. At the same time, focusing on positive leadership models, such as empathetic leadership, participative management, and employee well-being practices, can make significant contributions to creating a healthy work environment (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

In conclusion, the effects of toxic leadership can be of varying degrees and amounts. In order to minimize these negative effects and increase the well-being of employees, the necessary importance should be given both in the academic field and in practice.

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## Entrepreneurial Leadership

Serdal Özkes<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Since the early 21st century, there have been many changes in social relations, economics, technology, and information flow, which have led to radical changes in the concept of leadership. While leadership models were generally based on stability and control, the rapid changes in today's world have forced the business world to go beyond this idea. One of the leadership types that emerged with this necessity was entrepreneurial leadership. Entrepreneurial leadership aims to lead organizations to success in their internal and external environments by emphasizing risk-taking, opportunity creation, and vision development (Renko et al., 2015). While the aim of traditional leadership is to manage the existing order in the most effective and efficient way, entrepreneurial leadership is an idea that questions the existing order, produces values, and transforms these values into environmental and social benefits (Kuratko, 2007). In this context, entrepreneurial leaders have not only been people who manage organizations, but also pioneers of change and development (Gupta et al., 2002). Entrepreneurial leadership, which is defined as a leadership that evaluates and directs the environmental factors required by our age, gathers employees within the framework of organizational goals, and encourages them to innovate, has become an indispensable element for enterprises that want to ensure their continuity in this environment of digitalization, transformation, and innovation-oriented competition in today's world (Akça, 2020).

### 1. Introduction

Today, even in organizations where change and development are very limited, they need to be able to take advantage of new business opportunities to the maximum extent in order to continue their existence. The most basic condition for doing this is the adoption of entrepreneurial attitudes

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<sup>1</sup> Science Specialist, Turkish Gendarmerie General Command, serdarozkes@hotmail.com, 0000-0002-0734-5971

and behaviors by employees at all levels of the organization. Researchers around the world who closely follow such developments have conducted studies on how to support entrepreneurial behaviors in organizations and entrepreneurial leadership, a modern new leadership style that can be successful in today's conditions, have been included in the management literature (Renko et al., 2015).

Entrepreneurial leadership has been the focus of attention of many researchers due to its positive effects on organizational performance and the solutions it can bring to the challenges faced by organizations in today's uncertain, challenging, competitive environment and rapidly changing business life (Harrison et al., 2016). Rapid changes, uncertainties, and factors that lead to an environment of instability have become the rule for organizations (McGrath & Macmillan, 2000). Successful management of organizations in the face of these challenges will be possible through simultaneous practices such as seeking and finding advantages, exploring opportunities, and strategic entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial leadership is assumed to be a special type of leadership that has the capacity to perform such practices successfully (Gupta et al., 2004; Subramaniam & Shankar, 2020). Recognizing the need for a new type of leadership that can provide the core competencies of the global business environment, changing societal needs, educational environment, and moral requirements, researchers have paid attention to entrepreneurial leadership (Britchenko et al., 2018; Fernald et al., 2005). In this way, entrepreneurial leadership started to shine.

In many studies to date, it is seen that there are many similarities in the field of entrepreneurship and leadership, both historically and conceptually (Cogliser & Brigham, 2004). It has been observed that the field of entrepreneurship and leadership should be intertwined and that the concept of entrepreneurial leadership as a new field has taken its place in the literature as a result of the intertwining of these two processes (Vickers, 2018).

## **2. Entrepreneurship**

An entrepreneur is a person who has new ideas, identifies important opportunities, and brings together the necessary resources to make the most of them, and establishes a business by taking certain risks and uncertainties to make a profit (Zimmerer et al., 2008; Price, 2000). Frederick et al. (2018) define an entrepreneur as a person who innovates within the existing situation, as well as establishes a business. An entrepreneur is a person who has competitive thinking and can do what others cannot do. People with these characteristics provide a sustainable competitive advantage with

their success. In addition, entrepreneurs are risk-takers (Küçüköğlu et al., 2020). Entrepreneurs take responsibility by realizing their ideas, but if there is no customer demand with this risk undertaken, great losses may occur (Aydınlık, 2016). Entrepreneurship is defined as “investment activities with the aim of producing goods or services”, while entrepreneurs are defined as “people who transform their capital into investment by taking the risk of profit and loss to produce goods or services”. Entrepreneurship is “the continuation of the business in question continuously and as a profession” (Tutar & Küçük, 2003).

### 2.1. Characteristics of Entrepreneurship

The development and growth of a nation depend on the number of entrepreneurs who will contribute to the development of the country's economy by keeping up with the frequently changing developments in today's world. Entrepreneurs are evaluated not by their earnings but by the economic value they provide for their country. One of the important problems in undeveloped societies is that the number of people with entrepreneurial qualities is very low or that there is no political, economic, and technical infrastructure to support existing entrepreneurs (Durukan, 2005).

Academic studies have identified common characteristics that successful entrepreneurial personalities should have. These characteristics are;

- Taking reasonable and acceptable risks,
- Courageous, overcoming difficulties, decisive, and persevering behavior, and able to get things done,
- One who can think in multiple ways rather than a single approach, who goes beyond stereotypes, who is innovative,
- Committed, with visions for the future and a willingness to realize their visions,
- Confident, faithful, and determined behavior,
- Demonstrates leadership qualities in planning, organizing, and coordinating,
- Continuously learning and questioning, absorbing changes and responding immediately to changing market needs,
- Common characteristics and abilities are defined as personalities who see opportunities not seen by others and transform these opportunities into business ideas (Müftüoğlu, 2004; Titiz, 1994; Durukan, 2005).

## 2.2. Responsibilities of Entrepreneurs

According to Charles Handy, “Great entrepreneurs see what is wrong, what is lacking, and what is not fit for the world, and work to correct, repair, fill gaps and innovate”. Therefore, entrepreneurs have responsibilities as entrepreneurs and to the society in which they operate. These responsibilities and duties can be summarized as follows (Bozgeyik, 2005).

- Ideas related to the work they perform contribute to increasing the country’s production capacity,
- To capitalize on opportunities and bring the idle potential of the goods and services they produce into the economy by activating them,
- To increase the welfare level of the society by producing quality products through the use of technology and to improve the quality of life of the society.
- Contributing to the employment of the country with the personnel they employ in the businesses they establish,
- Creating value and managing change are among the main responsibilities of entrepreneurs.

## 2.3. Historical Development of Entrepreneurship

In the Middle Ages, entrepreneurs were the people responsible for the construction of castles, cathedrals, and other public buildings. These people were the clergy of that period. In this period, the term entrepreneur was used to describe people who were responsible for the construction of large production projects such as places of worship, roads, and bridges belonging to the church and the state. The people who took part in such works did not take risks; they were only responsible for managing the resources given to them (Torun, 2023).

In the seventeenth century, the concept of entrepreneurship was used to describe people who made commitments to government agencies for the supply of products or services and assumed responsibility for carrying out certain activities. In this period, the entrepreneur-risk relationship began to emerge (Akkaya, 2021). In 1725, Richard Cantillon, who first introduced the concept of entrepreneurship into the literature, defined entrepreneurs as not only the person who provides the capital but also the person who assumes risk (Erdoğan, 2007). With the Industrial Revolution, the definition of entrepreneur was also affected. The entrepreneur is now defined as a person who can take risks, undertake risks, and exist even in an environment of uncertainty without avoiding speculative activities (Akkoç et al., 2019).

According to Jean Baptiste Say, a European economist who also managed the business he founded, an entrepreneur is a person who combines economic production factors to create a productive structure (Güler, 2010). Thus, Say emphasized the importance of the managerial role of entrepreneurs and defined entrepreneurs as people who can serve as both coordinators and managers in the enterprise (Güney, 2008).

Schumpeter, who has an important place in entrepreneurship theory, argued that people do not need to own a business or capital to become entrepreneurs. He also defined people who come up with an innovation or an idea that is not available in the market as entrepreneurs. According to Schumpeter, the entrepreneur feels the obligation not only to make a profit but also to develop a product that is not available on the market. Schumpeter argued that if the entrepreneur creates innovations that have not existed before by using new production methods, it will disrupt the existing economic balance and start a process called “creative destruction”, and Schumpeter linked the phenomenon of entrepreneurship with innovation and creativity (Akin, 2009).

Alfred Marshall (1842-1924), one of the pioneers of the neo-classical approach, defines an entrepreneur as “a person who produces goods and services and introduces innovations and methods”. According to Marshall, entrepreneurs are those who take full responsibility within the company, fulfill control duties, and assume the responsibility of business risk by directing production, and can act as managers and employers by coordinating capital and labor (Temizel, 2012).

In the twentieth century, after Schumpeter, two important names, Krizner and Drucker, developed the concept of entrepreneurship. Krizner defined entrepreneurs as people who can see opportunities, have strong intuition, and identify opportunities that are not recognized by others. Drucker, on the other hand, used maximizing opportunities for entrepreneurship as a driving force for success and introduced the concepts of innovation-effectiveness to the literature (Akkaya, 2021).

### **3. Entrepreneurial Leadership Concept**

#### **3.1. The Emergence and Historical Development of Entrepreneurial Leadership**

Historically, entrepreneurship and leadership have been considered separate fields. Until the mid-twentieth century, leadership research focused on processes such as power, authority, and influence in hierarchical



structures (Bass, 1990). Entrepreneurship research has examined processes such as individual innovation, risk-taking, and opportunity creation. The transformation in the global world since the 1980s has led to the emergence of a new concept where these two fields intersect (Cogliser & Brigham, 2004).

The concept of entrepreneurial leadership developed in response to the managerial challenges associated with the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Entrepreneurs have become not only the owners of an innovative idea, but also the leaders of the group that implements these ideas. Over time, these approaches have not only been limited to SMEs but have been adopted by other large-scale enterprises, public institutions, and non-governmental organizations (Leitch & Volery, 2017). Today, the concept of “Entrepreneurial Leadership” has become more comprehensive and refers to a wide range of areas that include both intrapreneurship and strategic entrepreneurship.

### **3.2. Entrepreneurial Leadership Concept**

There are various approaches used in the literature to explain the concept of entrepreneurial leadership. These approaches are respectively: focusing on entrepreneurship from the field of leadership (leader-first), focusing on the leader in the field of entrepreneurship (entrepreneurship-first), and focusing on the combination of entrepreneurship and leadership, psychological, contextual, and holistic approaches (Akkaya, 2021).

- **Leader-focused approach:** considers entrepreneurial leadership as a leadership style. It considers entrepreneurship as a leadership trait that emerges after the formation of certain conditions (Vecchio, 2003).
- **Entrepreneurship-focused approach:** considers entrepreneurial leadership as an entrepreneurial idea. It argues that leadership should be considered as a leading component of entrepreneurship (Nor et al., 2019).
- **Focusing on the intersection of entrepreneurship and leadership:** in this third approach, entrepreneurial leadership emerges as a result of the intersection of entrepreneurship and leadership, and new characteristics emerge that are not found in these two fields (Bagheri & Pihic, 2011).
- **The psychological approach to entrepreneurial leadership** focuses more on the characteristics and actions of the leader. There are many studies in this context in the literature (Gupta et al., 2004; He et al., 2017; Hentschke, 2009)

- The contextual approach to entrepreneurial leadership is concerned with the environmental factors that lead to the emergence of entrepreneurial leadership (Renko et al., 2015).

The holistic approach explains entrepreneurial leadership holistically by evaluating the psychological and contextual approaches together (Roomi & Harrison, 2011). The common conclusion to be drawn from these approaches mentioned in relation to entrepreneurial leadership is clearly included in the leadership literature from the behaviors and characteristics of the entrepreneurial leader (Röschke, 2018).

### **3.3. Definition of Entrepreneurial Leadership**

Entrepreneurial leadership is a fairly new style that combines the characteristics of leadership with an entrepreneurial spirit (Kearney, 2020). Schumpeter (1934) first used the definitions of entrepreneurship and leadership together and mentioned that entrepreneurship is a special case of leadership (Dvalidze & Markopoulos, 2020; Zijlstra, 2014; Önen & Elkırmış, 2022).

Gupta et al. (2004) termed entrepreneurial leadership as a type of leadership that creates visionary scenarios to bring together and mobilize participants who are strategically engaged in the discovery and exploitation of value creation.

Many people think of an entrepreneurial leader as someone who recognizes an important entrepreneurial advantage and grows and builds a company around it. Entrepreneurial leadership is a unique leadership style that can emerge as a result of the leader's opportunity-oriented activities in organizations of all types and conditions, whether for-profit or not-for-profit, public or private (House et al., 1999; Renko, 2017).

### **3.4. Entrepreneurial Leadership Characteristics**

As we mentioned earlier, the concept of an entrepreneurial leader and the concept of an entrepreneur are not synonymous. Entrepreneurial leaders;

- Entrepreneurial leaders seize opportunities and seek opportunity-oriented activities (Renko et al., 2015). The reasons for seizing and evaluating opportunities within the organization; during the seizing of these opportunities, those who follow the leader also take the leader as a role model and become a source of leader motivation for themselves. (Renko et al., 2015)

- By clearly articulating the vision to those who follow the entrepreneurial leader, the entrepreneur ensures that people act in accordance with the organizational vision and internalize the vision (Renko et al., 2015)
- Whether the entrepreneurial leader is charismatic or not, they ensure that their followers follow them by being a role model for entrepreneurial behaviors (Renko et al., 2015).
- Leaders increase followers' interest in entrepreneurship, confidence and belief in their skills and abilities, and interest in innovation (Renko et al., 2015).
- Entrepreneurial leaders have the ability to discover new products and opportunities and follow processes in pre-existing organizations (Greenberg et al., 2011).
- The entrepreneurial leader also works in social relations, tackling social problems that are not considered important by others (Greenberg et al., 2011).
- Entrepreneurial leaders also engage in social and political movements and change services and policies in public and private organizations (Greenberg et al., 2011).

The success of entrepreneurial leadership depends on the relationships between followers, situations, and leaders. Entrepreneurial leaders especially realize the opportunities in front of them, and in order to achieve the goal, they become role models for their followers. At the same time, it is possible for the followers of the entrepreneurial leader to have sufficient self-efficacy and desire, and for the organizational conditions, environmental conditions, and available resources to be sufficient and suitable for use (Renko et al., 2015; Yolcu, 2017).

### **3.5. Entrepreneurial Leadership Principles**

Greenberg et al. (2011) listed three basic principles that entrepreneurial leaders possess. These principles are cognitive bidirectionality, social, environmental, and economic responsibility and sustainability, and self- and social awareness.

Cognitive duality is "*thinking*" and "*acting*". Leaders must learn to act cognitively and act in a multifaceted way, using the logic of prediction or foresight and creation as they approach decision-making. When the future is unknown, when it bears little or no resemblance to the past, the entrepreneurial leader must learn how to create the future through action

and experience. Through these skills, the entrepreneurial leader learns to use both thinking in decision making (Greenberg et al., 2011).

Social, environmental, and economic responsibility and sustainability; entrepreneurial leaders must learn to create economic, social, and environmental values and to channel the powerful synergies within these values. This principle suggests that traditional ways of doing business, where the leader focuses solely on creating economic value or where creating social value is secondary to creating economic value, are no longer valid (Greenberg et al., 2011).

In the third principle, entrepreneurial leaders need to understand the social environment as well as themselves in order to lead the planned activities. Such understandings are defined as self- and social awareness (Greenberg et al., 2011).

According to Kansikas et al. (2012), leading entrepreneurs with entrepreneurial ability and characteristics have the requirements to be leaders. As seen in the literature, entrepreneurial leadership is based on characteristics such as “exhibiting opportunistic behavior”, “innovative”, ‘creative’, “risk-taking”, “proactive behavior”, and “managing change” (Kaçar, 2024).

## Conclusion

This study aims to explain the interaction between these phenomena by examining the concepts of entrepreneurship, leadership, and entrepreneurial leadership with a holistic approach. The findings reveal that entrepreneurship and leadership are two fundamental areas of management that complement each other but have different dynamics.

The concept of entrepreneurship, which is discussed in the second chapter, is considered the main driving force of economic development, innovation, and social transformation. Entrepreneurs are actors who create value not only economically but also socially with their risk-taking tendencies, ability to recognize opportunities, innovative thinking skills, and sense of responsibility. With the transition of entrepreneurship from the mercantilist era to the industrial revolution and then to the information and digital economy, the roles of entrepreneurs have also changed. Entrepreneurship is no longer only an individual economic activity, but also a component of social innovation and sustainable development.

The concept of entrepreneurial leadership, examined in the third chapter, is considered a contemporary leadership approach that combines the innovative and opportunity-oriented aspect of entrepreneurship with

the visionary and transformative dimensions of leadership. Entrepreneurial leaders are individuals who develop strategic vision in uncertain environments and lead both individuals and organizations towards innovation. This type of leadership emphasizes the ability to manage change, evaluate opportunities, anticipate risks, and create an innovative culture within the organization (Renko et al., 2015; Gupta et al., 2004).

The core principles of entrepreneurial leadership include innovativeness, visionariness, courage to take risks, strategic thinking, commitment to ethical values, and encouraging teamwork. In addition, entrepreneurial leadership has been evaluated through individual (creativity, self-confidence, proactivity), organizational (innovative culture, learning organizational structure), and environmental (seizing market opportunities, social responsibility) dimensions (Kuratko, 2007).

In conclusion, entrepreneurial leadership has become a strategic necessity for contemporary organizations to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. This leadership approach not only enhances economic performance but also strengthens employee engagement, increases organizational innovation capacity, and contributes to the creation of social benefits. Future research will make important contributions to the literature by examining new dimensions of entrepreneurial leadership in the axis of digitalization, sustainability, artificial intelligence, and cultural differences.

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### **3. NEW GENERATION LEADERSHIP APPROACHES SUITABLE FOR THE TECHNOLOGY AGE**



## Digital Leadership 8

Onur Oktaysoy<sup>1</sup>

Özer Elkırmıř<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

In today's world of accelerating digitalization, the concept of leadership is no longer just a managerial function, but has become a fundamental element that determines the strategic orientation and sustainable success of organizations. The uncertainty, speed, and complexity of the digital age render traditional leadership approaches inadequate and necessitate a new form of leadership that integrates technology, strategy, and human-centeredness. In this context, digital leadership is defined as a leadership style that can use the opportunities offered by digital technologies in line with strategic goals, guide organizations in digital transformation processes, and maintain a human-centered approach by supporting cultural transformation in this process. The importance of digital leadership stems from its power to transform not only the way organizations use technological tools but also their organizational culture, business methods, and innovation capacity. Studies in the literature reveal that digital leadership has direct and indirect effects on organizational agility, employee performance, and competitive advantage. However, resistance to change, lack of digital skills, and difficulty in adapting to rapid technological developments are among the main challenges faced by digital leaders. This study aims to provide a comprehensive framework on the definition of the concept of digital leadership, its theoretical foundations, its importance for organizations and employees, the competencies that digital leaders should have, and the organizational reflections of their practices, the problems encountered in digital leadership implementation processes, and solution suggestions.

1 Assist.Prof.Dr., Kafkas University, onuroktaysoy@kafkas.edu.tr, ORCID:0000-0002-8623-614X

2 Dr. Lecturer, Kafkas University, oelkirmis@gmail.com, ORCID:0000-0002-5147-7031

## 1. Introduction

Technological transformation, which has become the defining force of the digital age, has radically changed the structure, strategies, and leadership styles of organizations as well as the daily lives of individuals. This transformation process requires not only the use of technological tools but also the redesign of organizational functioning, culture, and management approach. Emerging digital technologies demand from leaders not only the ability to manage, but also new competencies such as the ability to integrate technology into strategic goals, make quick decisions, read and make sense of complex data, and adapt quickly to changing conditions. In this context, the concept of digital leadership has taken its place in the literature as a technology-integrated, agile, and transformative leadership approach that goes beyond modern leadership theories.

Digital leadership is generally defined as “a form of leadership that can use the opportunities offered by digital technologies in line with strategic goals, guide organizations in digital transformation processes, and maintain human-centeredness in this process” (Woro & Herachwati, 2024). This leadership approach stands out not only with its technological know-how but also with its power to create cultural transformation. Digital leaders not only encourage technological innovations within the organization but also redefine the way of doing business, enable data-driven decision-making processes, and lead the creation of a learning organizational culture (Balakhanova et al., 2024).

Although definitions of digital leadership vary in the literature, there are some basic principles that are commonly emphasized. These include creating a strategic digital vision, possessing digital competencies, using digital communication tools effectively, fostering a culture of innovation, and creating value based on technology (Ming & Mansor, 2024). In this context, digital leadership is discussed in the literature not only as a position, but also as the ability to read change, navigate under uncertainty, and create agile organizational structures. The role of digital leaders has become even more critical in the VUCA world, which is defined by characteristics such as variability, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity triggered by digitalization (Chauhan & Thangavelu, 2024).

Digital leaders not only manage existing technology, but also stand out as actors who shape organizational strategies by following technological developments. The most critical skills that leaders should possess in this process include digital awareness, digital literacy, systemic thinking, data analysis competence, and ethical sensitivity (Araujo et al., 2021). In

addition, the social dimension of digital leadership is also emphasized in the literature, and the expectation that leaders should be able to conduct intra-team communication transparently and interactively through digital platforms, adapt to remote working models, and unite employees from different disciplines around a common goal is frequently emphasized (Tanniru, 2018).

In terms of organizational success, it is observed that the impact of digital leadership has a multidimensional structure. Research shows that organizations with high digital leadership capacity manage digital transformation processes more effectively and gain a competitive advantage from these processes (Sagbas et al., 2023). This situation reveals that digital leadership is not only a technical issue, but also a strategic, cultural, and managerial issue. In fact, digitalization investments made without digital leadership often remain superficial and insufficient to realize organizational transformation.

This book chapter aims to address the concept of digital leadership with a holistic approach. The definitional framework of the concept, its historical development, and its place in the literature will be elaborated in the light of theoretical approaches, the competencies that digital leaders should possess, their strategic role in digital transformation processes, and the challenges they face will be analyzed. At the same time, practical perspectives on digital leadership practices will be presented through case studies from different sectors, and suggestions for future research areas will be developed. Thus, it is aimed both to contribute to the academic literature and to provide strategic guidance to practitioners.

## 2. Definition and Key Characteristics of Digital Leadership

Digital transformation implies not only the adoption of technological tools but also a fundamental restructuring of the way organizations do business, their culture, and strategic orientation. This restructuring also transforms leadership, requiring new skill sets in areas such as decision-making, communication, coordination, and change management (Topcuoglu et al., 2023). In this respect, digital leadership is a managerial approach that responds to the uncertainty, speed, and complexity of the digital age and goes beyond classical leadership approaches.

Digital leadership can be defined as a form of leadership that not only uses technology but also combines it with strategic thinking and transformational power. This leadership approach describes individuals who can integrate digital technologies into the vision of the organization, make data-driven

decisions, adapt business processes in an agile manner, and effectively guide employees in this transformation (Woro & Herachwati, 2024). However, it would be misleading to see digital leadership as only a technical expertise, because digital leadership is also a cultural leadership that includes the ability to align organizational values with technology, create a learning organization, and design people-centered digital transformation processes (Sing Chauhan & Thangavelu, 2024; Topçuoğlu et al., 2022).

Some of the definitions of the concept of digital leadership are as follows; a digital leader is “a leader who can direct the organizational structure, access information through digital channels, lead digital transformation, foresee the changes that will form the basis for the organizational goals to be achieved and establish relationships” (Sheninger, 2014). In a different definition, digital leadership is defined as “a leadership style that can fulfill the roles attributed to the leader in the digital age by making use of digital tools, mastering digital technologies, and managing the organization” (Borah et al., 2022). Pearl Zhu (2015) defines digital leadership as a combination of five different leadership approaches: thought leadership, creative leadership, visionary leadership, curious leadership, and wise leadership.

In the literature, the concept of digital leadership has evolved over time and has been addressed from different perspectives. As a matter of fact, Araujo et al. (2021) emphasize that digital leadership includes not only technological competence but also dimensions such as strategic alignment, organizational agility, and cultural change (Araujo et al., 2021). Similarly, Ming and Mansor (2024) conceptualize digital leadership as a combination of distributed leadership and transformational leadership approaches. This model suggests that the leader is effective not only from the top down but also through horizontal and participatory processes (Ming & Mansor, 2024).

The distinctive characteristics of digital leadership are not limited to technological know-how. Some of the key characteristics that are widely accepted in the literature are: creating a strategic digital vision, having technological agility, making data-driven decisions, supporting innovation, using digital collaboration and communication platforms effectively, developing cybersecurity awareness, and fostering a culture of continuous learning (Mwita & Joanthan, 2020). In this context, digital leaders are positioned as individuals who set direction at both strategic and operational levels, who can keep up with the pace of change, and who do not lose focus on people in this process. Tanniru (2018) defines digital leadership as a form of leadership that enables the establishment and management of agile systems that can respond quickly to customer demands. This definition emphasizes

that digital leadership is a structure that provides strategic adaptation not only internally but also to the external environment (Tanniru, 2018).

In light of all these approaches, digital leadership can be defined as a multifaceted form of leadership that can integrate technology, strategy, and culture, adapt the organization to the dynamics of the digital age, and manage this process with both technical and human dimensions. In this context, digital leadership is a critical leadership approach not only for today but also for managing the uncertainties of the future.

### 3. Digital Leadership Models and Theoretical Approaches

The theoretical foundations of digital leadership are shaped by the reinterpretation of traditional leadership approaches in the digital context. The structural variables, such as speed, complexity, and uncertainty, that digital transformation has brought to the business world have profoundly affected the understanding of leadership, emphasizing leadership styles that prioritize collaboration, flexibility, and innovation rather than an authority-based, top-down leader profile. In line with this transformation, digital leadership has a multidimensional structure that cannot be reduced to a single theory and is located at the intersection of transformative, distributed, strategic, and systemic leadership theories.

In the literature, the most frequently cited framework to explain digital leadership is the transformational leadership approach. This theory argues that the leader is an actor who creates vision, inspires, and transforms organizational culture, not just runs the business. The digital leader is interpreted as the reflection of the transformative leadership principle in the digital age by developing a technological vision, supporting change within the organization, and involving employees in this process (Ming & Mansor, 2024). In parallel with this transformative structure, distributed leadership theory has an important place in the theoretical framework of digital leadership. Digital environments encourage decentralized, flexible, and horizontal structures to come to the fore. Accordingly, rather than being singular decision-makers, digital leaders assume the role of facilitators of collective decision-making processes supported by digital tools that empower teams (Al-Hadrawi & Reniati, 2023; Şahin, 2024). This model emphasizes that digital leadership is not only a technical but also a sociocultural form of leadership.

Some researchers also utilize strategic leadership theory to explain digital leadership, focusing on the digital leader's ability to integrate technology and strategy. Strategic digital leaders not only create solutions to current



problems but also anticipate technological opportunities and shape long-term directions that will increase the organization's competitiveness (Saced, 2024). This leadership style aims not only to keep up with current technologies in the digital age, but also to build the digital future. In addition to these, specific models have been proposed to explain the structure of digital leadership. For example, Zahra Saced (2024) considers digital leadership in four main dimensions. She lists them as digital vision, development of digital competencies, preparation of individuals for digital transformation, and effective use of digital networks. These four dimensions reveal the leader's capacity to increase organizational performance by integrating both technological and human aspects (Saced, 2024). Another model is the "ACC Model". According to this model, digital leadership consists of three basic elements: attitude, cognition, and digital capability. This tripartite structure argues that a leader can be effective in the digital environment not only with his/her level of knowledge but also with his/her mental flexibility and ethical responsibility (Luo et al., 2023).

All these theoretical frameworks and model proposals reveal the multidimensional nature and flexible application of digital leadership. Although derived from traditional leadership models, digital leadership is building its own theoretical foundations due to its unique context and new generation ways of doing business. This increasingly mature theoretical framework is not only a topic of academic discussion but also a guide for practitioners in developing effective leadership strategies in the digital age.

#### **4. Competencies and Role of the Digital Leadership**

Digital leadership, which is one of the most important leadership approaches in responding to the multifaceted expectations of the time period we are in, is much more than individuals equipped with technological knowledge; it refers to leader profiles that direct digital transformation, build bridges between people and systems, and build learning organizations. At this point, the role of the digital leader in the organization has evolved beyond the instrumental use of digital technologies to become a strategic and cultural change agent.

Current research reveals that digital leadership is not only technology-oriented but also requires a high level of human, cognitive, and managerial competencies. In this context, strategic digital vision development, technological awareness, coping with complexity, data-driven decision-making, digital ethical sensitivity, and cultural transformation leadership stand out among the core competencies of the digital leader (Hamzah &

Radzi, 2025). Especially in an environment where digitalization increases the need for uncertainty, continuous change, and learning in organizations, a directionless digitalization process is inevitable even if the leader is not visionary.

Digital leaders see change as an opportunity, not a threat, and bring this approach to the organization. The ability to guide change is directly related not only to technical decision-making processes, but also to preparing employees emotionally and cognitively for this process. Indeed, digital transformation requires the transformation of not only infrastructures but also individual attitudes and behaviors. In this context, the leader's role as a transformation architect is more about creating a corporate culture that internalizes technology rather than understanding it (Schiuma et al., 2024). Again, numerous studies show that not only individual competencies but also the leader's roles within the organization are decisive in the success of the digital leader. The digital leader not only manages but also facilitates, builds relationships, inspires, and nurtures agile decision-making processes. In particular, the need for speed and flexibility brought about by digital technologies requires the leader to move away from the classical hierarchical control approach and to manage team-based, collaborative, multi-generational structures (Vay & Steinherr, 2023). In this sense, the role of the digital leader aims to produce an impact that stretches organizational boundaries, fosters an innovative learning culture, and transforms individual contribution into collective value.

Another prominent dimension is the digital leader's relationship with data. In the digital environment, information is the key input for decision-making, and the leader's analytical thinking capacity, data literacy, and technological intuition play a critical role in guiding this process. However, this process must be not only rational but also balanced with ethical sensitivity. The digital leader cannot ignore values such as fairness, inclusiveness, and transparency when considering the impact of technologies ranging from artificial intelligence to big data on decision-making (Munsamy et al., 2023).

To summarize, digital leadership is a form of leadership that not only uses technology but also manages socio-cultural transformations shaped by technology. The digital leader's competencies go beyond technical knowledge and include multidimensional capabilities such as strategic orientation, transformation vision, ethical responsibility, and cultural construction, and his/her role includes leadership practices that can transform these competencies into an organizational impact. From this perspective, digital leaders are actors who build not only the present but also the future.

## 5. Success Criteria for Digital Leadership

In the literature, it is seen that the success of digital leaders is addressed within the framework of certain disciplines. These disciplines range from the creation of a digital strategy to the effective use of social media, from branding to data analytics. Figure 1 below shows seven key disciplines that enhance the effectiveness of digital leadership.



Figure 1. 7 Disciplines of Digital Leadership

Source: <https://poyrazruzgari.com/2018/01/12/dijital-liderlik/>

**Developing a Digital Strategy:** The most fundamental stage of digital leadership is to develop a holistic digital strategy that reflects the organization’s identity, values, and goals online. This strategy will guide the leader’s communication with both internal and external stakeholders and contribute to building a sustainable digital identity.

**Content Planning:** Success in digital leadership depends on a systematic content plan rather than random sharing. A content plan can be defined as a strategic roadmap that predetermines the type, timing, and target audience of the messages to be shared digitally. A well-crafted content plan increases the leader’s online visibility and allows the organization to communicate its messages in an organized and consistent manner. Thus, it contributes to building stronger, trust-based, and sustainable relationships with the target audience.

***Effective Use of Social Media:*** Social media is one of the key tools of digital leadership. Proper and strategic use of these platforms will facilitate the leader's interaction with expanding online communities, sharing knowledge, and participating in mutual learning processes.

***Branding and Visual Elements:*** Strengthening brand identity is directly related to the effective use of visuals and videos. By using visual content strategically, digital leaders both increase the awareness of the organization and make the interaction more meaningful by gaining the trust of the target audience.

***Strategic Alignment with the Website:*** A leader's digital presence should be represented holistically through the website. Aligning the website with content, strategy, and sales processes supports the consistency of organizational goals and strengthens the user experience.

***Creating a Sales Funnel:*** The sustainability of digital leadership requires the creation of a continuously functioning and evolving sales funnel. This process ensures that the target audience is attracted to the organization, loyal audiences are built, and organizational growth is supported, which is essential for long-term success.

***Using Advertising and Analytics:*** Advertising strategies and data analytics are central to digital leadership decision-making. The effective use of advertising and analytics applications increases organizational performance both by expanding the target audience and by enabling evidence-based strategic decisions.

The seven core disciplines of digital leadership reveal that leadership cannot be reduced to the use of technology alone, but rather encompasses a wide range of areas such as strategic vision, corporate communication, branding, sales, and analytics. Creating a strategic digital orientation, producing regular and planned content, using social media effectively, building a strong brand identity supported by visual elements, ensuring corporate alignment through the website, developing a functional sales channel, and supporting data-driven decision-making processes constitute the holistic structure of digital leadership. All of these disciplines help leaders not only strengthen their digital presence but also transform corporate culture, increase employee engagement, and secure the organization's sustainable competitive advantage. Therefore, digital leadership is considered one of the key determinants of strategic success in the modern business world.

## 6. The Impact of Digital Leadership on Organizational Culture, Performance, and Innovation

Leadership in the digital age shapes not only how organizations use technological tools, but also how they think, operate, and innovate. Digital leadership facilitates the transformation of corporate culture into a flexible, open, and learning structure that adapts to digitalization, while increasing employee performance and making innovation a corporate reflex. This multidimensional impact structure explains why digital leadership has become a critical strategic element for organizations.

Research shows that digital leadership plays a transformative role in the process of creating an innovative organizational culture (Köksoy & Oktaysoy, 2025; Morgül & Ataç, 2024; Wang et al., 2025). By encouraging open communication and facilitating collaboration through digital tools, digital leaders create a culture where creative thinking and flexible practices are supported. Such a culture increases internal openness to change and ensures organizational sustainability (Sagbas et al., 2023). The cultural sphere of influence of digital leadership is not limited to norms and values, but creates a set of digital habits that extends to daily work practices.

In addition, digital leadership has a significant impact on employee performance in direct and indirect ways. Effective digital leaders reduce the stress of technological changes on employees and increase performance by providing a guiding and motivating structure (Shin et al., 2023). The main factor that strengthens this effect is the digital culture that develops in parallel with digital leadership. Digital culture creates an environment that encourages collaboration, is open to experimentation, and values learning from mistakes, thereby creating a stronger leadership-performance relationship (Priyamedha et al., 2025).

From an innovation perspective, digital leadership encourages not only the use of technology in organizations but also the redesign of business processes and business models. Empirical studies have shown that digital leadership has a direct positive impact on both product and process innovation (Benitez et al., 2022; Fang, 2023). In addition, intermediate variables such as digital entrepreneurial orientation and digital organizational culture also play an important role in strengthening this relationship (Wang et al., 2022). From this point of view, it would be appropriate to state that digital leadership acts as a catalyst that not only manages technological transformation but also carries the innovative mindset to the organizational level. As a matter of fact, it is often emphasized in the literature that the impact of digital leadership on innovation is not only direct but also indirect through digital

organizational culture. In other words, digital leadership primarily builds a culture that has internalized digital values and behaviors, and this culture ensures the sustainability of innovation capacity (Yılmaz et al., 2024). In this context, the synergistic effect of leadership style and cultural structure becomes the main determinant of innovation performance.

In the context of this framework, it is seen that digital leadership has a holistic role not only to respond to technological developments, but also to increase employee performance and internalize innovation by integrating these developments into the cultural structure of the organization. Digital leaders, with their visionary approaches and transformative effects, have a strategic function with their potential to ensure that organizations not only survive in the intensely competitive conditions of today's world, called the digital age, but also evolve into an innovative and sustainable future.

## 7. Challenges in Digital Leadership and Strategic Solution Approaches

Digital transformation is not only an area of opportunity for leaders but also a challenging process that brings forth multi-layered difficulties. While digital leadership has the potential to steer technological developments and prepare organizations for the future, realizing this potential can be constrained by various structural, cultural, and individual barriers. The challenges faced by digital leaders can be listed as follows:

***Resistance to Change:*** One of the most common obstacles observed in digital leadership practices is resistance to digital transformation. Both employees and middle managers may show genuine resistance to digital applications due to fears stemming from uncertainty and discomfort with changing habits (Çalışkan, 2019). This resistance can undermine the integrity of the transformation process by not only hindering the adoption of new systems but also leading to the questioning of the leader's authority.

***Digital Skill Gap:*** Another structural barrier that emerges in digital leadership practices is the digital skill gap. Leaders and teams who cannot effectively use digital tools may view technology as an operational burden rather than a strategic advantage. Differences in digital proficiency levels, particularly within a multigenerational workforce, make it difficult for leaders to develop a holistic digital vision (Xiao, 2024). At this point, the leader's role should not only be to ensure technology integration but also to promote digital literacy throughout the organization.

***Failure to Keep Pace with Rapid Technological Change:*** Unlike previous industrial eras, digital technologies today are developing at an exponential



rather than linear rate, making it increasingly difficult for leaders to integrate this change into strategic decisions. Leaders who fail to adequately anticipate technological developments may make poor investment decisions, miss opportunities, or be perceived as lacking vision within their team. This situation may stem not only from individual inadequacies but also from a lack of organizational learning (Bolte et al., 2018).

***Misalignment Between Organizational Culture and Leadership Goals:*** One of the fundamental challenges encountered in digital leadership is the misalignment between organizational culture and leadership goals. In traditional, hierarchical, and risk-averse organizational cultures, it is quite difficult to integrate the values of the digital age, such as agility, openness, and innovation, into corporate life. Such structures can produce mechanisms of silent resistance that prevent the digital leader's vision from being realized (Zulu et al., 2023). This situation is particularly evident in traditional industries such as construction and manufacturing.

***Technological Infrastructure Deficiencies:*** Another dimension of the challenges encountered in digital leadership applications relates to technological infrastructure deficiencies. The sustainability of digital leadership is directly related not only to the leader's personal capacity but also to the currency, flexibility, and holistic structure of the organization's digital infrastructure. Dependence on outdated systems, cybersecurity risks, and integration difficulties can seriously limit the leader's ability to implement strategic digital decisions (Sagbas et al., 2023).

Despite all these challenges, research shows that effective strategies can largely overcome the obstacles to digital leadership. These strategies can be listed as follows:

***The Leader's Active Role Model:*** The leader's use of digital tools in daily operations, involvement in the learning process, and embracing digital transformation not just as a project but as a cultural issue is an important factor that will significantly increase employee motivation and adaptation (Pertiwi et al., 2024). Such a leadership approach will enable employees not only to develop their technology skills but also to contribute to organizational innovation and sustainable competitive advantage by embracing the digital transformation process. The leader's active use of digital tools can transform them into a powerful role model for employees, enabling them to be a key factor in overcoming resistance to change.

***Implementation of Digital Competency Development Programs:*** Another important strategy that can be used to address issues encountered in digital

leadership practices is the implementation of development programs tailored to the organization's digital needs. Instead of universal training, modular training systems tailored to individual skill levels can enable employees to adopt technology more quickly and confidently (Xiao, 2024). This approach enables employees not only to acquire knowledge during the digitalization process but also to gain the competencies and equipment to effectively apply technology in their own areas of responsibility. In this way, leaders can support a culture of learning by guiding employees at different levels and creating a foundation for sustainable digital transformation within the organization.

***Systematically Embedding Digital Values in Organizational Culture:*** Another solution strategy is to systematically embed digital values in organizational culture. To achieve this, not only vision statements but also performance criteria, reward systems, and internal communication policies must be redesigned to support digitalization (Imhof & Grivas, 2022). This approach will enable employees to view digital transformation not as an abstract goal but as a natural part of their daily work practices, while also allowing individual efforts to align with organizational values. Thus, digitalization can become one of the fundamental elements of organizational culture, rather than being reduced to technology investments alone.

To summarize, digital leadership is a multidimensional transformational leadership that is not limited to technological tools. The success of this leadership style is possible by identifying obstacles across a wide range, from individual attitudes to the organization's infrastructure, culture, and decision-making processes, and developing strategic, participatory, and continuous solutions to these obstacles. The success of a digital leader lies not only in their ability to manage change, but also in their ability to recognize the invisible walls that stand in the way of change and overcome these walls through collective intelligence.

## 8. Conclusion

This section has attempted to address the concept of digital leadership within a multidimensional framework, from its theoretical foundations to its practical implications. Considering the overall integrity of the study, it becomes apparent that digital leadership cannot be reduced to the mere use of technological tools; rather, it is a comprehensive form of leadership that encompasses strategic vision, cultural transformation, ethical sensitivity, and a human-centered approach. In the rapidly changing and uncertain structure of the digital age, digital leadership has become a critical element that enables organizations not only to survive but also to shape the future.



Findings from the literature review and highlighted by digital leadership-focused studies clearly demonstrate the multifaceted effects of digital leadership, such as transforming organizational culture, improving employee performance, and encouraging innovation at the corporate level. In this context, digital leaders are not only those who manage technology, but also transformation agents who involve employees in the transformation process, build learning organizations, and strengthen the collective vision. Findings from the literature also show that this holistic approach plays a fundamental role in creating organizational agility and sustainable competitive advantage.

However, as emphasized in this study, challenges such as resistance to change in digital leadership practices, lack of digital skills, cultural incompatibilities, and inability to keep pace with rapid technological developments come to the fore. Overcoming these challenges is possible through leaders acting as role models, spreading digital awareness, integrating digital values into the organizational culture, and adopting a participatory leadership approach. Therefore, the success of digital leadership is directly related not only to individual competencies but also to organizational infrastructure and cultural alignment.

In this context, digital leadership is emerging as a decisive factor not only in the management of current technologies but also in the strategic orientation of organizations toward the future. Digital leaders enhance the competitive strength of organizations by transforming changing environmental conditions into opportunities through their visionary perspectives, while also ensuring the sustainability of transformation processes through their approaches based on ethical and human values. Especially in today's world, where artificial intelligence, big data, the Internet of Things, and similar technologies are rapidly becoming widespread, it has become critically necessary for leaders to use these tools not only to ensure operational efficiency but also for the purposes of organizational learning, innovation, and generating social benefits.

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## Technological Leadership 8

M. Akif Yenikaya<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

In today's world, leadership concepts are undergoing a fundamental transformation due to the impact of digitalization. In this context, technological leadership has evolved beyond an approach focused solely on the use of technological tools to become a leadership model containing multi-layered dimensions. This study examines the concept of technological leadership, which has come to the fore in our era of rapidly increasing digitalization, from a multidimensional perspective. The historical development process of technological leadership, its fundamental components, leadership styles, and skills have been comprehensively examined, with particular emphasis on its mutual interaction with digital transformation. Literature reviews indicate that technological leadership has a direct impact on organizational performance, innovation capacity, and digital adaptation. Furthermore, ethical responsibilities and social impacts in the context of integrating artificial intelligence and advanced technologies into leadership processes are also evaluated. The study also analyzes the structural, cultural, and ethical challenges faced by technological leadership and offers predictions for future leadership approaches. The study aims to contribute to academic and applied research, providing a theoretical framework for future studies.

### 1. Introduction

Technological developments in today's world are profoundly transforming the way organizations operate and societies live. Advances in areas such as digitalization, artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, big data analytics, and automation are reshaping not only production processes but also management approaches (Kraus et al., 2021). This rapid change process necessitates a new form of leadership that goes beyond traditional leadership approaches. This leadership form is a technological leadership approach that

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1 Assist.Prof.Dr., Kafkas University, akif.yenikaya@kafkas.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0002-3624-722X

not only views technology as a tool but also positions it as a strategic value creator (Avolio et al., 2014).

Technological leadership refers to leaders' ability to effectively use technology in decision-making and change management processes. In this context, leaders must not only possess technical knowledge and skills but also have the strategic vision to integrate technology into organizational goals. In this respect, technological leadership plays a critical role in enabling organizations to gain a sustainable competitive advantage in digital transformation processes (El Sawy et al., 2016).

Furthermore, the importance of technological leadership extends beyond economic outcomes. Its contributions are multidimensional and include promoting employee development within an innovative organizational culture, enhancing agility in business processes and focusing on socially beneficial areas of technology use. However, the ethical issues and cybersecurity threats that leaders face in a rapidly changing technological environment cannot be ignored. In this context, various studies on the ethical issues and cybersecurity threats that leaders encounter in a rapidly changing technological environment show that this topic is becoming increasingly critical.

- ***Ethical dilemmas and security dilemmas:*** Technological developments are confronting leaders with ethically challenging situations. Measures taken against cyber threats (e.g., data collection, encryption, anonymization) can harm certain fundamental values, thereby giving rise to ethical debates (Domingo-Ferrer et al., 2017).
- ***Legal gaps and lack of international cooperation:*** Existing national and international legal frameworks are inadequate in the face of rapidly evolving cyber threats, leading to blurred ethical boundaries. Therefore, ethical rules are becoming increasingly important, and leaders are expected to make decisions within the framework of these rules (Troshchenkov & Halona, 2024).
- ***The need for ethical leadership in cybersecurity:*** Business leaders need to adopt proactive security strategies that consider not only technological but also ethical, human, and managerial dimensions. These strategies should be supported by human behavior, education, and awareness (Balzano & Marzi, 2024).
- ***Artificial intelligence and ethical issues:*** While the use of artificial intelligence in cybersecurity provides rapid responses, it also raises serious ethical issues such as data privacy, impartiality, and

accountability. This necessitates that managers be equipped not only with technical but also ethical competence (Al-Mukhtar, 2024).

- ***Integration of ethics and emotional intelligence:*** It is argued that artificial intelligence and emotional intelligence should be used together to improve ethical decision-making processes. This contributes to leaders approaching ethical dilemmas in a more sensible and balanced manner (Abidin et al., 2025).

This study aims to examine the theoretical dimensions of the concept of technological leadership. The study will first discuss the historical development of the concept and its theoretical foundations in literature. It will then focus on the components of technological leadership, its functions in the organizational context, and its critical role in digital transformation processes (Elkirmis, 2025). Furthermore, the effects of technological leadership on employee performance, innovation, and sustainable competitive advantage will be evaluated, focusing on ethical responsibilities, social dimensions, and potential future contributions. Thus, the aim is not only to reveal the theoretical framework of technological leadership but also to provide an analysis of its applicability in different sectors.

## 2. The Concept of Technological Leadership

Technological leadership is a strategic leadership approach that goes beyond the use of technology and emerged in response to the pressures of transformation brought about by the digital age. This concept has gained increasing importance, particularly since the late 20th century, as technology has reshaped organizational structures and leadership roles. Technological leadership involves not only individuals or institutions keeping up with technological developments, but also the ability to guide, transform, and integrate these developments into strategic decisions (Daugherty et al., 2013).

The development of the concept was first observed in corporate contexts where technology-based management practices gained importance. Initially, technology-focused approaches used in businesses' R&D investments and product innovation processes eventually necessitated the integration of a technological dimension into the understanding of leadership. In this context, the concept of technological leadership is considered not only in terms of technical expertise but also in terms of vision, change management, and the ability to guide digital transformation processes (Sadowski & Roth, 1999).



Technological leadership essentially consists of components such as strategic vision development, integrating technology with corporate goals, knowledge-based decision-making, digital ethical awareness, and encouraging continuous learning. This type of leadership means more than just establishing and managing technological infrastructures. It also makes organizational culture open to innovation by increasing employees' digital literacy (Bezrukov et al., 2024). The concept has found wide application not only in the private sector but also in areas such as public administration and education (Samsudin & Ghani, 2020).

At the global level, states' technological leadership strategies guide strategic areas such as national sovereignty, digital security, and economic competitiveness. Countries that are pioneers in technology production and management use this leadership approach not only in their domestic policies but also as a power factor in international relations.

Today, technological leadership encompasses not only the management of existing technologies, but also the strategic integration of advanced technology areas such as artificial intelligence, big data, the Internet of Things and cybersecurity. Therefore, leaders must possess not only technical knowledge but also ethical sensitivity, decision-making skills that consider social impacts, and a vision for digital transformation (Al-Mukhtar, 2024).

### **3. Technological Leadership and Digital Transformation**

Technological leadership plays a strategic role in the success of digital transformation processes. The concept of digital transformation refers to a multidimensional change that requires not only the renewal of technological infrastructure, but also the restructuring of organizational culture, business processes, and leadership approaches. Throughout this process, leaders go beyond effectively managing digital technologies and take on critical responsibilities such as creating a vision for transformation, involving stakeholders in the process, and overcoming organizational resistance (Mwita & Joanthan, 2020).

Research shows that for digital transformation to be successful, leaders must possess technological literacy, strategic foresight, and change management skills. The transformation process is directly impacted by leaders' ability to develop a digital vision, embrace data-driven decision-making processes and motivate employees in line with this vision. (Souza & Pietrafesa, 2023). Digital leadership also plays a decisive role in supporting organizational agility and innovation (Chauhan & Thangavelu, 2024).

The literature also emphasizes that digital leaders must possess not only technical knowledge but also human skills such as collaboration, transparency, and ethical sensitivity. In this context, the understanding of leadership is evolving away from traditional authoritarian models toward a more horizontal, participatory, and data-driven structure (Klein, 2020).

#### 4. Technological Leadership Skills

Technological leadership requires a multifaceted skill set that goes beyond just using technology, it also involves the ability to strategically steer technology, adapt employees to digital change, and ensure the sustainable digital transformation of organizations. In this context, the key competencies that a technology leader must possess include strategic thinking, change management, digital literacy, communication skills, problem solving, ethical awareness, and innovation (Beedle & Wang, 2013).

Studies conducted on the education sector have revealed that school administrators' technological leadership competencies have a direct impact on student achievement and teacher satisfaction. Among these skills, technology integration, team management, and effective use of technological resources are particularly prominent (Indah et al., 2022). Similarly, research conducted in military and high-tech sectors emphasizes that, in addition to technical competence, the leader's commitment to the task, adaptability, and interdisciplinary communication skills are also critical (Bar-Gil, 2024).

Technological leaders are also expected to possess strong personal characteristics. These include self-discipline, accountability, vision development, and trust-building skills. To be successful in technology leadership, not only technical knowledge but also "soft skills" such as people management, emotional intelligence, and effective communication are required (Robertson, 2007).

In summary, technological leadership skills encompass a multidimensional set of competencies ranging from technical expertise to strategic management, communication, and ethical sensitivity. Developing these skills is essential for organizations to gain a competitive advantage in the digital age.

#### 5. Styles of Technological Leadership

Technological leadership styles refer to the behavioral patterns and management approaches adopted by leaders in organizational transformation processes accelerated by digitalization. In this context, it is emphasized that technological leadership cannot be explained by a single model, and that flexible and multifaceted leadership styles that vary according to

different situations are effective (Thite, 2000). In literature, innovative, transformational, interactive, and agile leadership styles represent different orientations of technological leadership in this context.

### **5.1. Innovative Technological Leadership**

Innovative technological leadership encompasses not only the ability to manage existing digital tools, but also the competence to foster a strategic vision, the courage to take risks, and a learning organization culture that will drive transformation at the organizational level. Research shows that technological leadership plays a critical role in increasing innovation.

For example, a study conducted in the education sector showed that technological leadership and information and communication technology literacy significantly increased teachers' innovative behaviors (Dasmo et al., 2025). Similarly, it has been emphasized that innovative leadership is decisive in organizations' adaptation to technological changes in the age of digital transformation (Sunarmo et al., 2023). This leadership style offers advantages such as making employees open to innovation, creating technology-focused learning environments, and turning change into opportunity.

Especially today, with the rapid proliferation of technologies such as artificial intelligence, automation, and data analytics, innovative leaders must possess not only technological knowledge but also social and ethical leadership skills that can transform organizational culture. In this context, innovative technological leadership has become a strategic necessity for institutions seeking to gain a sustainable competitive advantage.

### **5.2. Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership supports digital innovation by increasing employee motivation and making organizational culture open to innovation (Dupont et al., 2024). This leadership style stands out with its fundamental elements of vision creation, inspiration, sensitivity to individual differences, and intellectual stimulation. Transformational leaders demonstrate a high level of passion and self-confidence, engaging employees in their vision and motivating them to go beyond the set goals.

Research shows that transformational leadership has positive effects on innovation, performance, employee commitment, and job satisfaction. On the other hand, for this approach to be effective, the leader must be consistent in their words and actions, adhere to ethical principles, and build trust over the long term.

### 5.3. Interactive Leadership

Interactive leadership stands out with short-term goal management based on reward and punishment mechanisms; it is more effective in technical tasks and operational processes (Thite, 2000). In this leadership style, leaders tend to encourage employee performance with rewards while applying penalties for non-compliance with established standards. In this regard, it focuses on short-term goals, prioritizes stability, and exhibits a relatively more conservative stance in the face of change.

However, in today's digitalized work environments, where skills such as flexibility, creativity, and continuous learning have gained importance, it is emphasized that leadership models based solely on reward and punishment systems may be insufficient. An overly interactive leadership approach can hinder innovation and long-term development.

### 5.4. Agile Leadership

Agile leadership, one of the new generation leadership approaches, stands out with its decision-making flexibility, team-based work, and adaptability in rapidly changing technological environments (Bekiris, 2023). Agile leaders support their employees with horizontal organizational structures that encourage collaboration, individual development, and open communication instead of hierarchical control.

Research shows that agile leadership is not only a leadership style but also a strategic change tool that enables organizational culture transformation. Agile leadership, especially in digital transformation processes, increases decision-making speed, encourages innovation, and strengthens employee engagement (Ncube et al., 2024). This leadership style plays a significant role in creating a sustainable competitive advantage, enabling organizations to secure their long-term success. The literature emphasizes that this leadership style promotes organizational flexibility, effectively manages change processes, and prioritizes a people-centered management approach. Thus, leadership supports the sustainability of competitive advantage not only through technological or structural transformations but also by strengthening employee participation, motivation, and organizational engagement.

## 6. Ethics and Social Responsibility in Technological Leadership

Technological leadership is not limited to guiding technological decision-making processes, it also encompasses an inclusive sense of responsibility that considers the social, environmental, and ethical impacts of these

decisions. Rapidly developing technologies, such as artificial intelligence, bring leaders' ethical responsibilities to the forefront. This is because AI's decision-making mechanisms involve many ethical dilemmas, such as bias, privacy, accountability, and social equality (Jonas, 2014).

In this context, ethical leadership should be supported not only by individual values but also by corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices. Research shows that ethical leadership is positively related to CSR and that leaders who exhibit ethical behavior can make their organizations more responsible and sustainable. Particularly in sectors where AI-supported decision support systems are used, structuring these technologies in accordance with the principles of transparency and accountability falls within the ethical responsibility of leaders (Salazar et al., 2024).

With the integration of artificial intelligence technologies into social life, the scope of ethical responsibility is no longer limited to technical applications but encompasses much broader social dimensions. In this context, technological leaders should not only focus on internal goals such as organizational efficiency or competitive advantage but also consider the impact of these technologies on individual rights, social justice, and ethical principles. Issues such as the transparency of algorithmic decision-making processes, the protection of data privacy, the reduction of risks of discrimination based on artificial intelligence, and the preservation of human dignity are among the fundamental ethical priorities of technological leadership (Jonas, 2014).

In summary, the ethical and social responsibility dimension of technological leadership has become even more critical, especially with technologies such as artificial intelligence that can have powerful and unpredictable effects. In light of the need for a sustainable and fair digital future, it has become imperative for leaders to manage technology and guide society in accordance with ethical principles.

## **7. Organizational Outcomes of Technological Leadership**

Technological leadership covers not only the integration of digital tools into managerial processes, but also the direct and indirect effects of this process on organizational performance. Research shows that combining transformational leadership style with technological adaptation increases organizations' overall efficiency, employee motivation, and innovation capacity (Saptono et al., 2024). In this context, technological leadership contributes not only to operational improvement but also to abstract

outcomes such as organizational flexibility, adaptability to change, and strategic vision development.

Innovation and competitive advantage are also among the organizational outcomes of technological leadership. An effective technology leader helps organizations successfully navigate their digital transformation processes and achieve a leading position in the market through visionary thinking, change management, and strategic alignment (Dey, 2022). This leadership style also enhances organizational learning and adaptation capabilities by encouraging the development of digital competencies among employees.

On the other hand, aligning the organizational structure with technology and leaders' strategic decision-making skills in this process are also critical. Especially in the post-COVID-19 period, the technological leadership approach has been seen to facilitate adaptation to new norms such as remote working, agile management, and digital service delivery (Obuba, 2022).

In summary, technological leadership provides holistic organizational development by transforming not only the technical competencies of organizations but also their fundamental elements such as human resources, strategic orientation, and innovation capacity.

## 8. Challenges in Technological Leadership

Technological leadership, while strategically important due to its capacity to guide digital transformation processes, faces numerous complex challenges. First, technology is evolving rapidly, and keeping pace with this pace of change requires leaders to have both technical knowledge and a willingness to continuously learn. Leaders must also contend with structural problems such as organizational resistance to change, inadequate infrastructure, budget constraints, and a lack of skilled human resources (Sincar, 2013).

Furthermore, technological leadership is intertwined not only with technical competence but also with emotional, ethical, and cultural dimensions. For example, when integrating advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence into organizations, leaders must also manage employees' emotional responses, ethical concerns, and cultural adaptation. In this context, leaders are responsible for addressing fear and distrust of technology, while also accurately communicating its benefits (Kakabadse et al., 2008).

Another significant challenge in leadership is technological uncertainty. It is difficult to decide which technologies will provide long-term benefits and which will be temporary trends. Making strategic decisions in this uncertain

environment challenges risk management and visionary skills (Kovalchuk et al., 2022).

In addition, for technological leadership to be effective across the organization, not only top-level managers but also all stakeholders must embrace this vision. However, due to lack of training, communication gaps, and strategic misalignments, this often proves to be a challenging process (Gulpan & Baja, 2020).

## **9. The Future of Technological Leadership**

The future of technological leadership points to an era in which the need for leaders who can strategically steer advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, automation, the Internet of Things (IoT), and data analytics—rather than merely managing digital tools—is rapidly increasing. With the Fourth Industrial Revolution, leaders must not only use technology but also manage the transformation it creates, acting with ethical and social responsibility (Groscurth, 2018).

The most important qualities expected of future leaders include digital intelligence, flexibility in decision-making in variable environments, data-driven strategic planning, and cross-cultural digital communication skills. Leaders are now moving towards managing agile, horizontal, and inclusive organizations rather than classic hierarchical structures (Taylor et al., 2019). At the same time, it is emphasized that in an environment of increasing technological uncertainty, visionary leadership must be combined with operational leadership that can keep pace with rapid change (Kovalchuk et al., 2020).

However, in an era where artificial intelligence and automation are transforming the workforce, it is inevitable that leaders develop not only technical competence but also ethical guidance and human-centered approaches. Leadership models are now being reshaped by concepts such as digital humanism, a passion for sustainability, multicultural collaborations, and flexibility (Toader, 2024).

The future of technological leadership will be shaped by leaders who not only understand technology but also transform it to deliver social benefit and corporate sustainability. This leadership approach necessitates a visionary, inclusive, and ethically grounded perspective capable of managing both the opportunities and risks of the digital age.



## 10. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study aims to explain how leadership has evolved in line with the requirements of the digital age by addressing the concept of technological leadership within a multidimensional framework. Technological leadership encompasses not only the use of digital tools but also complex processes such as creating strategic vision, managing organizational transformation, developing employees' digital competencies, and fulfilling ethical responsibilities. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, and big data have necessitated a redefinition of leadership in both technical and human dimensions. In this context, technological leadership emerges as a holistic approach that responds to the leadership needs of the era.

An effective technology leader not only guides the use of technology but also transforms corporate culture, prepares employees for digital change, and develops an ethics-based management approach. Different styles of technological leadership, such as transformational, agile and visionary leadership, are effective to varying degrees in different contexts. Leaders who can flexibly blend these styles gain a strategic advantage. However, leaders also face many challenges, such as rapid technological change, digital inequality, algorithmic bias, data privacy, and organizational resistance.

In this context, the academic contribution of this study is to provide conceptual coherence regarding technological leadership and to systematically bring together information scattered throughout the literature. At the practical level, this study serves as a strategic guide for individuals in leadership positions. It clearly outlines the skills technological leaders should possess, the leadership styles that are effective in specific situations, and the ethical responsibilities they bear.

Several recommendations can be made for future research. First, empirical studies are needed to reveal how technological leadership is implemented in different sectors (education, healthcare, public, private). Furthermore, the role of leadership in AI-supported decision-making processes, employee perceptions, and their impact on organizational outcomes should be examined in detail. The effects of cultural context on leadership approaches should also be evaluated through comparative studies. Finally, in a world where digitalization is rapidly advancing, ethical and sustainable technological leadership models should be developed to shape the digital future and create leadership profiles.



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## Remote Leadership

Ebru Uluçay Bektaş<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Remote leadership is a leadership approach that enables teams to be managed effectively in environments where they are not physically present in the same place. The acceleration of digitalization, the proliferation of flexible working models, and the globalizing business world are increasing the importance of remote leadership. This leadership model requires not only the use of technology but also multidimensional skills such as effective communication, trust building, motivation, performance management, cultural awareness, and flexibility. The main challenges faced by remote leaders include communication breakdowns, lack of motivation, work-life balance problems, and barriers to collaboration in a virtual environment. To overcome these challenges, successful remote leaders must establish regular and transparent communication, create an environment of trust, use technology strategically, and develop approaches that address the individual needs of employees. In addition, cultural diversity and inclusion are important dimensions for effective management of virtual teams. In the future, remote leadership will be transformed by the integration of technologies such as artificial intelligence, virtual and augmented reality, making leaders' agile, flexible, and technology-oriented skills even more important. Employee experience and well-being will become a key factor for leaders to consider in their strategic decision-making. Indeed, remote leadership is emerging as a permanent and strategic leadership model in the modern business world, requiring both individual leadership competencies and organizational processes to be adaptive, flexible, and inclusive. This approach is critical for enhancing team performance, strengthening employee engagement, and ensuring sustainable success in digital business environments.

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1 Lecturer, Artvin Çoruh University, ebru.ulucaybektas@artvin.edu.tr,  
ORCID:0000-0002-5714-1854

## 1. Introduction

Remote leadership is defined as managing and directing business processes through digital communication technologies without being physically present in the same place as team members (Avolio, Kahai & Dodge, 2000). Unlike traditional forms of leadership, remote leadership takes place in environments where factors such as physical distance, time difference, and cultural diversity are intensely felt.

Avolio and Kahai (2003) emphasize that remote leadership is not limited to the use of technology, but also emphasizes the leader's ability to build trust, collaboration, and visioning skills in the digital environment. In this context, remote leadership goes beyond the technical use of digital tools and refers to a strategic approach to managing human relations in a virtual environment.

Globalization, digitalization, and technological innovations have radically changed the dynamics of the business world. Especially in the 21st century, the rapid development of communication technologies and the widespread use of internet-based working tools have paved the way for the emergence of remote working models as an alternative to the traditional office environment (Cascio & Shurygailo, 2003). This transformation has necessitated the development of new approaches to leadership and has led to the concept of "remote leadership" gaining more and more importance in the literature.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this process by necessitating remote working practices and has caused organizations around the world to reconsider their leadership styles (Contreras, Baykal & Abid, 2020). While traditional forms of leadership are based on physical presence, remote leadership requires coordinating geographically dispersed teams through digital tools. This requires leaders to restructure both their communication and motivation methods (Zhang et al., 2021).

Remote leadership is based on communication and collaboration processes sustained through technology. However, this model requires not only technical competencies but also skills such as trust building, empathy, cultural sensitivity, and performance management in a digital environment (Avolio, Kahai & Dodge, 2000). Therefore, remote leadership can be considered not only as an adaptation of existing leadership understandings to the digital environment, but also as the development of a new leadership paradigm. The aim of this chapter is to examine the concept of remote leadership in its theoretical and practical dimensions and to identify the

opportunities, challenges, and successful implementation strategies that leaders face.

## 2. Emergence of Remote Leadership

The origins of remote leadership can be traced back to the late 20th century with globalization and the integration of information technologies into business life. In particular, the spread of the Internet and the emergence of virtual teams ushered in a new era in leadership styles (Zaccaro & Bader, 2003). However, the period when this concept was discussed the most on a global scale was the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic forced millions of employees to switch to remote work and required leaders to adapt to this new situation and manage their teams efficiently (Kniffin et al., 2021).

The main challenges faced by leaders during this period included ensuring transparency in communication, maintaining employee engagement, supporting work-life balance, and effective management of digital tools (Contreras, Baykal, & Abid, 2020). Therefore, remote leadership is not only a temporary crisis management tool, but also a permanent leadership model in the modern business world.

## 3. The Importance of Remote Leadership

Today, remote leadership is of strategic importance for organizations for several reasons. First, the globalization of the labor market allows employees from different countries to work on the same projects. This requires the coordination of geographically dispersed teams and makes remote leadership inevitable. Secondly, thanks to digitalization and technological advances, many sectors prefer the remote working model as it provides both cost advantages and flexibility. The sustainability and efficiency of this model are largely dependent on leaders' effective leadership in digital environments (Purvanova, 2014). Third, remote leadership is critical not only for managing operational processes but also for employee engagement, motivation, and sustaining organizational culture. Studies in the literature reveal that job satisfaction and performance of employees increase in organizations where remote leadership is effective (Golden & Veiga, 2008). In this respect, it would be appropriate to state that remote leadership is a candidate to become one of the most fundamental forms of leadership in the business world in the future. Especially as hybrid working models become permanent, it is imperative for leaders to be active simultaneously in physical and virtual environments (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). This makes it necessary for leaders to acquire new competencies required by the digital age in addition to their classical leadership skills.

## **4. Key Skills of Remote Leadership**

Remote leadership is a multidimensional process that cannot be reduced to the use of digital tools. In this context, leaders need to both adapt their traditional leadership skills to the virtual environment and develop new skills. In the literature, digital communication skills, building trust and empathy, performance and goal management, and managing cultural diversity are among the key skills that are emphasized for effective remote leadership (Avolio, Kahai & Dodge, 2000).

### **4.1. Digital Communication Skills**

Communication in remote leadership is carried out through digital tools in environments where physical contact is limited. For effective communication, leaders need to be able to effectively use e-mail, video meeting platforms, instant messaging applications, and project management software (Gilson et al., 2015). However, communication is not only about technological competence; it is also important to convey messages in a clear, transparent, and understandable way. Research shows that transparency in communication increases employee engagement and job satisfaction in virtual teams (Kirkman et al., 2002).

### **4.2. Building Trust and Empathy**

Physical distance can undermine trust between team members. Therefore, it is a critical skill for remote leaders to instill trust and empathize with employees. Jarvenpaa and Leidner (1999) found that trust is a factor that directly affects collaboration and performance in virtual teams. Leaders can foster trust by providing regular feedback, taking employees' opinions into account, and being sensitive to individual needs (Zhang et al., 2021).

### **4.3. Performance and Goal Management**

Since it is not possible to observe the daily activities of employees one-on-one in remote leadership, performance evaluation processes take on a different dimension. In this context, leaders need to clearly define roles and responsibilities, set measurable goals, and develop regular follow-up mechanisms (Purvanova, 2014). It is also important that the feedback process is not only result-oriented but also supportive of learning and development (Staples, Hulland & Higgins, 1999).

#### **4.4. Managing Cultural Diversity**

With globalization, remote working brings together individuals from different countries and cultures in the same team. This requires leaders to develop cultural sensitivity and manage diversity effectively (Hinds, Liu & Lyon, 2011). Cultural diversity can increase innovation and creativity when managed correctly, but can lead to conflicts when mismanaged. Therefore, remote leaders should adopt an inclusive leadership approach and consider cultural differences as a source of enrichment (Rockstuhl et al., 2011).

#### **4.5. Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Support**

In a remote work environment, employees may face problems such as loneliness, isolation, and burnout (Kniffin et al., 2021). Leaders exhibiting high emotional intelligence, recognizing the emotional needs of employees, and creating psychological support mechanisms when necessary are important factors that increase team commitment (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2013).

#### **4.6. Technology Mastery and Flexibility**

Another skill that remote leaders should possess is the capacity to closely follow technological developments and integrate them into business processes. However, flexibility, the ability to adapt to changing conditions, is one of the key elements that determine the success of remote leadership (Cascio & Shurygailo, 2003). Leaders need to develop flexible strategies that can guide their teams even in times of uncertainty.

### **5. Challenges in Remote Leadership**

Although remote leadership provides many advantages to organizations, it also brings with it various challenges that can limit the effectiveness of leaders. In the literature, these challenges are examined under headings such as communication problems, lack of motivation and commitment, work-life balance problems, technological barriers, and conflicts arising from cultural differences (Contreras, Baykal & Abid, 2020).

#### **5.1. Communication Problems**

In teams that are not physically co-located, communication takes place mostly through digital tools. This can lead to delays in information flow and misunderstanding of messages (Kirkman et al., 2002). In addition, the lack of body language, gestures, and facial expressions in face-to-face communication creates difficulties, especially in communicating complex or



sensitive issues (Cascio & Shurygailo, 2003). Communication breakdowns can lead to trust issues and weakening of cooperation within the team.

## **5.2. Lack of Motivation and Commitment**

Maintaining organizational commitment and motivation of employees in a remote work environment is a significant challenge for leaders. Research shows that remote workers sometimes feel lonely, their sense of belonging to the organization decreases, and this situation negatively affects their job performance (Golden, Veiga & Dino, 2008). In this context, it is crucial for leaders to develop motivational strategies and interact with employees regularly.

## **5.3. Work-Life Balance Problems**

In the remote working model, the boundaries between employees' work and private lives can become blurred. Since employees often work in a home environment, they find it difficult to completely separate from work, and this increases the risk of burnout (Chong et al., 2020). At this point, leaders are expected to support employees in work-life balance and help them create healthy work routines.

## **5.4. Technological Barriers**

While technology is the main tool for communication and coordination in remote leadership, it is also a source of various problems. Internet connection problems, software incompatibilities, or limitations in accessing digital tools can negatively affect work processes (Gilson et al., 2015). In addition, the low level of digital literacy of some employees creates additional challenges for leaders in managing the team.

## **5.5. Challenges Arising from Cultural Diversity**

In globally dispersed teams, cultural diversity is an important source of enrichment, but can also lead to conflict when mismanaged (Hinds, Liu & Lyon, 2011). Different communication styles, ways of doing business, and values can lead to misunderstandings and cohesion problems within the team. If leaders fail to manage cultural differences, there may be a loss of trust and a decrease in performance within the team (Rockstuhl et al., 2011).

## 5.6. Leadership Roles and the Question of Identity

The lack of clarity in the roles and identities of leaders in remote leadership is another challenge. The leader-employee interaction that naturally develops in the physical environment may be more limited in the digital environment, and it may be difficult for leaders to display their authority or directive roles (Zaccaro & Bader, 2003). This can make it difficult to accept leadership, especially in newly formed teams.

## 6. Strategies for Successful Remote Leadership

Effective remote leadership requires not only the use of technological tools but also the strategies that leaders develop in terms of communication, motivation, trust, and cultural awareness. The literature highlights a number of key approaches to successful remote leadership (Avolio, Kahai & Dodge, 2000; Purvanova & Bono, 2009).

### 6.1. Effective Communication Strategies

The success of remote leadership largely depends on effective communication. Leaders' regular and open communication with employees reduces uncertainties and makes business processes more efficient (Zaccaro & Bader, 2003). In particular, the balanced use of synchronous and asynchronous communication tools supports both immediate coordination and long-term information sharing (Olson & Olson, 2012). Moreover, leaders setting clear goals and communicating expectations transparently contribute to building trust within the team.

### 6.2. Building and Sustaining Trust

Trust is one of the key determinants of collaboration and performance in remote teams. Leaders' appreciation of employees' contributions, transparent information sharing, and fair decision-making help to develop trust. It is also emphasized that trust should be supported not only by task-oriented but also by relationship-oriented communication (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995). Regular feedback meetings and one-on-one meetings are effective strategies for sustaining trust.

### 6.3. Strategic Use of Technology

Technological tools play a critical role in remote leadership, not only for communication but also for motivation and engagement. Research shows that choosing the right technology increases team productivity (Gilson et al., 2015). Leaders need to identify digital platforms that fit the needs of

the team and provide training opportunities for employees to use these tools effectively. In addition, using video conferences not only for business purposes but also to support social interaction strengthens team cohesion (Necley, 2021).

#### **6.4. Increasing Employee Motivation and Engagement**

To maintain the motivation of remote employees, it is important for leaders to develop reward systems that are aligned with goals (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In addition, involving employees in decision-making processes and supporting their autonomy are among the effective strategies that increase engagement (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002). Leaders providing personalized support by recognizing the individual needs of employees also increase motivation.

#### **6.5. Cultural Awareness and Inclusive Leadership**

In globally distributed teams, it is critical that leaders take cultural differences into account and adopt an inclusive management approach (Rockstuhl et al., 2011). Cultural diversity can enhance creativity when managed correctly, but can lead to conflict when mismanaged. Developing cultural intelligence and respecting different value systems supports team cohesion and performance.

#### **6.6. Flexible and Agile Leadership**

The sustainability of remote leadership depends on the ability of leaders to adapt quickly to changing conditions. The agile leadership approach envisages flexible decision-making in uncertain environments and actively involving employees in change processes (Joiner & Josephs, 2007). The ability of leaders to develop proactive strategies against unforeseen crises increases the resilience of remote teams.

### **7. Remote Leadership in the Future**

Remote leadership is not just a temporary crisis solution, but has become one of the key elements of modern organizations' sustainability strategies. Especially the digital transformation process accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic shows that remote leadership will be a more permanent and comprehensive management model in the future (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

### **7.1. Technological Transformation and Artificial Intelligence Integration**

One of the most prominent elements of remote leadership in the future is the integration of technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR) into leadership processes. AI-based decision support systems will strengthen leaders' data-driven decision-making processes, while also providing new opportunities to monitor and evaluate employee performance (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2017). AR and VR technologies will greatly reduce the physical distance barrier by providing more interactive and realistic communication opportunities in virtual meetings (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016).

### **7.2. Agile and Flexible Leadership Models**

Increasing uncertainties in the global business world suggest that agility and flexibility in remote leadership will become even more important in the future. Leaders will have to adopt a management approach that adapts quickly to changing market conditions, engages employees, and encourages continuous learning (Joiner & Josephs, 2007). In this context, future remote leaders will not only be strategic decision makers but also catalysts of learning and innovation.

### **7.3. Focus on Employee Experience and Well-being**

One of the important dimensions of remote leadership in the future is an increased focus on employee experience and well-being. Work-life balance, burnout, and psychological well-being will be among the priority management areas for leaders (Choudhury, Foroughi & Larson, 2021). Leaders need to adopt a more holistic approach that considers not only job performance but also the emotional needs of employees.

### **7.4. Globalization and Diversity Management**

The spread of remote working makes it easier for organizations to bring together employees from different geographies and cultures in the same teams. In the future, cultural intelligence and diversity management will be among the critical competencies of remote leaders (Rockstuhl et al., 2011). This situation will require leaders to see cultural differences as an asset and develop inclusive policies.

### **7.5. Sustainability and Social Responsibility Perspective**

Future leadership models will not only focus on efficiency, but will also include sustainability and social responsibility dimensions. The environmental impacts of remote leadership (e.g., reduction of carbon footprint) will be aligned with organizations' sustainability strategies (Hooker, 2021). In this context, leaders will have to consider not only business objectives but also social and environmental responsibilities.

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## Data Driven Leadership

Bilal Kobanoğlu<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This chapter explores the evolution of leadership in the context of data-driven decision-making and artificial intelligence (AI). Beginning with the historical example of Ramses II's failure at Kadesh, it underscores the timeless importance of accurate and timely information in leadership. The discussion then transitions to the modern organizational landscape, where traditional leadership models based on intuition and experience are contrasted with data-driven leadership, which emphasizes evidence-based decision-making, transparency, and measurable outcomes. The chapter outlines the fundamental principles of data-driven leadership, including objectivity, avoidance of bias, the establishment of measurable goals through Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and the cultivation of a strong data culture that promotes data literacy and accountability. Further, the integration of AI and big data analytics is examined as a transformative force that enhances strategic planning, risk management, and operational efficiency while presenting challenges related to ethics, privacy, and algorithmic bias. The chapter concludes that effective data-driven leadership bridges the gap between strategic vision and operational execution by converting complex datasets into actionable insights. Ultimately, leaders who successfully embed data and AI into their organizational culture can anticipate risks, adapt to changing environments, and foster sustainable innovation and competitive advantage in the digital age.

### 1. Introduction

Before 1299 BCE, near Kadesh on the banks of the Orontes River, one of the largest battles in recorded history took place. The combatants were two of the era's great powers: The Hittites, led by Muwatalli, and the Egyptians, under Ramses II. Their immediate objective was to seize territories such as Amurru and Amka, located along vital trade routes within the borders

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1 Assist.Prof.Dr., xxx University, bilalkobanoglu@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0003-0744-9209

of modern-day Syria. Yet, their ultimate aim was far grander: to become the singular dominant power in the world. The Hittite army, numbering 17,000 armored soldiers supported by 3,000 chariots, advanced toward the Orontes. Meanwhile, the Egyptian forces, organized into four divisions each bearing the name of a god Amon, Ra, Ptah, and Seth totaled 20,000 troops with 2,000 chariots, marching through the lands of Mesopotamia. Ramses II personally commanded the vanguard, leading the division named after Amon.

Hittite spies spread intelligence claiming that the Hittite army had not yet crossed the Orontes, but was positioned near Aleppo. Believing this misinformation, Ramses II sought to launch an immediate strike. He accelerated the Amon division to execute a surprise attack, unwittingly increasing the distance between it and the other divisions. In reality, the Hittites were already positioned and struck the Amon division when it least expected it. Ramses II, realizing the situation just before the assault, sent two of his officers to summon reinforcements from the nearest division. Yet, their arrival came too late. Erroneous and delayed data culminated in a devastating blow for Ramses II, turning what should have been a decisive strike into a near catastrophe.

In this chapter, we explore data-driven leadership how modern leaders can harness timely, accurate, and actionable data to make better decisions, avoid unnecessary risks, and achieve strategic objectives.

## **2. What is Data-Driven Leadership?**

Nowadays, numerous physical and organizational structures exist worldwide, ranging from well-organized streets, bridges, and iconic buildings to complex institutional systems such as governments, international organizations, social security frameworks, and banking networks. The effectiveness of these structures relies heavily on collaboration among individuals, highlighting the critical role of coordination in achieving desired outcomes.

In contemporary organizations, success in business, science, politics, and education depends not only on the professional competence of individual team members but also on their ability to work cohesively under effective leadership. Even when every member performs optimally, the absence of timely, accurate, and actionable information can compromise collective performance. This underscores the importance of leaders who can harness data to guide decision-making, coordinate activities, and align team efforts toward strategic objectives.

Consider the analogy of an orchestra: although each musician may be highly skilled, the ensemble's performance requires a conductor to synchronize their efforts and achieve harmony. Similarly, in modern organizations, leaders function as conductors of complex collaborative processes.

Richards and Engle (1986) define leadership as the process of articulating a vision, embodying organizational values, and creating an environment conducive to the achievement of goals. Leadership, therefore, encompasses all dimensions associated with the attainment of objectives, including the assumption of responsibilities and the management of teams both of which constitute complex and demanding endeavors. In contemporary organizational contexts, however, effective leadership increasingly relies on the strategic use of data. Data-driven leadership extends traditional conceptualizations by emphasizing evidence-based decision-making, continuous performance monitoring, and informed coordination of team activities. While Richards and Engle's (1986) framework highlights the foundational principles of leadership, integrating data analytics enhances leaders' ability to achieve organizational goals efficiently and adaptively, thereby bridging the gap between vision and actionable outcomes.

However, in today's data-intensive environments, traditional leadership approaches are often insufficient. Leaders must rely on data-driven insights to make informed decisions, anticipate challenges, and adapt strategies, thereby transforming the nature and impact of leadership.

In an era characterized by rapid technological advancements, globalization, and market volatility, organizations are increasingly required to adopt data-driven leadership approaches to maintain a competitive edge. Data-driven leadership entails the use of empirical evidence, analytical techniques, and technological tools to guide strategic decision-making and enhance organizational outcomes. Whereas traditional leadership often relies on intuition and experiential knowledge, data-driven leadership emphasizes informed decision-making based on both quantitative and qualitative insights (Arena, 2025).

The proliferation of big data, artificial intelligence (AI), and cloud computing has enabled organizations to gather, process, and interpret vast amounts of information. These capabilities allow leaders to anticipate market trends, optimize operational processes, and improve customer experiences. However, embracing a data-driven approach extends beyond the mere implementation of technological solutions; it also necessitates a transformation in organizational culture, a shift in leadership mindset, and careful consideration of ethical implications (Arena, 2025).

### 3. Differences between Traditional Leadership and Data-Driven Leadership

Traditional leadership primarily relies on intuition, personal experience, and established practices to guide decision-making. Leaders often make judgments based on their perception of situations, past successes, and their understanding of team dynamics. In contrast, data-driven leadership emphasizes the use of empirical evidence and analytical insights to inform decisions. Decisions are guided by quantitative metrics, qualitative data, and predictive models rather than solely by instinct or prior experience. While traditional leaders may focus on hierarchical authority and personal influence, data-driven leaders prioritize measurable outcomes and evidence-based strategies (Bektaş ve Atik, 2025; Geçgin, 2022). Communication in traditional leadership often flows top-down, whereas data-driven leadership encourages transparency through shared data and collaborative interpretation. Risk assessment under traditional approaches may be subjective, while data-driven leadership systematically evaluates risks using analytics. Performance evaluation in traditional leadership is often qualitative, whereas data-driven leaders rely on clear, measurable indicators. Traditional leadership adapts based on intuition and trial-and-error, whereas data-driven leadership adjusts strategies in response to real-time data. Overall, the key distinction lies in the foundation of decision-making: subjective judgment versus objective, evidence-based reasoning. Table 1 summarizes the key distinctions between traditional and data-driven leadership.

*Table 1. Key Differences between Traditional Leadership and Data-Driven Leadership*

Aspect	Traditional Leadership	Data-Driven Leadership
Decision Basis	Intuition, personal experience, past practices	Empirical evidence, analytics, data insights
Focus	Hierarchical authority, personal influence	Measurable outcomes, evidence-based strategies
Communication Style	Primarily top-down	Transparent, data-sharing, collaborative interpretation
Risk Assessment	Subjective judgment	Systematic evaluation using analytics
Performance Evaluation	Qualitative assessment	Quantitative, measurable indicators
Adaptation Approach	Trial-and-error, intuition	Strategy adjustment based on real-time data
Problem Solving	Experience-driven, reactive	Data-driven, proactive
Decision Speed	Variable, depending on leader's experience	Potentially faster, guided by data insights
Accountability	Often informal, based on authority	Transparent, evidence-based
Strategic Orientation	Past-oriented, relies on precedent	Forward-looking, predictive, and objective

*Note. This table was developed by the author based on original research and conceptual analysis.*

4. The Importance of Data in Business and Its Impact on Leadership

In today’s rapidly evolving business landscape, data has become a pivotal asset for organizations aiming to maintain competitiveness and drive informed decision-making. The integration of data analytics into business operations offers numerous advantages that significantly influence leadership practices.

Data-driven decision-making enables leaders to formulate strategic moves in uncertain environments by relying on evidence-based insights rather than intuition, thereby enhancing foresight in long-term planning. For instance, the analysis of market trends allows organizations to make more accurate decisions regarding investment priorities or entry strategies for specific regions. This process strengthens strategic planning by providing a solid roadmap toward long-term objectives. Beyond operational efficiency, data becomes a critical source of innovation and competitive advantage within strategic management, as leaders can design more adaptive and innovative

strategies in response to dynamic market conditions. Risk management also gains a proactive dimension, since data-driven signals highlight potential threats in advance, enabling leaders to transform crises into opportunities through well-informed strategic initiatives. This approach not only mitigates risks but also enhances organizational resilience in the face of external challenges. Moreover, cultural transformation occurs as data occupies a central role in managerial philosophy; employees internalize data-oriented thinking, contributing directly to strategic goals while fostering transparency and accountability as key components of organizational culture. In such a context, leaders act not only as decision-makers but also as transformative agents who embed data as a strategic asset within the culture of the organization.

Heraclitus' famous assertion that "the only constant is change" has become more meaningful than ever in today's world. Change now manifests not only in its continuity but also in its accelerating momentum. The global business environment has evolved into a landscape defined by intense competition, heightened uncertainty, and the rapid circulation of information. Most organizational needs are shaped within this fast-paced flow of data and are closely tied to market dynamics, which continuously test strategic flexibility. In such a context, organizational strategies must exhibit agility and adaptability from boardroom decisions to the smallest operational processes. At this point, data-driven leadership emerges not as a mere option but as an indispensable necessity for ensuring organizational sustainability and securing long-term competitive advantage.

## **5. Fundamental Principles of Data-Driven Leadership**

Data-driven leadership is a fundamental phenomenon that strengthens decision-making processes in modern organizations. This approach enables leaders to base their decisions not solely on intuition, but on the analysis and interpretation of available data, ensuring a more objective and bias-free perspective. Furthermore, clearly defining strategic goals and tracking them through measurable indicators allows both the concrete evaluation of performance and the systematic monitoring of decision outcomes. The interaction between data and measurable objectives enables leaders to continuously optimize processes and enhance organizational effectiveness. All of these elements function interactively as the fundamental structures of data-driven leadership, providing a reliable and effective foundation for leadership practice.

### 5.1. Using Data in Decision-Making Processes

Data-driven decision-making (DDDM) is recognized as a critical approach for enhancing organizational performance in contemporary businesses. As highlighted by Sarioğuz and Miser (2024), DDDM enables organizations to improve organizational efficiency by streamlining operations, identifying bottlenecks, and optimizing resource allocation. For example, a company leveraging real-time production data can detect inefficiencies and adjust production schedules accordingly, thereby enhancing operational performance (Sarioğuz & Miser, 2024).

In terms of innovation, DDDM provides a data-based foundation for ideation and experimentation. Organizations can analyze data to identify market trends, customer preferences, and emerging opportunities, which informs the development of new products, marketing strategies, and business models. For instance, a technology firm may examine consumer feedback to identify market gaps and design new features or products that address evolving demands (Sarioğuz & Miser, 2024).

Moreover, in today's competitive business environment, competitiveness is closely tied to the ability to adapt quickly and make informed decisions. DDDM helps organizations gain a competitive edge by supporting decisions based on real-time data. Companies that utilize data for market research, customer insights, and operational improvements can respond proactively to market shifts, emerging trends, and competitor actions (Sarioğuz & Miser, 2024).

Leaders who utilize data analytics can make more informed decisions, leading to improved business outcomes. Data-driven decision-making allows organizations to optimize operations, remain competitive, and make informed decisions, thereby reducing risks and enhancing overall performance (Arena, 2025).

Data-driven leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping strategic decision-making within organizations. This approach enables leaders not only to understand current operational conditions but also to anticipate future opportunities and risks. At the strategic level, data-driven leadership supports the prioritization of resources, the formulation of long-term objectives, and the enhancement of organizational agility. By leveraging analytical insights, leaders can design innovation and growth strategies, execute proactive initiatives that secure competitive advantages, and respond swiftly to evolving market conditions. In this way, a data-oriented approach



establishes a robust link between strategic vision and operational execution, thereby contributing to the sustainable success of the organization.

## **5.2. Objectivity and Avoiding Bias**

In decision-making and judgment processes, individuals frequently rely on heuristics, which are simplified cognitive strategies for processing information. The use of these strategies can lead to cognitive biases (CB), characterized by systematic and predictable deviations from rational evaluation. For instance, individuals may tend to overestimate the accuracy of their own judgments (overconfidence bias), perceive past events as more predictable than they actually were (hindsight bias), or selectively seek and interpret evidence in ways that reinforce pre-existing beliefs (confirmation bias). Cognitive biases, therefore, represent systematic patterns of deviation that can influence decision-making outcomes, potentially causing judgments to diverge from normative or rational standards (Berthet, 2022).

Within the context of data-driven leadership, ensuring objectivity and mitigating the influence of cognitive biases is of critical importance. Leaders can limit the systematic effects of biases by relying on reliable and accurate data rather than intuitive or subjective judgments. For instance, the use of data analytics and statistical models can help prevent errors arising from cognitive biases such as overconfidence or confirmation bias. Moreover, data-driven processes enable the objective evaluation of different scenarios and support strategic decisions based on historical evidence. In this way, data-driven leadership minimizes the impact of systematic deviations caused by biases, promoting more rational, transparent, and reliable decision-making.

## **5.3. Measurable Goals and KPIs**

The strategic use of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) greatly boosts organizational productivity and efficiency. Thoughtfully crafted KPIs empower leaders to pinpoint areas needing enhancement, allocate resources effectively, and steer decisions based on data. Well-defined KPIs help employees grasp expectations clearly, improving their focus and performance. Moreover, KPIs foster employee motivation and engagement by providing objective, fair measures of success. However, excessively strict or unattainable KPIs can harm morale and increase stress, so KPIs must strike a balance between ambition and achievability. For managers, KPIs enable quicker, evidence-based decision-making. Ongoing tracking helps organizations identify trends, foresee challenges, and adapt strategies proactively. Ultimately, the effective implementation of well-crafted KPIs

drives organizational success, enhances productivity, improves customer satisfaction, and supports sustained business growth (Kushariyadi et al., 2025).

Data analytics provides leaders with insights into market trends, customer behaviors, and operational efficiencies, enabling the formulation of effective strategies. By leveraging data, leaders can anticipate market shifts and align organizational goals accordingly (Chigbu, 2025). Implementing data-driven approaches helps in identifying inefficiencies and areas for improvement within business processes. This leads to enhanced operational efficiency and fosters innovation, as leaders can make adjustments based on real-time data insights (Schmidt, 2023). Data analytics aids in identifying potential risks and challenges, allowing leaders to take proactive measures. This proactive approach to leadership helps in mitigating risks and ensuring the organization's stability and growth (Ford and Abel, 2024).

The effective use of KPIs is directly linked to one of the fundamental principles of data-driven leadership: measurable goals and performance monitoring. Data-driven leaders rely on objective and concrete indicators to make decisions, minimizing deviations caused by biases and enhancing organizational performance. When KPIs are designed in alignment with strategic objectives, they support leaders in evidence-based decision-making and make employees' contributions more visible. Consequently, a performance management system is established that aligns closely with the core principles of data-driven leadership.

#### **5.4. Building a Data Culture**

In data-driven leadership, the effective utilization of data is a critical factor for organizational success. The quality, accuracy, and accessibility of data directly influence the leader's ability to make informed, objective decisions. Ensuring that data is properly generated, collected, and managed relies heavily on the organization's overall data culture. A strong data culture promotes data literacy among employees, encourages evidence-based decision-making, and facilitates the seamless flow of information across all levels of the organization. Consequently, the development and maintenance of a robust data culture are essential for maximizing the impact of data-driven leadership.

According to Pörtner et al. (2024) data literacy is a critical competency for individuals and organizations in today's data-driven world, as it enables employees to understand, interpret, and apply data effectively in decision-making processes. In data-driven leadership, leaders base their decisions

on objective data and ensure that the entire organization adopts a data-oriented mindset to achieve strategic goals. This is analogous to an orchestra conductor, whose slightest movement of the baton must be accurately perceived and executed by the musicians. Similarly, a data-driven leader establishes effective data communication by enabling employees to correctly interpret data and act in a coordinated manner during decision-making processes. In organizations with high levels of data literacy, employees actively participate in data-driven decision-making, translating the leader's vision and strategic plans into effective action. Consequently, without the development of organizational data literacy, the effectiveness of data-driven leadership remains limited.

The adoption of data-driven leadership promotes a culture of transparency and accountability within organizations. Leaders who embrace data analytics are better equipped to make decisions, ensuring compliance and fostering trust among stakeholders (Kesari, 2025).

## **6. Data-Driven Leadership in the Age of Artificial Intelligence**

Technological advancements have enabled robots and computer systems to emulate aspects of human intelligence. Artificial intelligence (AI) fundamentally encompasses the simulation of cognitive functions such as learning, reasoning, problem-solving, and decision-making. AI can be understood as a subset within the broader field of information technologies, with machine learning (ML) serving as the foundational mechanism that allows systems to learn from data independently of explicit programming. Artificial neural networks, inspired by the human brain, facilitate complex tasks such as pattern recognition and visual analysis, while Natural Language Processing (NLP) enables computers to comprehend and generate human language. Additionally, computer vision technologies allow AI systems to interpret visual data and recognize objects, individuals, or emotional states. Taken as a whole, these components highlight AI's potential to produce strategic and transformative impacts across diverse domains (Madanchian et al., 2023).

In data-driven leadership, insights serve as fundamental tools that enable leaders to make rapid and informed decisions. These insights not only allow for the evaluation of past performance but also provide guidance for forward-looking strategic directions. When obtained accurately and in a timely manner, insights enhance an organization's competitive advantage and strengthen the agility of its leadership.

Generating insights in large organizations presents significant challenges, as it requires the integration of data from numerous departments. The diversity of these data sources (including differences in format, quality, and timing) complicates the processing and synthesis of meaningful information. Consequently, leaders must implement robust data management and integration strategies to ensure the reliability and comprehensiveness of the insights produced.

Insights play a pivotal role in shaping an organization’s strategic management processes. The identification of accurate patterns and trends ensures that these insights effectively guide strategic decision-making. In this way, leaders can transform insights from mere information into a strategic tool that is fully integrated with the organization’s management and long-term objectives.

In this context, within an organization where a data-driven culture is well established, insights generated in real-time by artificial intelligence and made accessible to all levels of management enhance strategic decision-making flexibility. Real-time insights enable leaders to respond swiftly to changing market conditions and to identify opportunities at an early stage. Consequently, the organization not only achieves operational efficiency but also attains agile and proactive strategic management, thereby strengthening its competitive advantage.

The advantages of AI-based, data-driven leadership are not limited solely to predictive capabilities; while it offers a wide range of benefits, there are inherent challenges associated with its implementation. These challenges are summarized in Table 2.

*Table 2. Integration of Artificial Intelligence in Leadership*

Application Area	AI Contribution	Potential Benefits	Challenges
Strategic Planning	Data analytics for trend forecasting	Faster and more accurate decisions	Data reliability and ethical concerns
Risk Management	Real-time risk assessment	Proactive solutions during crises	Algorithmic biases
Resource Allocation	Automated optimization tools	Increased efficiency	Over-reliance on technology
Performance Analysis	Monitoring and evaluating employee performance	Objective feedback	Privacy concerns
Communication and Collaboration	AI-supported communication platforms	Enhanced team coordination	Human-AI interaction challenges

*Note. This table was developed by the author based on original research and conceptual analysis.*

Artificial intelligence (AI)-enhanced, data-driven leadership has emerged as a transformative approach that strengthens strategic and operational decision-making across multiple organizational domains. In **strategic planning**, AI leverages data analytics for trend forecasting, enabling leaders to make faster and more accurate decisions; however, concerns regarding data reliability and ethical implications remain critical (Table 2). Within **risk management**, real-time risk assessments allow leaders to implement proactive solutions during crises, although algorithmic biases may constrain effectiveness. **Resource allocation** benefits from automated optimization tools that improve operational efficiency, yet excessive reliance on technology introduces potential vulnerabilities. In the area of **performance analysis**, AI facilitates objective evaluation of employee outcomes while simultaneously raising privacy considerations. Furthermore, AI-supported **communication and collaboration** platforms enhance team coordination and knowledge sharing, though challenges in human-AI interaction must be carefully managed. Across all these application areas, AI provides powerful advantages that support informed leadership, but ethical, technical, and organizational constraints require deliberate attention. Consequently, organizations must integrate AI technologies into strategic management processes in a balanced manner, ensuring that insights not only inform decisions but also align with long-term organizational objectives. Ultimately, AI-based, data-driven leadership functions as a comprehensive tool, delivering actionable insights that enhance organizational agility and strengthen competitive advantage.

## 7. Conclusion

In today's complex and rapidly changing environment, success depends not only on individual expertise but also on the practice of data-driven leadership. While traditional leadership emphasizes vision and values, data-driven leadership highlights evidence-based decision-making, continuous monitoring of processes, and the alignment of teams with strategic objectives. With the rise of big data and artificial intelligence, leaders are now better equipped to anticipate risks and seize opportunities, yet this approach also requires cultural transformation and a strong awareness of ethical responsibilities.

Traditional leadership often depends on instinct, personal experience, and hierarchical authority, with decisions shaped by past practices and subjective judgment. By contrast, data-driven leadership centers on evidence, analytics, and measurable outcomes, ensuring that choices are informed by both quantitative and qualitative insights. It promotes transparency, collaborative interpretation of information, and systematic risk evaluation, while also

enabling faster, more adaptive responses through real-time data. Ultimately, the core difference lies in the foundation of decision-making: one rooted in intuition and precedent, the other in objective, evidence-based reasoning.

In today's fast-paced and competitive business environment, data has become an essential asset for effective leadership. Data-driven leadership enables leaders to make evidence-based decisions, anticipate risks, and design adaptive strategies that align with organizational goals. By integrating analytics, KPIs, and measurable objectives, leaders can optimize processes, enhance operational efficiency, and foster innovation. Equally important, cultivating a strong data culture ensures that employees adopt a data-oriented mindset, promoting transparency, accountability, and coordinated action throughout the organization. Ultimately, data-driven leadership bridges the gap between strategic vision and operational execution, supporting sustainable success and long-term competitive advantage.

Data-driven leadership enables organizations to transform complex datasets into actionable insights, providing leaders with a foundation for evidence-based strategic and operational decision-making. By leveraging AI and advanced analytics, data-driven leaders can conduct real-time monitoring, anticipate trends, and implement proactive risk management, enhancing organizational agility and efficiency. Data-driven leadership also supports objective performance evaluation, optimized resource allocation, and effective collaboration, while fostering transparency, accountability, and a culture of evidence-based decision-making. Despite its advantages, data-driven leadership requires careful attention to challenges such as algorithmic biases, data reliability, privacy concerns, and human-AI interaction. Overall, data-driven leadership reinforces competitive advantage, strengthens decision-making quality, and institutionalizes a culture where strategy and execution are closely aligned.

Data-driven leaders who strategically integrate AI and analytics into organizational processes will be able to anticipate market shifts, adapt proactively, and drive continuous innovation. By embedding data-driven leadership at the core of strategy, organizations can sustain long-term competitiveness and achieve transformative impact within their industries.

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## Green (Sustainable) Leadership

Mahmut Özdemirkol<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This study theoretically examines the concept of green leadership, which has developed based on principles of sustainability and environmental responsibility. Today's rapidly changing economic, social, and ecological dynamics necessitate redefining leadership. While traditional leadership approaches meet the needs of industrial society, a new sustainability-centered leadership model is needed in today's world, characterized by globalization, digitalization, and environmental crises. In this context, green leadership requires environmental awareness and a holistic management approach based on ethical values, social justice, innovation, and intergenerational responsibility. Green leadership has become an ethical choice and a strategic imperative for today's organizations. This approach contributes to achieving sustainable development goals at the institutional level by guiding leaders to balance economic success, environmental protection, and social welfare. The study highlights the growing importance of green leadership in academic and applied management literature.

This study examines the fundamental dynamics that shape green leadership under five headings: environmental crises, economic and market dynamics, societal expectations and consumer behavior, the international political and institutional framework, and the pressure for competition and innovation. These dynamics transform green leadership from a mere environmental orientation into a transformational tool that aligns with global environmental policies and integrates economic rationality and societal expectations. Furthermore, through theoretical foundations, the study explores the relationship between green leadership and the sustainability paradigm, its borrowings from classical leadership theories, and its place within the context of corporate social responsibility.

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1 Assistant Professor, Kafkas University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, m.ozdemirkol, ORCID: 0000-0003-4878-9947

## 1. Introduction

The The rapidly changing dynamics of the technological age necessitate rethinking the concept of leadership. While traditional leadership approaches have been able to meet the needs of industrial society, a new leadership model is needed in today's structure, shaped by globalization, digitalization, and sustainability. One prominent approach in this context is green (sustainable) leadership.

The increasing impact of environmental crises (climate change, depletion of natural resources, and the decline of biodiversity) directly impacts not only ecological balances but also economic structures, social well-being, and organizational strategies (Cengiz, 2025:150; Turguttoptaş, 2020:268). The process of combating environmental problems and transferring environmental values to future generations imposes various responsibilities on the state, individuals, civil society, and the private sector (Özdemirkol, 2025:36). Therefore, environmental problems are no longer merely the subject of environmental policies, but have also become part of a systemic transformation that shapes management, leadership, and innovation (Oktaysoy, 2025:109; Tuna & Yıldız, 2023:73; Battal & Yılmaz, 2025: 461; Bayrakoğlu et al., 2023: 205).

The concept of sustainability entered the global agenda, particularly with the Brundtland Report of 1987, and was defined as meeting today's needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet them (United Nations, 2025). This understanding represents a holistic approach that addresses environmental, economic, and social dimensions. The Rio Conference in 1992 brought the principles of sustainable development, which consider the balance between development and the environment, to the forefront (United Nations, 1992). At the 2012 Rio+20 Summit, institutional frameworks for a green economy and sustainable development were highlighted with the final declaration titled "The Future We Want" (United Nations, 2012).

Meanwhile, changing consumer behavior and increasing environmental awareness have forced businesses to adopt environmentally sensitive strategies (Bahçecik & Talebi, 2020: 229-231; Deniz et al., 2025: 68; Battal & Yılmaz, 2025: 478; Çavuşoğlu & Durmaz, 2019: 303). In this process, leaders' success has begun to be measured by financial indicators and environmental and social contributions (Tuna & Yıldız, 2023: 63). Thus, green leadership has emerged as an approach that focuses on achieving organizations' economic goals and adding value to society and the environment.

Consequently, leadership is being redefined in today's environment with a broad vision encompassing environmental and social responsibilities. This section discusses the theoretical foundations of green leadership, the relationships between the sustainability paradigm and leadership theories, and the dimensions of corporate social responsibility. The new dimensions of green leadership that it has gained in the technological age are also discussed.

## 2. The Dynamics Behind Green Leadership

Green leadership is a leadership approach rooted in the concept of sustainability and addresses the long-term responsibilities of organizations in terms of environmental, economic, and social dimensions (Battal & Yılmaz, 2025; Oktaysoy et al., 2025). In this context, green leadership represents an environmentally conscious stance and a holistic approach that incorporates ethical values, social responsibility, and intergenerational justice into organizational decision-making processes. Green leadership is not merely a modern management approach or organizational choice; it emerges due to global structural transformations and environmental, economic, social, and institutional pressures. In today's complex and dynamic business environment, leaders' adoption of a sustainability-centered approach is not limited to assuming environmental responsibility; it also encompasses strategic decision-making processes, innovation orientations, and social interactions (Altıntaş, 2023; Önen & Elkırımış, 2022).

In this context, five fundamental dynamics that necessitate green leadership stand out: environmental crises, transformations in economic and market conditions, societal expectations and consumer behavior, international political and institutional frameworks, and the pressures for competition and innovation. Studies in the literature (Ay & Yılmaz, 2004; Azazi & Uzma, 2022; Bahçecik & Talebi, 2020; Bayrakdaroğlu et al., 2023; Erkan et al., 2013; Onat & Yükselen, 2024; Torun, 2022; Oktaysoy, 2025; Özalp, 2022; Yangil, 2016) examine these dynamics from different perspectives and demonstrate the necessity of green leadership. Table 1 summarizes these dynamics that shape green leadership and shows the reflection of each in organizations. This table clearly demonstrates the scope of green leadership, encompassing its environmental, economic, social, and institutional dimensions.

*Table 1. Key Dynamics Shaping Green Leadership*

Dynamic	Definition / Explanation	Reflection in Green Leadership
Environmental Crises	Climate change, depletion of natural resources, energy crises	Integrating environmental risks into strategic management, assuming ecological responsibility
Economic and Market Dynamics	Green economy, sustainable business models, emerging sectors	Seizing new market opportunities, developing sustainable business strategies
Societal Expectations	Consumers' demand for eco-friendly products and social responsibility	Building corporate reputation and trust, implementing green marketing strategies
International Framework	Paris Agreement, Rio Summits, Agenda 21	Aligning global norms and standards with organizational strategy and vision
Competition and Innovation	Green innovation, eco-friendly technologies, digital transformation	Directing innovation toward sustainability, achieving competitive advantage

As can be seen from the table, green leadership is not a one-dimensional phenomenon but rather the product of a multifaceted and integrated transformation. Environmental crises drive leaders and organizations to assume ecological responsibility, while transformations in economic and market conditions make adopting sustainable business models imperative. On the other hand, societal expectations and consumer behaviors compel leaders to develop strategies that build corporate reputation and public trust.

International political and institutional frameworks embodied in documents such as the Brundtland Report, the Rio Summits, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Paris Agreement necessitate aligning global norms with organizational strategies. Finally, the pressure of competition and innovation requires leaders to achieve both competitive and sustainable organizational performance through eco-friendly technologies and green innovation.

In light of these dynamics, green leadership not only responds to current challenges but also represents a multidimensional leadership approach that reshapes the organizational and social structures of the future around the axis of sustainability. The five fundamental dynamics that necessitate the emergence of green leadership assign leaders multidimensional responsibilities beyond mere environmental concerns, encompassing the pursuit of economic opportunities, the fulfillment of societal expectations, alignment with international norms, and the strategic direction of innovation.

Therefore, understanding and operationalizing green leadership within organizations requires examining the role of each dynamic individually. The following sections will discuss the influence of each factor from environmental crises to economic and market dynamics, societal expectations to international institutional frameworks, and innovation pressures to competitive imperatives in detail. This approach reveals how leadership behaviors and organizational strategies are shaped within the sustainability framework.

### 3. The concept Global Environmental Crises

Of green leadership places ecological concerns at the core of business strategies, aiming not only to respond to crises but also to create new opportunities for organizational success. At this point, the notions of green management and innovation emerge as fundamental components of leadership. Global environmental issues such as climate change, drought, energy crises, floods, and biodiversity loss directly affect the living conditions of both individuals and organizations. These developments have made it necessary to redefine the understanding of leadership, thereby promoting the formulation and implementation of environmentally friendly development and growth policies (Erkan et al., 2013; Demir et al., 2025). Environmental crises have disrupted ecological balance and become structural pressures that transform economic systems, social structures, and organizational strategies (Oktaysoy, 2025:109). Therefore, green leadership is not merely a reaction to environmental problems but a transformation process compelled by these problems.

In this context, Battal and Yılmaz (2025:459–460) define green management as an approach in which businesses center all their activities around environmental considerations by considering their ecological responsibilities. This perspective is not independent of organizational objectives; on the contrary, it is almost impossible for a company that disregards environmental issues to achieve long-term competitiveness. Hence, environmental crises serve not only as a threat but also as a catalyst for organizational transformation and renewal in green leadership.

As Bayrakdaroglu et al. (2023:205) emphasize, green innovations also stand at the heart of this transformation process. New ideas, products, and processes that reduce environmental burdens provide both a response to the threats posed by crises and an opportunity for achieving sustainable development goals. Similarly, Kuşat (2013: 4898) underlines that environmental degradation obliges countries to develop sustainable policies

that preserve the balance of natural resources rather than focusing solely on economic growth.

In summary, global environmental crises have positioned green leadership as a management model rooted in ecological concerns and a central component of organizational transformation and the pursuit of sustainable development. Therefore, environmental problems can be regarded as both the driving force and the transformative power behind the emergence of green leadership.

### **3.1. Economic and Market Dynamics**

One key dynamic behind green leadership is the influence of economic and market conditions. Today, the pressures created by environmental issues impact ecological systems and have profound effects on economic systems (Bahçecik & Talebi, 2020:223; Onat & Yükselen, 2024:1710). The costs associated with climate change, the gradual depletion of natural resources, and fluctuations in energy prices necessitate a sustainability-oriented restructuring of economies (Deniz et al., 2025:68; Özalp & Erbaşı, 2022:41). In this context, the shift of businesses and governments toward environmentally friendly investments emerges not merely as an ethical responsibility but also as an economic imperative (Deniz et al., 2025:76).

From the perspective of market dynamics, the transformation in consumer behavior is particularly noteworthy (Bayrakoglu et al., 2023:200). The increasing prevalence of environmentally conscious consumers has rapidly driven demand for eco-friendly products and services (Onat & Yükselen, 2024:1711). This trend compels companies to develop sustainability strategies to protect their brand value and secure a competitive advantage. Investments in green technologies, renewable energy, and carbon-neutral production processes contribute to environmental protection and open the door to long-term economic gains.

The impact of economic and market dynamics on green leadership can be considered a driving force of transformation. Green leadership is fueled by environmental sensitivity, economic rationality, and changing market conditions. Therefore, green leadership holds the potential to guide a sustainable transformation while balancing environmental policies with economic considerations.

### **3.2. Social Expectations and Consumer Behavior**

One of the prominent dynamics in the development of green leadership is societal expectations and consumer behavior. The growing environmental

awareness among societies exerts direct pressure on organizations and leaders. In this regard, Onat and Yükselen (2024) emphasize that societal expectations directly shape corporate sustainability strategies, while Bahçecik and Talebi (2020) point out that this transformation in consumer behavior brings green marketing and sustainable brand value to the forefront. Accordingly, green leadership becomes a critical element in fulfilling environmental responsibilities and building social trust and corporate reputation.

In recent years, societies' recognition of the seriousness of environmental problems and disasters has led individuals to adopt more environmentally conscious attitudes (Çavuşoğlu & Durmaz, 2019: 303). The rise in environmental concern and awareness has resulted in significant changes in consumer behavior, leading to an increasing demand for eco-friendly products and services (Çavuşoğlu & Durmaz, 2019: 304).

Since the sustainability of the ecosystem is directly linked to human activity, societal sensitivity toward environmental issues has grown. As environmental concerns have risen, consumer interest in sustainable products and services has also increased, making sustainable marketing a globally significant issue. Onat and Yükselen (2024: 1710) note that sustainability-oriented marketing strategies focus on conserving and regenerating natural resources, reaching large audiences, transforming consumption habits, and enhancing consumer awareness. Similarly, green purchasing behavior is defined as a conscious consumption process to reduce environmental impacts and preserve natural resources (Onat & Yükselen, 2024: 1711).

Today's consumers pay attention to fulfilling their needs and whether companies comply with social norms, respect natural life, and fulfill their social responsibilities. Individuals with positive environmental attitudes express a stronger willingness to make an effort to purchase products from environmentally responsible companies. This tendency positively influences corporate environmental image and contributes to competitive advantage (Çavuşoğlu & Durmaz, 2019, p. 304). In this context, consumer demands especially in developed countries are increasingly becoming a preference for partnering with companies that prioritize environmental responsibility and social justice (Bahçecik & Talebi, 2020: 231). Research thus highlights that companies must pursue profit and demonstrate environmental responsibility in response to a more conscious society.

As environmental problems intensify, individuals' consumption habits are also transforming around the axis of sustainability. Deniz et al. (2025: 69) define green consumption as the motivation of individuals to minimize environmental impacts throughout purchasing, usage, and disposal



processes. In this respect, societal expectations and consumer behaviors constitute one of the strongest driving forces behind green leadership. Indeed, green leadership is about responding to environmental crises and guiding a sustainable transformation by addressing societal demands.

### **3.3. International Political and Institutional Framework**

One The international political and institutional framework is one of the most significant dynamics behind green leadership. Ay and Yılmaz (2004) emphasize that Agenda 21 assigns important responsibilities to industrial organizations based on the principle of sustainability. In this context, green leadership must respond to local organizational needs and global responsibilities. Global environmental policies directly shape leadership approaches. The concept of sustainability was first defined at the international level in the Brundtland Report (1987) and was subsequently reinforced through the 1992 Rio Summit and the 2012 Rio+20 Summit. The institutionalization of this process has been achieved through the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which impose comprehensive responsibilities on all actors from states to businesses.

The impact of internationally developed environmental policies on businesses is quite evident. The environmental damage caused by corporations is considered one of the main contributors to global environmental problems. Therefore, companies must develop environmentally sensitive strategies at every stage from defining their mission and objectives to managing production processes and waste management. However, several challenges arise during implementation: securing financial resources, obtaining the necessary human capital for eco-friendly production, and anticipating consumer reactions to green products can all limit corporate environmental strategies (Bahçecik & Talebi, 2020:229). Despite these constraints, green leadership provides the vision and strategic guidance needed to overcome such obstacles, leading organizations toward a more sustainable future.

Within this framework, green marketing constitutes a key dimension of how global environmental policies are reflected in local practices. Green marketing represents a holistic approach that reshapes corporate marketing activities around the axis of environmental responsibility (Deniz et al., 2025: 68). Developed in line with international institutional regulations and consumer demands, this approach enables green leadership to balance economic and environmental responsibilities.

In conclusion, the international political and institutional framework is one of the fundamental dynamics driving green leadership. The process

extending from the Brundtland Report to the Sustainable Development Goals represents the evolution of global environmental policies and the institutionalization of the green leadership concept itself. In this regard, green leadership distinguishes itself through its ability to integrate global responsibilities into local strategies.

### **3.4. Competition and Innovation Pressure**

In today's world, where globalization is accelerating, technological developments are intensifying, and markets are becoming increasingly competitive, the sustainable survival of businesses depends on their ability to move beyond traditional leadership models and adopt contemporary leadership styles (Bayrakoğlu et al., 2023:199). In this context, green leadership is not merely an approach representing environmental sensitivity, but also a strategic orientation that responds to innovation and competitive pressures.

The literature emphasizes that innovation processes cannot achieve lasting success without environmental sustainability. From this perspective, green leaders do not view innovation solely as a tool for gaining a competitive advantage; instead, they direct it toward combating climate change, reducing environmental burdens, and generating social benefits. Indeed, Bayrakdaroğlu et.al., (2023) highlight the strong relationship between transformational leadership characteristics and green innovation, arguing that leaders should position environmentally oriented innovations at the core of organizational culture.

Businesses' close observation of their competitors facilitates the rapid diffusion of environmental initiatives. When firms notice that their competitors are developing eco-friendly products and processes, they tend to improve their activities similarly. This demonstrates that competitive pressure plays a decisive role in the spread of environmentally responsible behaviors (Bahçecik & Talebi, 2020:232). Thus, competition contributes not to the postponement of environmental responsibility, but rather to its acceleration.

Although innovation is often associated with technological inventions and discoveries, it actually encompasses not only technical progress but also multi-dimensional domains of organizational development, such as products, processes, behaviors, marketing, and strategy (Bayrakoğlu et al., 2023:200). In this framework, green innovation refers not merely to the creation and implementation of new ideas, but also to organizational processes, products, and practices that reduce environmental impacts and

contribute to ecological sustainability goals (Ben Arfi et al., 2018; cited in Bayrakoglu et al., 2023:200-205).

Therefore, in contemporary organizations, competitive and innovation pressures constitute one of the key dynamics shaping green leadership. Green leaders perceive these pressures not merely as obligations but as opportunities that strengthen the vision of corporate sustainability. Thus, innovation becomes a strategic instrument that provides organizations with social and competitive advantages while offering solutions to environmental problems.

#### **4. The Theoretical Foundations of Green Leadership**

Green leadership is a sustainability-oriented and distinctive approach that responds to modern organizations' increasing demands for environmental and social responsibility. This form of leadership not only aims for organizational success but also places normative values such as environmental sensitivity, social benefit, sustainability, and intergenerational justice at its core (Battal & Yılmaz, 2025:464; Tuna & Yıldız, 2023:62,73). The contributions of various disciplines shape the theoretical foundation of green leadership. It can be analyzed in three main dimensions: the sustainability paradigm, its relationship with classical leadership theories, and the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR).

The sustainability paradigm constitutes the fundamental framework of green leadership and envisions the integrated management of organizations' economic, environmental, and social objectives (Azazi & Uzma, 2022; Battal & Yılmaz, 2025:460; Kılıçoğlu, 2005; Turguttopaş, 2020:268; Oktaysoy, 2025:115). Its relationship with leadership theories demonstrates how green leadership reinterprets the insights of classical leadership approaches through the lens of sustainability and environmental-social responsibility (Battal & Yılmaz, 2025; Oktaysoy, 2025; Tuna & Yıldız, 2023:73). Finally, the corporate social responsibility dimension reveals how green leadership integrates environmental and social contributions into organizational vision and strategic decision-making processes (Yangil, 2016:134; Bahçecik & Talebi, 2020; Onat & Yükselen, 2024).

When these three dimensions are evaluated together, green leadership emerges as an environmental management approach and a holistic theoretical framework that shapes organizational identity, culture, and social impact. The following sub-sections examine these fundamental dimensions in detail.

#### 4.1. Sustainability Paradigm

Sustainability constitutes the most critical concept underpinning the theoretical foundation of green leadership. The definition articulated in the “Brundtland Report” meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Turguttopaş, 2020:269) positions sustainability as a holistic framework that integrates environmental, economic, and social dimensions (Kuşat, 2013:4899; Kılıçoğlu, 2005, p. 11). This definition demonstrates that sustainability is not merely an environmental policy but a normative paradigm that reshapes organizations’ strategic orientations and leadership practices (Azazi & Uzma, 2022; Cengiz, 2025:855).

At the organizational level, sustainability takes form through efficient resource use, ecosystem preservation, and the integrated management of social responsibilities. Battal and Yılmaz (2025) conceptualize sustainability as a theoretical and practical framework, emphasizing its role as a business strategic foundation (Battal & Yılmaz, 2025:460–464). Thus, sustainability transcends its environmental character, linking itself to organizational identity, performance, and competitive strategy (Battal & Yılmaz, 2025:464; Onat & Yükselen, 2024:1710).

Institutional applications of the sustainability paradigm converge in areas such as green organizational behavior, renewable energy practices, circular economy, and green logistics. Studies in this field aim to demonstrate positive relationships between sustainable leadership and internal processes such as organizational commitment, justice, and identification (Battal & Yılmaz, 2025:478). Moreover, employees’ green behaviors are emphasized as key determinants of organizational success (Özalp & Erbaşı, 2022:66), indicating that leadership plays a central role in achieving sustainability goals.

From a historical and international perspective, the development of the sustainability paradigm can be traced from the 1972 Stockholm Declaration to the Brundtland Report (1987) and the 1992 Rio Conference (Agenda 21), which deepened global commitment to sustainable development (Kuşat, 2013:4899–4900). The Rio+20 Conference (2012) highlighted the notion of a “green economy,” linking it with sustainable development and poverty eradication objectives (Erkan et al., 2013:65). This global agenda paved the way for concrete actions under the Paris Agreement, emphasizing low-carbon transformation and the rise of sustainable finance (Turguttopaş, 2020:268–269).

The sustainability paradigm requires a transformation of both economic and social practices. Barbiroli (2011) argues that the transition to sustainable development necessitates a structural shift from open-loop economic systems toward closed-loop (circular) and service-oriented economies. This framework promotes resource efficiency through product redesign, durable consumption models, eco-friendly technologies, and advanced industrial ecology applications (Barbiroli, 2011). Similarly, Kuşat (2013) stresses that green economy and sustainable development prioritize the effective use of natural resources and the compensation of negative externalities (Kuşat, 2013:4897, 4904).

Transformations in consumer behavior and marketing also constitute a vital dimension of the sustainability paradigm. Rising environmental concern and consumer awareness have increased demand for sustainable products and services, thereby enhancing the significance of sustainable marketing strategies (Ay & Yılmaz, 2004:26; Bahçecik & Talebi, 2020:227; Deniz et al., 2025:68; Onat & Yükselen, 2024:1710–1720). The literature on green consumption suggests that purchasing, usage, and disposal behaviors are increasingly motivated by the desire to minimize environmental impact (Deniz et al., 2025:69; Onat & Yükselen, 2024:1721). Consequently, organizational sustainability performance is shaped by regulatory and financial mechanisms and market demand dynamics.

The sustainability paradigm redefines leadership responsibilities. Sustainable leadership is conceptualized as a management approach that aims to meet stakeholder needs, create long-term value, and maintain economic, social, and environmental balance (Battal & Yılmaz, 2025:460). Research indicates that transformational and responsible leadership approaches integrate with sustainability goals, enhancing organizational green innovation and strengthening employees' environmental awareness (Battal & Yılmaz, 2025:461; Bayrakdaroğlu et al., 2023:205; Oktaysoy, 2025:111). Furthermore, recent studies highlight “green personality traits” as a growing area of interest in exploring leadership's influence on organizational outcomes (Tuna & Yıldız, 2023:62).

In summary, the sustainability paradigm holds institutional significance along three principal axes: (1) conservation and efficient use of ecological resources, (2) social justice and protection of intergenerational rights, and (3) management of organizations within principles of environmental and social accountability. This integrated perspective transforms green leadership from a managerial technique into a strategic and identity-shaping framework for organizations. Within this framework, the green transformation of

enterprises should be understood not merely as an environmental or ethical requirement but as a comprehensive change process encompassing marketing, finance, technology, and organizational behavior dimensions.

#### 4.2. Relationship with Leadership Theories

Leadership Leadership is the ability of an individual to guide, influence, and direct a group or organization. Leaders establish institutions' goals and build strong relationships with organizational members, helping to enhance their performance and motivation levels (Bayrakoğlu et al., 2023:199). As an age-old phenomenon dating back to the history of humanity, leadership has gained importance as a natural outcome of collective living and organization. It began to be systematically studied from the management science perspective, particularly after the Industrial Revolution (Yangil, 2016:129; Demir et al., 2010:129). Initially, leadership was explained solely through the personal traits of leaders; over time, the leaders' behaviors, decision-making processes, and impact on the organization also became research subjects. Today, leadership is regarded as a fundamental element that guides the behaviors of organizational members toward achieving goals; leaders assume multifaceted roles such as goal-setting, relationship-building, and enhancing employee motivation (Bayrakoğlu et al., 2023:199).

In the modern era's complex and rapidly changing business environment, traditional leadership styles alone are no longer sufficient. In this context, new leadership approaches prioritizing sustainability, environmental, and social responsibilities have emerged. Nowadays, green practices have been integrated into many organizational domains, ranging from green leadership to green product and process management (Tuna & Yıldız, 2023:61). Green leadership emerges as a unique leadership form that draws on various leadership theories and reinterprets them through the lens of sustainability (Battal & Yılmaz, 2025:461). This leadership style places environmental awareness and social responsibility at the center of organizational practices while drawing strength from charismatic, visionary, ethical, and transformational leadership approaches (Tuna & Yıldız, 2023; Oktaysoy, 2025; Şahin & Şahin, 2024).

Green leaders inspire their employees by serving as role models and contributing to developing environmentally conscious behaviors. Thus, the elements of motivation, inspiration, and value orientation that are prominent in transformational leadership merge with sustainability consciousness in green leadership. This underscores the critical role of leadership in guiding employees' environmental behaviors (Tuna & Yıldız, 2023:73).

To ensure green sustainability, national economies must be restructured with a “green economy” perspective (Kuşat, 2013:4897). Within this transformation process, it is essential to integrate leadership approaches with the vision of a green economy. Globalization, increasing competition, rapid technological changes, and sustainability requirements have made organizations go beyond traditional leadership approaches and adopt contemporary leadership models (Bayrakoğlu et al., 2023:199). In this context, green leaders stand out as inspiring actors who positively influence employees’ green behaviors and job performance (Tuna & Yıldız, 2023:73). Consequently, the motivation- and change-oriented approaches of classical leadership theories merge with the sustainability paradigm, prioritizing environmental awareness, social benefit, and intergenerational justice (Battal & Yılmaz, 2025:458–461).

Although green leadership differs from classical leadership models, it interacts with many leadership theories. Particularly, there are strong conceptual connections with charismatic, visionary, ethical, and transformational leadership approaches:

Charismatic leadership motivates individuals through impressive personal traits and inspiring behaviors; green leadership directs this motivation toward organizational success and environmental and social benefit (Tuna & Yıldız, 2023:73).

Visionary leadership relies on the capacity to establish long-term strategic goals; green leadership expands this vision to encompass ecological balance, sustainable development, and social welfare (Battal & Yılmaz, 2025:458–461).

Ethical leadership emphasizes adherence to moral norms in decision-making processes. Environmental ethics questions humanity’s impact on nature, highlights responsibilities toward the environment, and is grounded in principles of justice and equity in protecting natural entities and ensuring sustainability (Özdemirkol, 2025:44). Green leadership integrates this moral framework with intergenerational justice and ecological responsibility principles. Ethics plays a decisive role in shaping the behaviors of individuals and societies (Des Jardins, 2006:34; Kant, 2007:31). Accordingly, green consumption values are considered not only in terms of environmental awareness but also within a broader social and ethical context (Onat & Yükselen, 2024:1721). Especially for Generation Z, consumption is not merely a behavior to meet needs but also an expression of personal values, ethical stance, and worldview (Deniz et al., 2025:68). Therefore, young consumers closely monitor brands’ corporate social responsibility



performance, environmental footprints, and ethical practices within supply chains (Deniz et al., 2025:71).

Transformational leadership encourages organizational change and innovation. Green leadership guides this transformation toward sustainability, green innovation, and environmental management objectives (Oktaysoy, 2025:115; Bayrakdaroglu et al., 2023:205). Research indicates that green transformational leadership has statistically significant and positive effects on employees' green behaviors and job performance (Tuna & Yıldız, 2023:73). This finding suggests that managers' attitudes toward green transformation encourage employees to adopt similar behaviors, enhancing overall performance.

It should be noted that the green leadership approach combines the ethical, visionary, charismatic, and transformational elements of classical leadership theories with sustainability principles, creating a new leadership paradigm with a high consciousness of environmental and social responsibility. This paradigm aims not only for organizations to develop environmentally sensitive policies but also to rebuild organizational culture based on ecological awareness. Green leadership preserves the core strengths of classical leadership approaches while expanding them through an environmental and social responsibility lens. It motivates followers with inspiration drawn from charismatic leadership, applies the long-term perspective of visionary leadership for ecological balance and social welfare, integrates the value-oriented ethical leadership approach with intergenerational justice and ecological responsibility, and channels the innovative change dynamics of transformational leadership toward sustainability and green innovation goals. In this framework, green leadership combines the organizational success focus of classical leadership theories with environmental and social responsibility, offering a comprehensive, forward-looking, and sustainable leadership model for modern organizations (Battal & Yılmaz, 2025:461; Tuna & Yıldız, 2023:73; Oktaysoy, 2025:111).

### 4.3. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Another Another theoretical foundation of green leadership is the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). With the advancement of technology and society's growing awareness, businesses must rapidly adapt to changes. This necessity has become increasingly imperative in contemporary times. Globalization and the need to preserve diminishing resources have turned social responsibility into an expectation for businesses (Bahçecik & Talebi, 2020:223). Rising environmental awareness has



compelled businesses, as socio-economic entities, to consider sustainability in their production strategies and product designs (Karaca, 2013:100). In this context, CSR entails that organizations operate not only for economic interests but also for the benefit of society and the environment (Bahçecik & Talebi, 2020). Green leadership places CSR at the center of the organizational vision, aiming not only to fulfill legal obligations but also to contribute to society and nature voluntarily.

Green leadership does not merely encompass all dimensions of CSR; it elevates them through a sustainability perspective. Economic responsibility no longer refers solely to profit generation but also to environmentally friendly production and sustainable growth. Legal responsibility extends beyond regulatory compliance to include environmental sensitivity and voluntary initiatives. Ethical responsibility is expanded to incorporate intergenerational justice and ecological values, while voluntary social responsibility projects focus on environmental protection and raising societal awareness.

The relationship between CSR and green leadership can be considered on three levels:

- ***Strategic Level:*** Businesses integrate sustainability objectives into their strategic plans. Green leaders view CSR policies as obligations and integral components of the organization's value-creation process (Battal & Yılmaz, 2025).
- ***Cultural Level:*** Green leaders make environmental responsibility a core element of organizational culture, enhancing employees' environmental awareness and strengthening the organization's societal image (Tuna & Yıldız, 2023:73; Onat & Yükselen, 2024).
- ***Societal Level:*** As consumer environmental awareness increases, companies shift toward production processes and products that minimize environmental harm (Tuna & Yıldız, 2023:61; Deniz et al., 2025:71). This leads green leaders to regard CSR practices not only as tools for social benefit but also as critical instruments for the organization's long-term success (Bahçecik & Talebi, 2020).

Thus, green leadership treats CSR as a corporate obligation and a fundamental element shaping the organization's values and vision. In summary, green leadership emerges as one of the most effective practical embodiments of CSR, transforming organizational culture and societal perception through sustainability.

## 5. Conclusion

Contemporary green leadership has emerged as an approach developed in response to today's environmental, economic, and social transformations. In an era marked by deepening climate crises, rapidly depleting natural resources, and increasingly influential global environmental policies, leadership has evolved beyond a purely managerial skill to become a domain of ecological responsibility. This study demonstrates that green leadership is not merely an environmentally focused approach but a holistic management culture grounded in ethical values, social justice, and long-term sustainability.

The pressures created by environmental crises, new market dynamics, rising societal awareness, and international environmental regulations are reshaping leaders' decision-making processes. In this context, green leadership emerges as a transformative force that directs organizations toward economic objectives and ensures the reduction of environmental impacts and the consideration of social benefits. The long-term success of institutions is now directly linked to environmentally conscious production models, transparent governance, and trust-based relationships with stakeholders.

Green leadership draws upon transformational and ethical leadership approaches while reinterpreting them through an ecological lens. In this sense, a green leader is visionary, value-oriented, innovative, and highly responsible. In an era of rapid technological advancement, where digital tools increasingly guide decision-making processes, these qualities determine an organization's capacity to adapt to the future. Technological innovations such as artificial intelligence, data analytics, and automation systems offer significant opportunities for measuring environmental performance and optimizing resource use; however, their deployment requires a sustainable and ethical framework.

Today, leaders expect to sustain economic growth and implement a management approach that respects the planet's ecological boundaries and embodies fairness, transparency, and sustainability. This perspective makes green leadership not just an option but a necessity for the organizations of the future. As leaders' environmental responsibility becomes a central determinant of organizational culture and societal trust, the contribution of green leadership to organizational performance will become increasingly visible.

The development of green leadership also signals a transition to a new level of awareness in the management world. The balance established between economic objectives and environmental sensitivity is crucial for ensuring the continuity of organizations and securing the shared future of societies.

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## Ethical Leadership 8

Özer Elkırmış<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

The concept of ethical leadership plays a significant role in organizations, both from a managerial and moral perspective. When examining the historical development of leadership within strategic and social contexts, it becomes evident that leadership extends far beyond mere direction or the exercise of authority. Ethical leadership refers to an approach in which leaders align their decision-making, communication practices, behaviors, and efforts to shape organizational climate with ethical principles. In this regard, ethical leaders emphasize fundamental values such as honesty, trust, justice, and responsibility, thereby contributing not only to the personal development of employees but also to the overall success of their organizations. Within the scope of this study, the notions of leadership, ethics, ethical leadership, and the dimensions of ethical leadership are discussed in detail.

### 1. Introduction

Leadership is recognized as a concept that dates back to the very origins of human history and has maintained its significance throughout all periods of social life. Across historical processes, leadership has served as an essential element for the survival of communities, the maintenance of social order, and the achievement of common goals. In the modern era, however, the notion of leadership has expanded beyond the establishment of authority to encompass the motivation of employees, the encouragement of innovation, and the enhancement of institutional performance.

On the other hand, the concept of ethics, as a fundamental philosophical discipline that enables individuals to distinguish between right and wrong behaviors, carries significant importance both at the individual and institutional levels. Ethical principles function as guiding norms within a broad spectrum, ranging from decision-making processes to ordinary

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1 Dr. Lecturer, Kafkas University, oelkirmis@gmail.com, ORCID:0000-0002-5147-7031

behaviors exhibited in daily life. In this context, the concept of ethical leadership emerges as an approach that integrates the traditional roles of leadership with moral responsibility, fostering the internalization of ethical values within organizational culture.

The growing importance of the concept of ethical leadership is largely shaped by the adverse consequences resulting from ethical violations frequently encountered in today's business world. The adoption of ethical behavior by leaders not only contributes to the preservation of organizational reputation but also plays a critical role in fostering an environment of trust among employees. Within the scope of this study, the fundamental aspects of leadership and ethics are examined, and the phenomenon of ethical leadership along with its dimensions is addressed in detail.

## 2. The Concept of Leadership

The origins of the concept of leadership can be traced back to the very beginnings of human history. Early human communities, in their struggle for survival, were compelled to organize in order to withstand the challenges of nature and to maintain order within their groups. One of the most fundamental requirements of such organization was the presence of a leader capable of guiding individuals toward shared goals and mobilizing them into collective action. As inherently social beings, humans have lived in communities throughout history, and within these communities, the function of leadership emerged as a natural necessity (Çiçeklioğlu, 2022). Leadership has thus remained a central element in human history, enabling individuals to act collectively, simplifying decision-making during times of crisis, and ensuring the sustainability of social order (Bass, 1990).

In a scientific context, the foundations of leadership research can be traced back to the first half of the 20th century. Particularly during the 1960s and 1970s, extensive studies on the phenomenon of leadership emerged within the fields of sociology, psychology, and business administration. During this period, the concept of leadership began to attract significant attention not only from academic circles but also from practitioners. The growing interest in leadership stemmed largely from its multidimensional and complex nature. Accordingly, the literature has produced numerous definitions of leadership. Although a universal and commonly accepted definition of leadership has not yet been established, these studies have provided valuable contributions to the understanding of its diverse dimensions (Stogdill, 1974).

Over time, efforts to establish a common understanding of leadership have intensified, leading to the emergence of definitions that gained recognition



both in academic circles and in practice. In this context, leadership has been described as “the process of influencing employees to achieve goals shared by the majority of organizational members” (Gediklioğlu, 2015). This perspective does not reduce leadership merely to personal traits or the exercise of authority; rather, it emphasizes leadership as an interactional and goal-oriented process. Leadership is thus regarded as a dynamic phenomenon that shapes the attitudes, behaviors, and motivations of group members in alignment with organizational objectives. Accordingly, leadership is acknowledged as a multidimensional construct that is grounded in individual qualities while also encompassing significant social dimensions (Bolden, 2011). Moreover, in today’s rapidly changing and increasingly complex business environment, the role of leadership has become even more critical. Leadership not only fulfills the functions of guidance and control but also assumes broader responsibilities, such as fostering innovation, empowering employees, and ensuring sustainable performance (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

### 3. The Concept of Ethics

The term *ethics* originates from the Greek word *ethos*, meaning character or habit. It is widely acknowledged that ethics was first examined systematically by Aristotle, through which it gained recognition as a distinct philosophical discipline. Often referred to as moral philosophy, ethics seeks to guide individuals toward proper conduct by evaluating the distinction between good and evil within a moral framework. In this regard, ethics emerges as an approach that examines human behavior from a moral standpoint and identifies which attitudes and actions can be considered virtuous (Kaplan, 2009; Pieper, 2002). Ethics also appears as a system of values that determines how individuals should interact within social life and which actions ought to be regarded as morally right. At both individual and institutional levels, it functions as a framework that questions the conformity of choices and behaviors to established standards (Conaway & Fernandez, 2000).

The concept of ethics is defined as a philosophical discipline that examines, from a moral perspective, the fundamental rules, values, and notions of good and evil or right and wrong that emerge in every aspect of life and play a crucial role in individuals’ personal and social development. Ethics, which increasingly gains significance in everyday life, represents the entirety of norms adopted in scientific studies and social interactions, guiding behaviors that align with these established standards (Kırlioğlu & Akyel, 2003). Generally defined as moral philosophy, the concept of ethics seeks to explain human behaviors and actions by analyzing the values that shape interpersonal relationships, the moral dimensions of cultural heritage,



and the foundations of right and wrong conduct (İşgüden & Çabuk, 2006; Şahin, 2024).

#### **4. The Concept of Ethical Leadership**

Leaders assume the responsibility of guiding and mobilizing employees to implement the policies and achieve the objectives established by their organizations. In this process, they are often required to make various decisions depending on differing circumstances. However, the implementation of these decisions can produce significant social consequences for employees, organizations, and society at large. In this context, ethical violations within organizations highlight the critical importance of the ethical dimension of leadership. Consequently, researchers have increasingly focused on examining the ethical aspects of leadership and the outcomes that arise from this dimension (Ekmekçioğlu, 2019).

Demonstrating ethical leadership behaviors is not as straightforward as it might initially appear. Leaders must possess strong willpower and courage to exhibit such behaviors effectively. Adhering to ethical principles often requires resisting pressures from the surrounding environment or from upper management. Unethical situations encountered in the workplace are frequently concealed by managerial levels, thereby creating additional pressures on leaders. Under such circumstances, ethical leaders are expected to maintain a resolute, courageous, and fearless stance without retreating. Conversely, when some managers resort to unethical behaviors, it not only undermines their personal reputation but also adversely affects the credibility and standing of the organization (Stouten, van Dijke, & Cremer, 2012).

Ethical leaders are managers who consistently keep shared organizational values, ways of working, and ethical standards at the forefront of daily operations and actively support them. One of the distinguishing features of such leaders is their ability to delegate responsibility to employees and encourage them to embrace these responsibilities. An ethical leader evaluates both their own behaviors and those of their employees within the framework of ethical principles. They exemplify honesty through their own actions and expect the same standard from their employees. In decision-making processes, they adhere to guiding principles and demonstrate an exemplary approach by valuing employees' opinions. All decisions they make are grounded in ethical values, and their leadership is built upon these foundations (Altıntaş, 2023). These leaders reinforce rules and standards with ethical norms, taking courageous and decisive steps to generate solutions when challenges arise. Moreover, they create an environment of

trust that strengthens employees' positive behaviors and dedicate time and resources to support their professional growth (Sezgül, 2010). By fostering the internalization of ethical principles among employees, ethical leaders contribute to the prevention of negative behaviors and help shape workplace attitudes in a positive direction (Mayer, Aquino, Greenbaum, & Kuenz, 2012).

Ethical leaders, in their decision-making processes, consider not only the achievement of predetermined objectives but also the potential ethical implications of their decisions. When a potential outcome reveals an ethical concern, they revisit the decision and adopt a more appropriate approach (Bennis, 1995; Özdemirkol, 2025). At the core of ethical leadership lies the elimination of behaviors and practices deemed inappropriate or unethical. In this context, leaders play a crucial role in resolving emerging issues. Ethical leaders hold a decisive position in establishing ethical standards within organizations, promoting and rewarding ethical behavior, and ensuring that unethical actions are subject to appropriate sanctions. Supporting employees' ethical conduct and preventing unethical behavior directly contribute to the cultivation of an ethical climate within the organization (Yıldız & Demirtaş, 2022).

#### **4.1. The Importance of Ethical Leadership**

Among the various types of leadership, ethical leadership holds a particularly significant position and has emerged as a prominent concept in the social sciences literature. Its importance is underscored in contemporary contexts, where managers may at times prioritize personal interests over organizational objectives, highlighting the necessity and critical role of ethical leadership (Demirtaş, 2015). Research indicates that the concept of ethical leadership is grounded in several fundamental characteristics. Foremost among these is that ethical leaders are honest, reliable, and possess strong moral character. Secondly, ethical leadership represents a perspective that is focused on both people and society (Northouse, 2016). Third, ethical leaders are required to develop a strong ethical awareness, which involves understanding the values of employees and showing them the respect they deserve. A fourth characteristic is their ability to motivate others. Ethical leaders prioritize the interests of their followers over their own personal gains. Fifth, they are encouraging and empowering, fostering an environment in which employees can develop themselves while providing support and motivation (Brown, Trevino, & Harrison, 2005). Sixth, ethical leaders play a crucial role in managing ethical responsibility. Within this scope, they establish rules to ensure adherence to ethical principles, encourage employees

to comply with these standards, and, when necessary, implement rewards or sanctions. Through these practices, adherence to ethical rules within the organization can become a normative and institutionalized expectation (Resick, Hanges, Dickson, & Mitchelson, 2006).

All of these qualities hold critical significance for both organizations and their employees. Ethical leadership contributes to the achievement of organizational goals by enhancing employee performance. Moreover, it exerts a substantial influence on the development of employees' commitment and loyalty to their organizations (Kamal, Samdani, & Yameen, 2018). The ethical maturity of leaders encompasses multidimensional competencies such as values, moral reasoning, empathy, and a sense of responsibility. Leaders who possess these qualities actively work to prevent ethical issues within the organization, reduce the occurrence of ethical violations, and ensure the continuity of an ethical culture. Consequently, organizations led by managers with well-developed ethical leadership characteristics not only achieve higher institutional success but also foster a sustainable climate of trust among employees (Yaman, 2010). The concept of ethical leadership is recognized as a leadership style that integrates managerial, strategic, and moral roles within the complex and dynamic structure of modern organizations. Such leaders not only guide the behavior of organizational members but also contribute to shaping the organizational culture based on ethical values. This approach enhances employee job satisfaction and overall organizational performance, laying the essential foundation for achieving long-term success (Brown et al., 2005).

## **4.2. Dimensions of Ethical Leadership**

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the concept of ethical leadership, it is essential to examine and articulate its underlying dimensions. Research indicates that ethical leadership fundamentally comprises four main dimensions. These dimensions are classified as ethical decision-making, ethical communication, ethical behavior, and the cultivation of an ethical organizational climate.

### **4.2.1. Communicative Ethics**

The concept of communicative ethics refers to the ethical principles that must be adhered to by professionals operating within the field of communication. This includes not only news agencies, newspapers, radio and television organizations, and online journalism, but also individuals producing non-news content for these platforms, professionals in advertising, and public relations specialists. The 1970s witnessed a diversification and

rapid development of mass communication tools, which, in turn, accelerated research in the field of communication ethics. During this period, issues such as media responsibility, media performance, and the public interest began to occupy a central position within communicative ethics. Mass communicators, who collect information and produce news, were regarded as actors who must operate with heightened caution and a strong sense of responsibility, as their content could directly influence audiences (Uzun, 2007).

In the context of leadership, the concept of communicative ethics plays a crucial role in assessing the scope of leaders' wrongful or self-interested actions. Furthermore, this dimension significantly contributes to determining the extent to which leaders treat their employees fairly and whether employees are subjected to any form of judgment or bias due to their individual differences.

#### **4.2.2. Ethical Decision-Making**

Individuals' perspectives and attitudes toward others with whom they communicate influence the decisions they make regarding those individuals and, consequently, their resulting behaviors. In every interaction, people transmit emotional signals, which have a significant impact on those around them. Research indicates that even in the absence of verbal communication, the emotions and moods of individuals present in the same environment can affect one another (Goleman, 2017). Emotions represent one of the most powerful resources in decision-making processes. Consequently, during decision-making, emotions serve as a fundamental reference point for choices regarding oneself, others, and the surrounding social and physical environment. Furthermore, because emotions are closely linked to personal values, desires, motivational sources, and self-regulatory mechanisms, they play a crucial role in shaping an individual's decision-making style (Pfeiffer, 2001).

Any decision made by an individual can vary depending on the person or situation involved. Therefore, rather than claiming that all decisions are inherently correct, it is more appropriate to evaluate decisions within the framework of ethical principles. Decisions grounded in ethical values enable the decision-maker to guide their actions more effectively and responsibly. When evaluated ethically, decisions provide a framework for shaping behavior and relationships, helping individuals determine what should or should not be done. In essence, making ethical decisions is fundamentally an effort to achieve a good and correct outcome. Ethics comprises the principles,

values, and standards that define what is right and good. Consequently, the ethical conduct of managers and the ethical quality of their decisions hold significant importance for organizational functioning as well as for fostering trust and commitment among employees (Karayaman, 2020).

One of the fundamental characteristics of ethical leadership is ensuring that decisions made are morally sound. Leaders who can clearly distinguish between right and wrong become trusted figures within their environment, thereby exerting a meaningful influence on others. When it is believed that a leader's decisions are guided by ethical principles, they contribute to the development of values such as honesty, commitment, and trust, which in turn strengthens employee loyalty (Torun & Çelik, 2024). This underscores the critical role that decisions made by ethical leaders play in fostering employees' attachment to their organizations. Ethical leaders are expected to subject their decision-making processes to a four-stage ethical analysis before implementation. In the first stage, the potential consequences of the decisions are evaluated. The second stage involves reviewing the alignment of decisions with laws and regulations. In the third stage, the compatibility of decisions with societal values and norms is assessed. Finally, ethical leaders must consult their conscience as a guiding framework when making their final decisions (Caruso & Salovey, 2007).

#### **4.2.3. Ethical Climate**

The concept of ethical climate constitutes one of the determining factors of behavior within organizations and enterprises, encompassing both ethical principles and ethical conduct. The extent to which employees demonstrate the expected attitudes and behaviors within an organization reflects the degree to which the ethical climate is recognized and internalized. In structures where an ethical climate is embraced, these principles are continuously valued and safeguarded. Consequently, in organizations with a strong ethical climate, conflicts and problems among employees are less likely to arise, and any issues that do occur tend to be resolved more swiftly. The presence of a well-established ethical climate facilitates the resolution of disagreements within the organization, promoting a more harmonious and cooperative work environment (Şahin & Dündar, 2011; Torun, 2023).

In this context, an organization's ability to compete with other institutions is strategically significant. This capability is generally associated with employees possessing an innovative mindset. The capacity of employees to engage in innovative behaviors, in turn, largely depends on the extent to which a strong ethical climate is embraced within the organization.

Organizations that adopt and maintain a climate grounded in ethical values are therefore better positioned to achieve a competitive advantage (Akkoç, 2012).

#### **4.2.4. Behavioral Ethics**

The concept of behavioral ethics can be defined as a set of rules that assist individuals in distinguishing between right and wrong actions within their professional and social interactions. Individuals who act in accordance with ethical principles are perceived as trustworthy members of their environment. This perception of trust contributes significantly to their success in both social relationships and professional settings (Brown et al., 2005).

The concept of behavioral ethics is regarded as a crucial factor in ensuring that individuals live in a secure and harmonious environment. When employees or individuals fail to adhere to ethical standards, unethical behaviors may emerge, potentially leading to various negative consequences within organizations. In such contexts, unethical attitudes such as threats and gossip may become prevalent. The approach of behavioral ethics aims to support and enhance positive behaviors among employees and individuals, while simultaneously mitigating negative actions. Accordingly, within organizations, the concept of behavioral ethics encourages employees to refrain from unethical conduct and promotes attitudes and behaviors grounded in ethical values (Tonus & Oruç, 2012).

### **5. Conclusion**

The concept of ethical leadership has emerged as a significant consideration not only for the managerial functions of contemporary organizations but also for their social responsibility and long-term sustainability. Leaders who prioritize ethical values foster trust among employees by embracing fairness and transparency in decision-making processes, thereby creating a foundation for healthy and enduring organizational relationships. In this context, ethical leadership plays a decisive role in shaping a positive organizational climate and enhancing employees' motivation, commitment, and performance levels. By integrating ethical principles into managerial practices, organizations can achieve both operational effectiveness and a culture of integrity that supports sustainable success.

When evaluating the dimensions of ethical leadership discussed in this study namely communicative ethics, ethics in decision-making, ethical climate, and behavioral ethics it becomes evident that this concept exerts a multifaceted influence within organizations. Ethical leaders are not merely

managerial figures who remind employees of ethical rules; they embody these values through their own behaviors and serve as role models for those around them. Consequently, the presence of ethical leadership facilitates the reduction of unethical behaviors and promotes the internalization of ethical conduct as a normative standard within the organizational culture.

One of the most significant contributions of ethical leadership to organizations is the enhancement of employees' sense of belonging and the strengthening of trust in the institution. When employees recognize that their leaders are committed to ethical values, they tend to align their own behaviors accordingly, experience higher job satisfaction, and develop a stronger commitment to organizational goals. Moreover, the concept of ethical leadership also plays a critical role in an organization's external relationships, contributing to the preservation of corporate reputation, the enhancement of societal trust, and the achievement of long term success.

In conclusion, the concept of ethical leadership represents a holistic approach that generates significant benefits at the individual, organizational, and societal levels. In the modern world, the sustainability of institutions, the well being of employees, and the trust established with society largely depend on the widespread adoption of leadership practices grounded in ethical values. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that ethical leadership is examined in depth within the academic field, further developed in practice, and integrated as a fundamental component of organizational culture.



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# **Beyond Authority: Leadership Approaches From Classical to Contemporary**

Editors:

Assist. Prof. Dr. Onur OKTAYSOY

Lecturer Dr. Ozer ELKIRMIS