Management Revue

Manag. Rev. **2025**; 36(4): 39031
https://doi.org/10.31083/MRev39031

Article

Leadership in Fractured Times: Reimagining Leadership Style Through Social Constructionism

Jon Billsberry[1,2,*]

[1]Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre, La Trobe University, Bundoora, VIC 3083, Australia
[2]Eva Burrows College, University of Divinity, Ringwood, VIC 3134, Australia
*Correspondence: j.billsberry@latrobe.edu.au; jon.billsberry@divinity.edu.au (Jon Billsberry)
Academic Editor: Simon Jebsen
Submitted: 14 March 2025 Revised: 10 July 2025 Accepted: 29 August 2025 Published: 15 December 2025

Abstract

Leadership styles have traditionally been conceptualised as stable, individual traits or behaviours that determine leadership effectiveness. However, this perspective often overlooks the socially constructed nature of leadership itself. This paper critically reviews the leadership style literature and reinterprets it through a social constructionist lens. By drawing on social constructionism, the study argues that leadership styles are not fixed attributes of individuals but are co-constructed through personal histories, interactions, shared meanings, and organisational contexts. The review highlights how dominant leadership style paradigms implicitly assume universal applicability while neglecting the role of cultural, historical, and discursive influences in shaping leadership perceptions and practices. Through this re-examination, the paper challenges essentialist views of leadership style and instead proposes that leadership emerges dynamically within social processes. It further emphasises how language, power relations, and institutional norms shape what is recognised as effective leadership in different contexts. This perspective has significant implications for leadership development, suggesting that instead of training individuals to adopt pre-defined styles, organisations should focus on fostering reflexivity, adaptability, and contextually grounded leadership practices. From an individual perspective, prospective leaders should focus on understanding their own implicit leadership theories and determining their approach to authenticity.

Keywords: leadership style; social construction; constructionism; leader development; leadership development
JEL: M12, M19, Y8

1. Introduction

Leadership has never mattered more, yet rarely has it seemed so contested or uncertain. Around the globe, leaders face a volatile mix of geopolitical upheaval, public distrust, institutional fatigue, and deepening social fragmentation. In the past few years alone, the COVID-19 pandemic, climate emergencies, technological disruption, war, and political instability have laid bare the limits of familiar leadership responses. Figures in positions of authority, whether in government, business, or civil society, are being judged not only for what they do, but for how their actions are interpreted and legitimised in public discourse. The crisis is not merely one of leadership performance, but of what leadership is taken to mean in different contexts. As calls intensify for ethical, inclusive, and adaptive leadership, the search for stable leadership models has begun to feel increasingly detached from the messy realities that leaders must navigate.

This disjuncture raises difficult questions for leadership scholarship. Many widely circulated leadership models continue to promise clarity and replicability at a time when expectations of leadership are fracturing across lines of culture, identity, and institutional context. What counts as effective leadership in one setting may be judged as inadequate or illegitimate in another. This is not simply a matter of differing opinions; it is a signal that leadership itself is understood and enacted in fundamentally different ways. If we are to better grasp how leadership functions in today's complex world, then it becomes necessary to scrutinise the assumptions that underpin how leadership is defined, recognised, and evaluated. It is with this motivation that this paper turns to the question of leadership style, not to offer another fixed model, but to examine the conceptual foundations on which such models rest.

Leadership styles have long been conceptualised as stable, individual traits or behaviours that directly determine leadership effectiveness, a perspective rooted in early theories that sought to identify inherent characteristics of successful leaders (Stogdill, 1948; Fischer and Sitkin, 2023; Fleishman, 1953). Trait-based approaches framed leadership as an outcome of innate qualities such as intelligence, confidence, and decisiveness, reinforcing a leader-centric paradigm that privileged personal attributes over contextual factors (Judge et al, 2002). However, despite much research, traits could not be shown to predict leadership and so scholars turned to behaviours (Chemers, 2000; Fischer and Sitkin, 2023). Behavioural theories, exemplified by the Ohio State (e.g., Hemphill and Coons, 1957; Stogdill, 1963) and Michigan (Cartwright and Zander, 1960; Katz and Kahn, 1951) studies, classified leadership into task- and relationship-oriented styles, suggesting that leader ef-

fectiveness could be distilled into observable patterns of action (Blake and Mouton, 1964; Chemers, 2000).

Yet, such perspectives, while influential, have been critiqued for their deterministic underpinnings (e.g., Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003; Klijn et al, 2022). By implying that leadership effectiveness can be universally defined through fixed traits or behaviours, these models overlook the fluid, interactional, and socially constructed nature of leadership (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Leadership is rarely a static phenomenon; rather, it emerges dynamically through relationships, discourse, and situational contingencies. Consider, for instance, how leadership manifests in crisis contexts versus stable organisational environments; what is deemed effective in one setting may fail in another.

Contemporary scholarship increasingly rejects the notion of leadership as a static entity, shifting instead toward relational and discursive models that emphasise leadership as co-constructed through social interaction (Billsberry and O'Callaghan, 2024; Fairhurst and Grant, 2010; Grint, 2022; Vuković and Carpentier, 2023). This evolution reflects a broader recognition that leadership is not simply about individual traits or predefined styles but about adaptive, contextually embedded practices (Hannah et al, 2024). In this light, the leader is not an isolated actor but part of a dynamic system in which meaning, power, and influence are continuously negotiated. Thus, rather than viewing leadership styles as fixed taxonomies, scholars and practitioners alike must grapple with the complexities of leadership as an evolving, context-sensitive practice. This shift has profound implications, not only for how leadership is studied but also for how it is developed in real-world settings where adaptability, reflexivity, and the ability to navigate ambiguity may prove more consequential than adherence to any single leadership style.

In this paper, I critically examine leadership style through a socially constructed lens, highlighting its conceptual limitations and the practical insights social constructionism offers for leader and leadership development. I begin by summarising key challenges in leadership style research before introducing social constructionism and its relevance to leadership theory. I then demonstrate how language, power dynamics, and institutional norms shape our understanding of leadership. A central component of this perspective is implicit leadership theories (ILTs): individuals' lay beliefs about leadership, which serve as the criteria by which leaders' styles are evaluated. I discuss the role of ILTs in shaping leadership perceptions and conclude by considering the implications of this approach for leadership and leader development.

2. Leadership Style

Traditionally, leadership styles have been conceptualised as stable, individual traits or behaviours that determine leadership effectiveness (Northouse, 2016). Early theories, particularly trait-based approaches, framed leadership as an inherent quality, suggesting that effective leaders possess distinguishing characteristics such as intelligence, confidence, and decisiveness (Stogdill, 1948). This perspective reinforced the notion that leadership effectiveness is largely predetermined by fixed personal attributes, positioning leadership as an intrinsic capability rather than a dynamic process. Building upon this foundation, behavioural theories, most notably those emerging from the Ohio State and Michigan studies, sought to categorise leadership behaviours into stable dimensions, such as task-oriented and relationship-oriented leadership (Cartwright and Zander, 1960; Hemphill and Coons, 1957; Katz and Kahn, 1951; Likert, 1961; Stogdill, 1963). By emphasising consistency in leadership behaviours, these theories sustained the prevailing assumption that leadership can be distilled into a set of predictable, enduring characteristics.

Over time, however, scholars began to challenge this static view, arguing that leadership is not merely a function of fixed traits or behaviours but is also shaped by contextual and relational factors (Bass, 1985). Contingency theories such as Fiedler's Contingency Model and House's Path Goal Theory introduced the idea that leadership effectiveness is contingent upon situational dynamics, including organisational structures, task complexity, and follower characteristics (Fiedler, 1967; House, 1971). These perspectives marked a significant departure from earlier theories by emphasising adaptability, yet they still operated within a framework that assumed the existence of distinct leadership styles that could be matched to specific contexts. As a result, while contingency theories broadened the scope of leadership research, they did not entirely dislodge the notion of leadership as a relatively stable personal attribute.

The emergence of transformational and transactional leadership theories further complicated this discourse by foregrounding the interactive and motivational dimensions of leadership. Bass (1990) distinguished between transactional leaders, who maintain stability through structured exchanges, and transformational leaders, who drive change by inspiring and engaging followers. While this framework acknowledged that leaders might adapt their styles to some extent, it nevertheless retained the underlying assumption that individuals exhibit stable leadership tendencies. Research has since demonstrated that transformational leadership, in particular, can enhance organisational performance, employee satisfaction, and innovation by fostering a shared vision and empowering subordinates (Nguyen et al, 2024; Podsakoff et al, 1996; Rabiul and Yean, 2021; Specchia et al, 2021). Yet, even as transformational leadership introduced a more fluid conceptualisation, it remained anchored in the broader tradition of identifying leader-centric attributes and behaviours that predict effectiveness.

More recent theoretical advancements have pushed back against these traditional perspectives, arguing that leadership is not simply a property of individuals but a socially constructed and dynamic process. Complexity lead-

ership theory (Uhl-Bien et al, 2007), shared leadership theory (Pearce and Conger, 2003), and the romance of leadership perspective (Grint, 2005; Kukreja et al, 2025; Meindl, 1995; Meindl et al, 1985), posit that leadership emerges through relational interactions, shaped by evolving organisational demands and external pressures. These perspectives challenge the notion of leadership stability, highlighting instead its fluid, distributed, and adaptive nature. Empirical research supports this view, demonstrating that leaders frequently recalibrate their approaches in response to environmental uncertainty, workforce diversity, and technological change (Dinh et al, 2014). Such findings suggest that leadership is far more malleable than early theories assumed, calling for a reconceptualisation that moves beyond the limitations of trait- and behaviour-based models.

3. Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is a theoretical framework that fundamentally challenges essentialist and positivist understandings of reality, arguing that knowledge and meaning are not passively discovered but actively produced through social interaction (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 2025; Gergen, 2023; Lock and Strong, 2010). While often associated with postmodern critiques of objectivity and universal truth, social constructionism is not identical to postmodernism. Rather, it shares postmodernism's scepticism of grand narratives and fixed meanings, but offers a more focused account of how knowledge and reality are co-produced through language, interaction, and institutional structures. Emerging from the seminal work of Berger and Luckmann (1966), social constructionism posits that reality is not an objective entity awaiting revelation but rather a contingent and historically situated product of human interpretation and cultural practice. In contrast to traditional epistemological perspectives that regard knowledge as a direct reflection of an external world, social constructionism highlights the ways in which meaning is shaped through discourse, relational processes, and institutional structures (Gergen, 2023). By shifting the focus from fixed truths to the social mechanisms through which reality is constructed, this perspective has had a profound influence across disciplines, including sociology, psychology, and communication studies, offering a critical lens for examining how knowledge systems, identities, and social norms are perpetually negotiated and redefined.

The postmodern critique of the social sciences emerged as a response to the Enlightenment-inspired belief in objectivity, universal truths, and the progressive accumulation of knowledge. Postmodern thinkers challenged the assumption that social phenomena can be studied with the same epistemological tools used in the natural sciences, arguing instead that meaning, identity, and power are contingent, situated, and mediated through language (Lyotard, 1984; Rorty, 1980). Rather than viewing theory as a mirror of reality, postmodernism frames it as a narrative constructed within particular discursive and institutional contexts. This critique destabilised the foundational premises of much social science, including the belief in neutral observation, methodological certainty, and the generalisability of findings. It invited scholars to reflect on whose perspectives are included, whose are excluded, and how research practices may reproduce dominant ideologies under the guise of objectivity (Foucault, 2002; Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). In doing so, postmodernism reframed inquiry not as a search for definitive answers but as a process of interpretation, reflexivity, and deconstruction.

For management research, these insights have been both provocative and transformative. The postmodern turn has prompted scholars to question the taken-for-granted categories that organise organisational life such as leadership, strategy, performance, and culture, revealing them as socially produced rather than naturally occurring entities (Boje et al, 1996; Parker, 1995; Spicer and Alvesson, 2025). Rather than assuming managerial concepts have inherent meanings, postmodern analysis foregrounds their discursive construction, and the power relations embedded within them. This has opened space for critical, pluralistic, and narrative-based approaches that challenge normative assumptions and give voice to marginalised perspectives (Knights, 1992; Spicer and Alvesson, 2025). For leadership studies in particular, the postmodern lens raises pressing questions about who gets to define leadership, how legitimacy is granted, and whose values are encoded in dominant leadership frameworks (Sandberg, 2001). In recognising the instability and contestability of meaning, postmodernism offers a powerful counterpoint to essentialist models, encouraging a view of management knowledge as partial, situated, and always open to reinterpretation.

Central to social constructionism is the proposition that language is not merely a vehicle for transmitting neutral facts but an active force in shaping human experience. Wittgenstein's (1953) insight that meaning derives not from individual cognition but from participation in shared linguistic practices underscores the deeply social nature of knowledge. Language, from this perspective, does not simply describe reality; it constitutes it, delimiting what can be known, thought, and enacted (Burr, 2025). This view aligns with Foucault's (2002) analysis of discourse, which highlights how language is inextricably embedded in power relations, institutional structures, and regimes of truth that determine what is deemed legitimate knowledge. In this sense, social constructionism unsettles conventional notions of objectivity by revealing the ways in which meaning is contingent upon historical, cultural, and political contexts rather than an inherent feature of the world.

This epistemological orientation has significant implications for understandings of identity and subjectivity. Identity is not an innate, self-contained essence but an ongoing, co-constructed phenomenon emerging through social interaction. This perspective challenges psychologi-

cal theories that treat personality as stable and unchanging, instead illuminating how identities are fluid, context-dependent, and continually reshaped through relational engagement (Dharani, 2025; Shotter, 1993). Research in gender studies and critical race theory, for example, has drawn extensively on social constructionism to demonstrate that categories such as race, gender, and sexuality are not biologically determined but socially produced and maintained through discourse and institutional practice (e.g., Crenshaw, 1991; Ferguson, 2004; Reece, 2024; Sheppard et al, 2024). This has profound political ramifications, exposing how power dynamics are embedded in the very categories that define human experience, shaping not only individual self-conception but also broader social hierarchies and systems of inclusion and exclusion.

A key tenet of social constructionism is its critique of positivism and objectivist claims to knowledge. Rejecting the assumption that scientific inquiry reveals universal, context-independent truths, social constructionists contend that all knowledge is situated, shaped by social, historical, and ideological contingencies (Kuhn, 1962). This epistemological stance aligns with the interpretivist tradition, which prioritises understanding over prediction and recognises the inherently subjective nature of human inquiry. By deconstructing dominant narratives and interrogating the assumptions underlying taken-for-granted knowledge, social constructionism exposes the political stakes of epistemology, revealing not only how knowledge is produced but also whose interests it serves. In doing so, it offers a powerful framework for critically analysing the construction of meaning, authority, and legitimacy within social life.

4. Social Constructionism and Leadership Styles

One of the most significant contributions of social constructionism to leadership studies is its challenge to the notion that leadership styles are stable, individual traits or behaviours. Traditional leadership theories, particularly trait and behavioural models, have long conceptualised leadership as an inherent, relatively fixed characteristic of individuals, assuming that certain personal attributes or behavioural tendencies determine leadership effectiveness (Stogdill, 1948; Fleishman, 1953). In contrast, a social constructionist perspective reframes leadership as an emergent and co-constructed phenomenon, arising through interactions between leaders, followers, and the broader social and organisational context (Fairhurst and Grant, 2010). From this standpoint, leadership styles are not intrinsic properties possessed by individuals but rather fluid, historically contingent, and discursively produced constructs shaped by language, cultural expectations, and situational dynamics (Grint, 2005; Fairhurst and Grant, 2010; Sandberg, 2001; Uhl-Bien, 2006). This shift in perspective moves leadership studies away from an essentialist, trait-based paradigm and towards an understanding of leadership as an inherently non-essentialist, relational, and context-dependent process.

Central to the social constructionist critique of leadership styles is the role of language in constituting leadership identities and practices (Grint, 1997). Language is not simply a neutral conduit for describing leadership; it is the very medium through which leadership is enacted, legitimised, and made meaningful (Billsberry and O'Callaghan, 2024). Scholars working within the discursive leadership tradition have demonstrated that leadership does not exist independently of the communicative practices through which it is performed, negotiated, and contested (Fairhurst, 2011). Leaders construct and reinforce their leadership identities by engaging in sense-giving practices, framing organisational challenges, and invoking discursive resources to legitimise their authority (Fischer and Sitkin, 2023; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). This perspective underscores that leadership styles are not universal, objectively definable categories but rather socially negotiated performances shaped by the interplay of language, institutional norms, and collective meaning-making processes.

A further implication of this perspective is the recognition that leadership styles are deeply embedded within specific cultural and historical contexts, challenging the assumption that particular leadership models possess universal applicability. Research in cross-cultural leadership studies has consistently highlighted how perceptions of effective leadership vary significantly across societies, shaped by historically entrenched values, normative expectations, and institutional configurations (Hofstede, 1980; Gelfand et al, 2007). For instance, transformational leadership, frequently heralded as an ideal leadership model in Western contexts, may not carry the same resonance in collectivist cultures, where more participatory or paternalistic leadership approaches align more closely with prevailing social and organisational values (House et al, 2004). A social constructionist lens thus enables scholars to move beyond rigid, prescriptive leadership frameworks and instead examine how leadership styles emerge as socially situated constructs, shaped by the cultural and institutional conditions in which they are embedded.

Moreover, the social constructionist perspective exposes the power dynamics underpinning dominant classifications of leadership styles. Leadership taxonomies are not neutral descriptors of leadership practice but are instead shaped by those occupying positions of structural power who often shape leadership norms in ways that reinforce existing power asymmetries, privileging leadership styles that align with dominant group interests while marginalising alternative, potentially subversive approaches (Billsberry and O'Callaghan, 2024; Ford, 2006; Knights and Willmott, 1992; Petriglieri, 2020; Petriglieri and Peshkam, 2022). This dynamic helps to sustain traditional leadership ideals, such as charismatic, authoritative, or heroic leadership, which persist not necessarily because they are universally

effective, but because they remain aligned with entrenched power structures that dictate what is valorised as legitimate leadership (Tourish, 2013). By critically interrogating the relationship between leadership and power, scholars highlight how certain leadership styles become institutionalised while others are systematically overlooked or delegitimised, thereby exposing the ideological underpinnings of dominant leadership discourses. Feminist and critical leadership scholars have drawn upon social constructionism to interrogate how leadership styles are gendered, racialised, and classed, revealing the ways in which normative leadership ideals reinforce existing power asymmetries (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Collinson and Tourish, 2015). For instance, assertive and directive leadership styles are often framed as 'strong' and 'effective' when enacted by men but as 'aggressive' or 'unlikeable' when exhibited by women, reflecting how leadership is constructed through discourses that sustain gendered hierarchies (Billing and Alvesson, 2000). These insights highlight the need to critically examine how leadership styles are not only socially produced but also institutionally maintained, often in ways that reinforce dominant power structures.

Institutional norms further entrench particular leadership expectations by embedding them within formal structures, policies, and organisational practices. Institutions, whether they be corporate entities, public sector organisations, or academic establishments, do not simply adopt leadership frameworks in a neutral or objective manner; rather, they construct and sustain leadership models that reflect and perpetuate dominant cultural, economic, and political ideologies (Smircich and Morgan, 1982). These norms dictate not only who is seen as a legitimate leader but also which leadership behaviours are rewarded, sanctioned, or deemed incompatible with institutional objectives (Ayaz et al, 2024; Barker, 2001). For instance, organisations operating in highly competitive, profit-driven industries frequently valorise leadership traits such as decisiveness, assertiveness, and risk-taking, while those in collaborative or service-oriented sectors tend to prioritise relational and participatory leadership approaches (Denis et al, 2010). These institutionalised expectations create path dependencies, reinforcing established leadership models and making it difficult for alternative paradigms to gain traction unless broader structural transformations occur.

By foregrounding leadership as a socially constructed phenomenon, this perspective moves beyond conventional leadership taxonomies towards a more dynamic and contextually sensitive understanding of leadership styles. This approach resonates with emerging paradigms such as complexity leadership and shared leadership, which conceptualise leadership as an adaptive, relational, and distributed process rather than a function of individual traits or stable behavioural patterns (Uhl-Bien et al, 2007; Pearce and Conger, 2003). Ultimately, social constructionism offers a critical lens through which to reconceptualise leadership styles as fluid, contested, and embedded within broader social and cultural frameworks, thereby opening new avenues for leadership scholarship that move beyond essentialist and prescriptive models.

5. Implicit Leadership Theories

Implicit Leadership Theories (ILTs) refer to the cognitive schemas that individuals develop over time to categorise and interpret leadership behaviours. These mental frameworks influence how people perceive, evaluate, and respond to leaders within organisational settings (Billsberry et al, 2018; Foti et al, 2017; Lord and Maher, 1991; Lord and Shondrick, 2011; Lord et al, 2020; Offermann and Coats, 2018; Offermann et al, 1994; Riggs and Porter, 2017; Schyns and Meindl, 2005; Schyns and Schilling, 2011; Tavares et al, 2018). Rooted in social cognition, the ILT approach suggests that individuals do not assess leadership effectiveness purely on objective criteria but rather through the lens of pre-existing expectations regarding what constitutes an effective leader (Eden and Leviatan, 1975). These schemas are shaped by social learning, cultural norms, and personal experiences, rendering leadership perceptions inherently subjective and context-dependent (Lord and Maher, 1991). As a result, a leader's perceived effectiveness is often determined not only by their actual performance but also by the degree to which they align with followers' implicit expectations (Schyns and Schilling, 2011). This approach underscores the socially constructed nature of leadership, where legitimacy is contingent on congruence with shared prototypes rather than solely on demonstrable competence.

A critical implication of ILTs is their influence on leadership style and leader-follower interactions. When a leader's behaviour aligns with followers' implicit expectations, they are more likely to be perceived as competent, trustworthy, and legitimate (Epitropaki and Martin, 2005; Foti et al, 2017; Riggs and Porter, 2017). Conversely, leaders who deviate from these prototypical expectations may face resistance or scepticism, irrespective of their actual abilities. This alignment process is particularly salient in leader emergence, as individuals who embody widely recognised leadership characteristics, such as confidence, dominance, and intelligence, are more likely to be identified as leaders (Escobar Vega et al, 2025; Junker and van Dick, 2014). Moreover, ILTs shape leadership outcomes through cognitive biases, such as confirmation bias, where followers selectively interpret a leader's actions in ways that reinforce their existing beliefs (Lord et al, 1984). This suggests that leadership effectiveness is not merely an objective phenomenon but is continually co-constructed through perception, discourse, and interaction.

ILTs are a fundamental component of the social construction approach to leadership, which posits that leadership is not an objective set of traits or behaviours but rather a socially constructed phenomenon that emerges through in-

teractions and shared meanings (Fairhurst and Grant, 2010). ILTs shape this construction by serving as cognitive templates that individuals use to interpret and ascribe leadership roles within social contexts (Lord and Shondrick, 2011). Because leadership is co-constructed through ongoing social exchanges between leaders and followers, ILTs play a pivotal role in influencing who is recognised as a leader and how leadership effectiveness is judged (Billsberry and O'Callaghan, 2024; DeRue and Ashford, 2010; Offermann and Coats, 2018). Rather than viewing leadership as an intrinsic quality, this perspective highlights that leadership emerges when individuals collectively assign meaning to behaviours that align with their implicit expectations. Consequently, leadership is not simply about possessing certain skills or enacting predefined styles, but about successfully navigating and influencing the implicit cognitive frameworks that guide followers' perceptions.

From a social constructionist standpoint, ILTs contribute to the dynamic negotiation of leadership identities within organisational settings. As individuals engage in leadership and followership roles, their perceptions are filtered through pre-existing ILTs, which shape the legitimacy and authority they afford to different actors (Foti et al, 2017; Lord et al, 2020; Schyns and Schilling, 2011; Uhl-Bien, 2006). This means that leadership is not just enacted but also interpreted and reinforced through social interactions, where leaders and followers continuously negotiate what leadership means in a given context (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012). Additionally, ILTs can create self-fulfilling cycles in which individuals who match leadership prototypes are more readily accepted as leaders, while those who deviate from these schemas face resistance, regardless of their actual capabilities (Sy, 2010). As a result, an ILT-informed perspective deepens the social constructionist understanding of leadership by demonstrating how cognitive structures shape and sustain leadership as a collectively held social reality rather than an individual attribute.

6. Implicit Leadership Theories and Leadership Style

The presence of ILTs fundamentally reshapes how leadership styles are conceptualised by emphasising the role of cognitive schemas in leadership perception (Escobar Vega et al, 2025). Traditional leadership style theories typically assume a direct causal link between leader behaviours and follower outcomes (Bass, 1990; Greenleaf, 1977). However, research on ILTs challenges this assumption, contending that the effectiveness of any leadership style is contingent upon the extent to which it aligns with followers' implicit expectations (Billsberry and O'Callaghan, 2024; Epitropaki et al, 2013). This cognitive perspective complicates the notion that leadership effectiveness is determined solely by a leader's actions, instead highlighting the intricate interplay between leader behaviours and follower perceptions. Consequently, leadership cannot be reduced to a predefined set of behaviours; rather, leaders may engage in impression management strategies to align with follower prototypes, navigating an inherently interpretive and socially constructed leadership landscape (Billsberry and O'Callaghan, 2024).

This perspective also disrupts claims regarding the universality of leadership styles by demonstrating that leadership effectiveness is contextually and culturally contingent. While transformational leadership, for instance, is frequently extolled for its cross-cultural applicability (Bass, 1997), ILT research suggests that followers from different cultural backgrounds may interpret and respond to transformational behaviours in divergent ways (Den Hartog and De Hoogh, 2024). In cultures with strong hierarchical orientations, participative leadership behaviours may be perceived as weak or indecisive, whereas in egalitarian cultures, directive leadership may be regarded as authoritarian and ineffective (Brodbeck et al, 2000; Javidan et al, 2006). These insights call into question the presumed portability of dominant leadership frameworks across cultural and situational boundaries, reinforcing the imperative for a context-sensitive approach to leadership scholarship. By exposing the cultural embeddedness of ILTs, this perspective underscores the importance of moving beyond a monolithic understanding of leadership to one that is attuned to localised and culturally mediated leadership expectations (Den Hartog and De Hoogh, 2024).

Beyond cultural variation, an ILT-informed approach also shifts the analytical focus from leader behaviours to follower (and non-follower) cognition, challenging prevailing assumptions about leadership emergence and development. Rather than positing that leadership qualities are either innate or cultivated solely through training, ILT research suggests that leader emergence is heavily influenced by the extent to which individuals conform to prevailing leadership prototypes (Billsberry and O'Callaghan, 2024; Epitropaki and Martin, 2004; Junker and van Dick, 2014; Offermann and Coats, 2018). This shift carries implications for leadership development initiatives, as it necessitates greater attention to the implicit biases that inform leader selection and evaluation (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Organisations seeking to diversify their leadership cadre must acknowledge that ILTs play a pivotal role in entrenching traditional leadership archetypes, often to the detriment of individuals from historically underrepresented groups, including women and ethnic minorities (Ayaz et al, 2024; Eagly and Sczesny, 2009). By unearthing the cognitive biases that underpin leadership perceptions, an ILT perspective offers a crucial lens for interrogating and disrupting systemic barriers to leadership inclusion.

Furthermore, ILTs problematise the rigidity of conventional leadership taxonomies. Traditional theories frequently categorise leaders into distinct typologies, such as transformational, transactional, charismatic, empowering, ethical, authentic, servant, and destructive leadership, im-

plying that leadership can be meaningfully segmented into discrete and stable styles (Fischer and Sitkin, 2023). However, ILT research challenges this premise by revealing that these classifications may fail to encapsulate how leadership is enacted and experienced in practice (Fischer and Sitkin, 2023). Rather than adhering to a predetermined leadership style, leaders may need to dynamically calibrate their behaviours in response to followers' implicit expectations, underscoring the adaptive and interactional nature of leadership (Foti et al, 2008). This recognition advances a more fluid and relational view of leadership, one that moves beyond static typologies to acknowledge leadership as an ongoing process of co-construction between leaders and followers.

Finally, integrating ILTs into leadership scholarship underscores the centrality of perception management in leadership effectiveness. Leaders who are adept at recognising and shaping follower expectations may be more successful in securing legitimacy and influence (Lord et al, 2017). But, as discussed later, it raises the question of whether prospective leaders should 'manage' their behaviours to align with other people's ILTs, thereby giving them decisions to make about their own authenticity (Billsberry and O'Callaghan, 2024). This insight reframes leadership not merely as a demonstration of competencies but as a process of alignment with the cognitive schemas through which followers interpret and evaluate leadership behaviours.

7. Leadership Development Within a Socially Constructed Perspective

Adopting a social constructionist approach to leadership has profound implications for leadership training and development, necessitating a departure from static, trait-based models towards a more dynamic, interactional perspective. Traditional leadership development programmes frequently centre on the acquisition of predefined competencies, predicated on the assumption that leadership effectiveness derives from mastering a set of universal skills (Day et al, 2014). However, from a social constructionist standpoint, leadership is not an individual possession but a relational process co-created through social interactions (Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien, 2012; Kempster and Iszatt-White, 2013; Sims and Weinberg, 2024). Consequently, leadership development must extend beyond technical skill acquisition to cultivate interpretive, reflexive, and adaptive capacities. This shift necessitates rethinking leadership training as a process of developing individuals' ability to understand and negotiate the ways in which leadership is perceived, enacted, and legitimised within specific organisational and cultural contexts.

A central implication of this perspective is the imperative to integrate reflexivity into leadership development initiatives. Reflexivity enables leaders to critically interrogate their own assumptions, biases, and communicative practices, fostering a deeper awareness of how their leadership identities are constructed and interpreted by others (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011). Traditional training models often neglect this dimension, instead reinforcing an implicit belief in leadership as a stable set of attributes that can be acquired and applied universally. In contrast, a reflexive approach encourages leaders to consider how power, discourse, and institutional norms shape the way leadership is enacted and received (Ford et al, 2008). By embedding reflexive practices such as narrative inquiry, storytelling, and peer dialogue within leadership development programmes, organisations can cultivate leaders who are more attuned to the relational and co-constructed nature of leadership. Such practices enable leaders to critically examine how their leadership is framed within different organisational narratives, thereby enhancing their ability to navigate and influence diverse leadership expectations.

Beyond reflexivity, leadership development from a socially constructed perspective should emphasise the role of social sensemaking in leadership enactment. Leadership is not merely a matter of decision-making or direction-setting; it is a meaning-making process through which individuals co-construct interpretations of organisational realities (Weick et al, 2005). Effective leaders, therefore, must be skilled in engaging with followers and other stakeholders in ongoing dialogue, facilitating the shared construction of meaning that underpins organisational action. This insight necessitates a move away from didactic training approaches towards more experiential, participatory learning methodologies. Action learning, coaching, and facilitated discussions provide opportunities for leaders to develop interpretive skills in real-time organisational settings, allowing them to experiment with different ways of constructing and communicating leadership (Raelin, 2016). Rather than positioning leaders as isolated agents of change, training should equip them to act as facilitators of collective meaning-making, fostering an organisational culture in which leadership is distributed and emergent (van Ameijde et al, 2009).

Moreover, a social constructionist perspective underscores the inherently collective nature of leadership development. Traditional leadership training models tend to focus on individual competency-building, yet if leadership is fundamentally relational, development efforts must extend beyond individual leaders to include followers, teams, and broader organisational networks (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Leadership is not exercised in isolation but emerges through interactions within organisational systems, making it imperative to design training programmes that reflect this collective dynamic. Initiatives such as team-based leadership development, collaborative problem-solving exercises, and cross-functional dialogue sessions can help participants recognise and actively shape leadership as an ongoing, shared process (Denis et al, 2012). By challenging hierarchical assumptions that position leadership as the domain

of a select few, such approaches promote more inclusive, participatory leadership cultures that are better equipped to navigate complex organisational environments.

In sum, a social constructionist lens fundamentally reshapes the landscape of leadership development by shifting the focus from individual traits and competencies to the relational, discursive, and interpretive processes that constitute leadership. This perspective challenges entrenched assumptions about leadership as a fixed set of attributes and instead advances a more fluid, contextually embedded understanding of leadership as a socially co-constructed phenomenon. By embedding reflexivity, social sensemaking, collective learning, and context-sensitive evaluation into leadership development efforts, organisations can cultivate leaders who are not only technically capable but also adept at navigating the complex social dynamics that shape leadership in practice.

8. Leader Development Within a Socially Constructed Perspective

Whereas leadership development takes a relational and systemic perspective, emphasising the social processes, networks, and shared practices through which leadership unfolds (Day, 2000; Day and Dragoni, 2015), leader development centres on the individual, focusing on the intrapersonal growth of prospective leaders by enhancing self-awareness, identity development, and personal capability (Billsberry and O'Callaghan, 2024; Day, 2000; McCauley et al, 2010). While leadership development has rightly gained traction as a means of fostering collective leadership capacity within organisations, an exclusive focus on this relational and systemic perspective risks neglecting the fundamental role of leader development, which is the cultivation of individual leaders' intrapersonal, interpersonal, and impression management capacities (Billsberry, 2013; Billsberry and Egri, 2017; Billsberry and O'Callaghan, 2024; Day and Dragoni, 2015). Leadership does not materialise in a vacuum; it emerges through individuals who must first develop the cognitive, emotional, and identity-based foundations necessary to navigate the complexities of leading (Billsberry et al, 2019; Escobar Vega et al, 2025; Hannah and Avolio, 2010). Without deliberate investment in leader development, individuals may struggle to internalise a leader identity, regulate the psychological demands of leadership, or build the self-efficacy required to exercise influence within leadership systems (DeRue and Ashford, 2010). The two perspectives are not mutually exclusive but interdependent: leadership development thrives when it is underpinned by strong leader development, as individual growth fuels the capacity to engage meaningfully in collective leadership processes (McCauley et al, 2010). A failure to integrate leader development risks reinforcing a paradox where organisations espouse distributed leadership yet fail to equip individuals with the personal agency, resilience, and sense of purpose necessary to enact leadership in dynamic and often ambiguous contexts. Thus, the challenge is not to privilege one approach over the other but to ensure that systemic leadership development efforts do not come at the expense of the deep, introspective work required for individuals to grow into their leadership potential.

Billsberry and O'Callaghan (2024) argue suggests that a socially constructed approach to leader development should not be reduced to a simple acquisition of competencies or leadership styles, but should instead involve a deep engagement with social perceptions, identity formation, and the authenticity dilemmas that prospective leaders face. One of the crucial lessons here is that prospective leaders must develop a meta-cognitive understanding of how their behaviours align or clash with the ILTs of those around them and that gives primacy to developing an understanding of one's own ILT. This will be accompanied by a period of unlearning as most prospective leaders have a leader-centric understanding of leadership and believe that leadership. resides within the leader as a set of styles, skills, abilities, competencies, and behaviours (Billsberry, 2013).

Billsberry and O'Callaghan (2024) further argue that, in this socially constructed paradigm, the efficacy of a prospective leader depends not just on their ability to lead but on their ability to be perceived as a leader. This means that leader development efforts should integrate training on impression management (Leary, 2019), identity work (Ibarra et al, 2014), and contextual adaptability (Den Hartog et al, 2020). Instead of a one-size-fits-all approach, leader development must be contextually sensitive, helping individuals understand and navigate the specific ILTs that operate within their organisational and cultural environment. One of the most compelling challenges that Billsberry and O'Callaghan (2024) identify is the authenticity dilemma faced by prospective leaders. Since leadership is socially conferred, individuals seeking to be recognised as leaders may feel pressured to adjust their behaviours to align with prevailing ILTs. However, this raises a fundamental question: to what extent should individuals modify their behaviours to be seen as leaders, and at what cost to their authenticity?

The authenticity dilemma is not merely an abstract concern; it has real consequences for leader development. Research on authentic leadership suggests that leaders who are perceived as genuine, self-aware, and transparent are more likely to gain trust and legitimacy (Lemoine et al, 2019). However, Billsberry and O'Callaghan (2024) highlight the paradox that aspiring leaders often find themselves in: they must either conform to others' expectations, thereby risking inauthenticity, or stay true to themselves and potentially be overlooked as leaders. This insight suggests that leader development should not merely focus on skill acquisition but should also equip individuals with strategies for balancing authenticity and adaptation. To resolve this tension, leader development must incorporate reflective practices that help individuals clarify their core val-

ues while also developing strategic flexibility. Rather than viewing adaptation as a form of deception, it can be framed as situational sensitivity: an ability to calibrate one's behaviour in ways that maintain authenticity while resonating with the expectations of key stakeholders.

Billsberry and O'Callaghan (2024) propose several strategies that prospective leaders might adopt when navigating the socially constructed nature of leadership. These include aligning their behaviours with the ILTs of those in authority ("aligning up"), conforming to the ILTs of subordinates ("aligning down"), maintaining personal authenticity at the risk of non-recognition, or challenging dominant leadership norms. Each of these strategies presents unique trade-offs, reinforcing the complexity of leader development in socially constructed environments. These strategies provide actionable insights for leader development. For instance, prospective leaders might benefit from scenario-based training that allows them to experiment with different leadership identities in varied contexts. Additionally, mentorship and coaching could play a critical role in helping individuals negotiate the balance between strategic adaptation and authenticity. Given that ILTs can vary across different organisational levels and cultural settings, leader development must also incorporate cross-contextual awareness, preparing individuals to navigate shifting expectations as they move through different leadership roles (Carroll and Levy, 2010; Den Hartog and De Hoogh, 2024).

9. Conclusion

As global expectations of leadership continue to shift in response to social, political, and organisational turbulence, there is growing pressure on both scholars and practitioners to rethink the assumptions that underpin leadership development. The question is no longer simply how to lead effectively, but how leadership itself is understood, interpreted, and legitimised across different contexts. These challenges demand more than adjustments to existing models; they call for a deeper interrogation of how leadership is constructed in practice. The insights developed in this paper point to the need for a fundamental reorientation; one that moves beyond static taxonomies and instead embraces the relational, cultural, and discursive complexities of leadership.

In this article, I have challenged conventional understandings of leadership style by positioning it as a socially constructed phenomenon rather than a stable set of personal traits or behaviours. It interrogates the deep-rooted assumption that leadership styles are intrinsic to individuals, demonstrating instead that they emerge through discourse, interaction, and the expectations of others. In doing so, it reframes leadership as a fluid, dynamic process shaped by cultural, institutional, and relational forces rather than a fixed taxonomy of styles. This shift in perspective has profound implications for both leadership theory and practice, necessitating a move away from prescriptive frameworks towards a more nuanced, contextually embedded understanding of leadership enactment.

A central contribution of this article is its application of social constructionism to leadership styles, highlighting how perceptions of leadership are co-created through language, power relations, and institutional norms. By exposing the ways in which dominant leadership models privilege certain archetypes while marginalising others, this perspective invites a critical reassessment of the assumptions underpinning leadership research and development. It reveals that leadership legitimacy is not solely a function of individual capability but is continuously negotiated within social structures, where people's implicit leadership theories shape who is seen as a leader and why.

The implications for leader development are particularly significant. If leadership styles are socially conferred rather than individually determined, then aspiring leaders must not only cultivate skills but also develop an acute awareness of how they are perceived and evaluated within their specific contexts. This necessitates a shift in leader development from a focus on competency acquisition to a more reflexive, identity-based approach; one that helps individuals navigate the tensions between authenticity and social expectation. The article underscores the importance of leader adaptability, not as a sign of inconsistency but as a strategic capacity to align with or challenge prevailing leadership schemas.

Furthermore, by problematising traditional leadership development paradigms, this article advances the argument that leadership training must move beyond formulaic style prescriptions and instead foster critical sensemaking, relational awareness, and the ability to engage in identity work. Leadership is not a universal construct but an evolving, situated practice; therefore, effective leader development must equip individuals not with static models but with the interpretative tools necessary to understand and shape leadership narratives within their specific organisational and cultural landscapes.

In sum, in this article I make a case for rethinking leadership styles as emergent, co-constructed phenomena rather than predefined behavioural patterns. I challenge leader development to embrace complexity, contextuality, and reflexivity, shifting the focus from skill mastery to the ability to engage with and influence the ever-changing social construction of leadership. By doing so, it can be a transformative perspective that not only advances leadership theory but also reimagines what it means to develop as a leader in practice.

Availability of Data and Materials

Not applicable.

Author Contributions

The author was solely responsible for all aspects of the study, including the conception and design of the re-

search, analysis, and interpretation. The author also drafted the manuscript and critically revised it for intellectual content, and approved the final version for submission.

Acknowledgment

The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on this paper. Any errors in this paper are the responsibility of the author.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Declaration of AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this work, the author used ChatGpt-4.0 to check spelling and grammar. After using this tool, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the publication's content.

References

Alvesson M, Deetz S. Doing critical management research. Sage: London. 2000.

Alvesson M, Spicer A. Critical leadership studies: The case for critical performativity. Human Relations. 2012; 65: 367–390. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726711430555

Alvesson M, Sveningsson S. Good visions, bad micro-management and ugly ambiguity: Contradictions of (non-)leadership in a knowledge-intensive organization. Organization Studies. 2003; 24: 961–988. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840603024006007

Ayaz O, Özbilgin MF, Samdanis M, Torunoğlu Tinay D. Authenticity and atypicality in leadership: Can an atypical leader afford to be authentic? International Journal of Management Reviews. 2024; 26: 312–328. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12355

Barker RA. The nature of leadership. Human Relations. 2001; 54: 469–494. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726701544004

Bass BM. Does the transactional-transformational leadership paradigm transcend organizational and national boundaries? American Psychologist. 1997; 52: 130–139. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.52.2.130

Bass BM. From transactional to transformational leadership: Learning to share the vision. Organizational Dynamics. 1990; 18: 19–31. https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616(90)90061-S

Bass BM. Leadership and performance beyond expectations. Free Press: New York. 1985.

Berger PL, Luckmann T. The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge. Anchor Books: Garden City, NY. 1966.

Billing YD, Alvesson M. Questioning the notion of feminine leadership: A critical perspective on the gender labelling of leadership. Gender, Work, and Organization. 2000; 7: 144–157. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0432.00103

Billsberry J, Egri CP. Leadership development through videography. In Kempster S, Turner AF, Edwards G (eds.) Field guide to leadership development. Edward Elgar: Cheltenham. 2017.

Billsberry J, Escobar Vega C, Molineux J. Think of the children: Leader development at the edge of tomorrow. Journal of Management and Organization. 2019; 25: 378–381. https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2019.10

Billsberry J, Mueller J, Skinner J, Swanson S, Corbett B, Ferkins L. Reimagining leadership in sport management: Lessons from the social construction of leadership. Journal of Sport Management. 2018; 32: 170–182. https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2017-0210

Billsberry J, O'Callaghan S. The social construction of leadership, implicit leadership theories, leader development, and the challenge of authenticity. Journal of Leadership Studies. 2024; 18: 6–22. https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.21886

Billsberry J. Teaching leadership from a social constructionist perspective. Journal of Management & Organization. 2013; 19: 679–688. https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2014.4

Blake RR, Mouton JS. The managerial grid: The key to leadership excellence. Gulf Publishing: Houston. 1964.

Boje DM, Gephart RP, Thatchenkery TJ (eds.) Postmodern management and organization theory. Sage: Thousand Oaks. 1996.

Brodbeck FC, Frese M, Akerblom S, Audia G, Bakacsi G, Bendova H, et al. Cultural variation of leadership prototypes across 22 European countries. Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology. 2000; 73: 1–29. https://doi.org/10.1348/096317900166859

Burr V. Social constructionism. 4th edn. Routledge: London. 2025.

Carroll B, Levy L. Leadership development as identity construction. Management Communication Quarterly. 2010; 24: 211–231. https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318909358725

Cartwright D, Zander A. Group dynamics: Research and theory. 2nd edn. Row, Peterson: Evanston, IL. 1960.

Chemers MM. Leadership research and theory: A functional integration. Group Dynamics. 2000; 4: 27–43. https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2699.4.1.27

Collinson D, Tourish D. Teaching leadership critically: New directions for leadership pedagogy. Academy of Management Learning & Education. 2015; 14: 576–594. https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2014.0079

Crenshaw K. Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. Stanford Law Review. 1991; 43: 1241–1299. https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039

Cunliffe AL, Eriksen M. Relational leader-

ship. Human Relations. 2011; 64: 1425–1449. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726711418388

Day DV, Dragoni L. Leadership development: An outcome-oriented review based on time and levels of analyses. Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior. 2015; 2: 133–156. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032414-111328

Day DV, Fleenor JW, Atwater LE, Sturm RE, McKee RA. Advances in leader and leadership development: A review of 25 years of research and theory. The Leadership Quarterly. 2014; 25: 63–82. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2013.11.004

Day DV. Leadership development: A review in context. The Leadership Quarterly. 2000; 11: 581–613. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(00)00061-8

Den Hartog DN, De Hoogh AH. Cross-cultural leadership: What we know, what we need to know, and where we need to go. Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior. 2024; 11: 535–566. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-110721-033711

Den Hartog DN, De Hoogh AHB, Belschak FD. Toot your own horn? Leader narcissism and the effectiveness of employee self-promotion. Journal of Management. 2020; 46: 261–286. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206318785240

Denis JL, Langley A, Rouleau L. The practice of leadership in the messy world of organizations. Leadership. 2010; 6: 67–88. https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715009354233

Denis JL, Langley A, Sergi V. Leadership in the plural. The Academy of Management Annals. 2012; 6: 211–283. https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520.2012.667612

DeRue DS, Ashford SJ. Who will lead and who will follow? A social process of leadership identity construction in organizations. Academy of Management Review. 2010; 35: 627–647. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.35.4.zok627

Dharani B. Fluidity of social identities: Implications for applying intersectionality. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion: An International Journal. 2025; 44: 502–523. https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-06-2022-0151

Dinh JE, Lord RG, Gardner WL, Meuser JD, Liden RC, Hu J. Leadership theory and research in the new millennium: Current theoretical trends and changing perspectives. The Leadership Quarterly. 2014; 25: 36–62. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2013.11.005

Eagly AH, Carli LL. Through the labyrinth: The truth about how women become leaders. Harvard Business School Press: Boston, MA. 2007.

Eagly AH, Karau SJ. Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. Psychological Review. 2002; 109: 573–598. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.109.3.573

Eagly AH, Sczesny S. Stereotypes about women, men, and leaders: Have times changed? In Barreto M, Ryan MK, Schmitt MT (eds.) The glass ceiling in the 21st century: Understanding barriers to gender equality (pp. 21–47). American Psychological Association: Washington DC. 2009. https://doi.org/10.1037/11863-002

Eden D, Leviatan U. Implicit leadership theory as a determinant of the factor structure underlying supervisory behavior scales. Journal of Applied Psychology. 1975; 60: 736–741. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.60.6.736

Epitropaki O, Martin R. Implicit leadership theories in applied settings: Factor structure, generalizability, and stability over time. Journal of Applied Psychology. 2004; 89: 293–310. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.89.2.293

Epitropaki O, Martin R. The moderating role of individual differences in the relation between transformational/transactional leadership perceptions and organizational identification. The Leadership Quarterly. 2005; 16: 569–589. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.06.005

Epitropaki O, Sy T, Martin R, Tram-Quon S, Topakas A. Implicit leadership and followership theories "in the wild": Taking stock of information-processing approaches to leadership and followership in organizational settings. The Leadership Quarterly. 2013; 24: 858–881. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2013.10.005

Escobar Vega C, Billsberry J, Molineux J, Lowe KB. The development of implicit leadership theories during childhood: A reconceptualization through the lens of overlapping waves theory. Psychological Review. 2025; 132: 719–743. https://doi.org/10.1037/rev0000484

Fairhurst GT, Grant D. The social construction of leadership: A sailing guide. Management Communication Quarterly. 2010; 24: 171–210. https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318909359697

Fairhurst GT, Uhl-Bien M. Organizational discourse analysis (ODA): Examining leadership as a relational process. The Leadership Quarterly. 2012; 23: 1043–1062. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2012.10.005

Fairhurst GT. Discursive approaches to leadership. In Bryman, A, Grint K, Collinson DL (eds.) The Sage handbook of leadership (pp. 495–507). Sage: London. 2011.

Ferguson RA. Aberrations in black: Toward a queer of color critique. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis. 2004.

Fiedler FE. A theory of leadership effectiveness. McGraw-Hill: New York. 1967.

Fischer T, Sitkin SB. Leadership styles: A comprehensive assessment and way forward. The Academy of Management Annals. 2023; 17: 331–372. https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2020.0340

Fleishman EA. The description of supervisory behavior. Journal of Applied Psychology. 1953; 37: 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0056314

Ford J, Harding N, Learmonth M. Leadership as identity: Constructions and deconstructions. Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke. 2008.

Ford J. Discourses of leadership: Gender, identity and contradiction in a UK public sector organization. Leadership. 2006; 2: 77–99. https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715006060654

Foti RJ, Hansbrough TK, Epitropaki O, Coyle PT. Dynamic viewpoints on implicit leadership and followership theories: approaches, findings, and future direc-

tions. The Leadership Quarterly. 2017; 28: 261–267. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2017.02.004

Foti RJ, Knee RE, Backert RSG. Multi-level implications of framing leadership perceptions as a dynamic process. The Leadership Quarterly. 2008; 19: 178–194. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2008.01.007

Foucault M. The archaeology of knowledge. 2nd edn. Routledge: London. 2002.

Gelfand MJ, Erez M, Aycan Z. Cross-cultural organizational behavior. Annual Review of Psychology. 2007; 58: 479–514. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.58.110405.085559

Gergen KJ. An invitation to social construction. 4th edn. Sage: London. 2023.

Greenleaf RK. Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness. Paulist Press: New York. 1977.

Grint K. Critical essay: Wicked problems in the Age of Uncertainty. Human Relations. 2022; 75: 1518–1532. https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267211070770

Grint K. Problems, problems, problems: The social construction of 'leadership.' Human Relations. 2005; 58: 1467–1494. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726705061314

Grint K. Reading Tolstoy's wave. In Grint K (ed.) Leadership: Classical, contemporary, and critical approaches (pp. 1–26). Oxford University Press: Oxford. 1997.

Hannah ST, Avolio BJ. Ready or not: How do we accelerate the developmental readiness of leaders? Journal of Organizational Behavior. 2010; 31: 1181–1187. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.675

Hannah ST, Bluhm D, Avolio BJ. Hierarchical leader-leader fit: Examining authentic leader dyads and implications for junior leader outcomes. Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies. 2024; 31: 453–472. https://doi.org/10.1177/15480518241276703

Hemphill JK, Coons AE. Development of the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire. In Stogdill RM, Coons AE (eds.) Leader behavior: Its description and measurement (Research Monograph No. 88). Ohio State University, Bureau of Business Research: Columbus. 1957.

Hofstede G. Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values. Sage: Beverly Hills. 1980.

House RJ, Hanges PJ, Javidan M, Dorfman PW, Gupta V (eds.) Culture, leadership, and organizations: The GLOBE study of 62 societies. Sage: Thousand Oaks. 2004.

House RJ. A path goal theory of leader effectiveness. Administrative Science Quarterly. 1971; 16: 321–339. https://doi.org/10.2307/2391905

Ibarra H, Wittman S, Petriglieri G, Day DV. Leadership and identity. In Day DV (ed.) The Oxford handbook of leadership and organization (pp. 285–301). Oxford University Press: Oxford. 2014.

Javidan M, Dorfman PW, de Luque MS, House RJ. In the eye of the beholder: Cross cultural lessons in leadership from Project GLOBE. Academy of Management Perspectives. 2006; 20: 67–90. https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2006.19873410

Judge TA, Bono JE, Ilies R, Gerhardt MW. Personality and leadership: A qualitative and quantitative review. Journal of Applied Psychology. 2002; 87: 765–780. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.87.4.765

Junker NM, van Dick R. Implicit theories in organizational settings: A systematic review and research agenda of implicit leadership and followership theories. The Leadership Quarterly. 2014; 25: 1154–1173. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2014.09.002

Katz D, Kahn RL. Human organization and worker motivation. In Tripp LR (ed.) Industrial productivity (pp. 146–171). Industrial Relations Research Association. 1951.

Kempster S, Iszatt-White M. Towards co-constructed coaching: Exploring the integration of coaching and co-constructed autoethnography in leadership development. Management Learning, 2013; 44: 319–336. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507612449959

Klijn EH, de Boer N, Eshuis J. Leading frontline enforcers: how supervisors' leadership style impacts inspectors' enforcement style. Public Management Review. 2022; 24: 398–417. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2020.1833610

Knights D, Willmott H. Conceptualizing leadership processes: A study of senior managers in a financial services company. Journal of Management Studies. 1992; 29: 761–782. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.1992.tb00688.x

Knights D. Changing spaces: The disruptive impact of a new epistemological location for the study of management. Academy of Management Review. 1992; 17: 514–536. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1992.4281996

Kuhn TS. The structure of scientific revolutions. University of Chicago Press: Chicago. 1962.

Kukreja P, Pandey J, Vogel B. Reviewing the romance of leadership literature: A trivializing, underdeveloped love affair? European Management Journal. 2025. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2025.04.010 (in press)

Leary MR. Self-presentation: Impression management and interpersonal behavior. Routledge: New York. 2019.

Lemoine GJ, Hartnell CA, Leroy H. Taking stock of moral approaches to leadership: An integrative review of ethical, authentic, and servant leadership. Academy of Management Annals. 2019; 13: 148–187. https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2016.0121

Likert R. New patterns of management. McGraw-Hill: New York. 1961.

Lock A, Strong T. Social constructionism: Sources and stirrings in theory and practice. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK. 2010.

Lord RG, Day DV, Zaccaro SJ, Avolio BJ, Eagly AH. Leadership in applied psychology: Three waves of theory and research. Journal of Applied Psychology. 2017; 102: 434–451. https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000089

Lord RG, Epitropaki O, Foti RJ, Hansborough TK. Implicit lead-

ership theories, implicit followership theories, and dynamic processing of leadership information. Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior. 2020; 7: 49–74. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-012119-045434

Lord RG, Foti RJ, De Vader CL. A test of leadership categorization theory: Internal structure, information processing, and leadership perceptions. Organizational Behavior and Human Performance. 1984; 34: 343–378. https://doi.org/10.1016/0030-5073(84)90043-6

Lord RG, Maher KJ. Leadership and information processing: Linking perceptions and performance. Unwin Hyman: London. 1991.

Lord RG, Shondrick SJ. Leadership and knowledge: Symbolic, connectionist, and embodied perspectives. The Leadership Quarterly. 2011; 22: 207–222. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2010.12.016

Lyotard JF. The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis. 1984.

McCauley CD, Van Velsor E, Ruderman MN. Introduction: Our view of leadership development. In Van Velsor E, McCauley CD, Ruderman MN (eds.) The Center for Creative Leadership handbook of leadership development (pp. 1–26). Jossey-Bass: San Francisco. 2010.

Meindl JR, Ehrlich SB, Dukerich JM. The romance of leadership. Administrative Science Quarterly. 1985; 30: 78–102. https://doi.org/10.2307/2392813

Meindl JR. The romance of leadership as a follower-centric theory: A social constructionist approach. The Leadership Quarterly. 1995; 6: 329–341. https://doi.org/10.1016/1048-9843(95)90012-8

Nguyen M, Sharma P, Malik A. Leadership styles and employee creativity: The interactive impact of online knowledge sharing and organizational innovation. Journal of Knowledge Management. 2024; 28: 631–650. https://doi.org/10.1108/JKM-01-2023-0014

Northouse PG. Leadership: Theory and practice. 7th edn. Sage: Thousand Oaks. 2016.

Offermann LR, Coats MR. Implicit theories of leadership: Stability and change over two decades. The Leadership Quarterly. 2018; 29: 513–522. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2017.12.003

Offermann LR, Kennedy JK, Wirtz PW. Implicit leadership theories: Content, structure, and generalizability. The Leadership Quarterly. 1994; 5: 43–58. https://doi.org/10.1016/1048-9843(94)90005-1

Parker M. Critique in the name of what? Postmodernism and critical approaches to organization. Organization Studies. 1995; 16: 553–564. https://doi.org/10.1177/017084069501600401

Pearce CL, Conger JA. Shared leadership: Reframing the hows and whys of leadership. Sage: Thousand Oaks. 2003.

Petriglieri G, Peshkam A. Stranger leaders: A theory of marginal leaders' conception of learning in organizations. Academy of Management Journal. 2022; 65: 1240–1273. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2019.0162

Petriglieri G. F**k science!? An invitation to humanize organization theory. Organization Theory. 2020; 1: 263178771989766. https://doi.org/10.1177/2631787719897663

Podsakoff PM, MacKenzie SB, Bommer WH. Transformational leader behaviors and substitutes for leadership as determinants of employee satisfaction, commitment, trust, and organizational citizenship behaviors. Journal of Management. 1996; 22: 259–298. https://doi.org/10.1177/014920639602200204

Rabiul MK, Yean TF. Leadership styles, motivating language, and work engagement: An empirical investigation of the hotel industry. International Journal of Hospitality Management. 2021; 92: 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102712

Raelin JA. Leadership-as-practice: Theory and application. Routledge: New York. 2016.

Reece R. Critical race theory: A multicultural disrupter. Genealogy. 2024; 8: 1–19. https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy8030103

Riggs BS, Porter COL. Are there advantages to seeing leadership the same? A test of the mediating effects of LMX on the relationship between ILT congruence and employees' development. The Leadership Quarterly. 2017; 28: 285–299. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.10.009

Rorty R. Philosophy and the mirror of nature. Princeton University Press: Princeton. 1980.

Sandberg J. The constructions of social constructionism. In Sjöstrand S-E, Sandberg, J, Tyrstrup, M (eds.) Invisible management: The social construction of leadership (pp. 28–48). Thomson: London. 2001.

Schyns B, Meindl JR. An overview of implicit leadership theories and their application in organization practice. In Schyns B, Meindl JR (eds.) Implicit leadership theories (pp. 15–36). Information Age Publishing: Greenwich CT. 2005.

Schyns B, Schilling J. Implicit leadership theories: Think leader, think effective? Journal of Management Inquiry. 2011; 20: 141–150. https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492610375989

Sheppard JA, Gabriel R, Fraser AM, LeBaron-Black AB. Critical race theory in human development and family science. Journal of Social Issues. 2024; 80: 124–144. https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12608

Shotter J. Conversational realities: Constructing life through language. Sage: Thousand Oaks. 1993.

Sims R, Weinberg FJ. More than follow the leader: Expectations, behaviors, stability, and change in a co-created leadership process. Group & Organization Management. 2024; 49: 332–364. https://doi.org/10.1177/10596011221093456

Smircich L, Morgan G. Leadership: The management of meaning. Journal of Applied Behavioral Science. 1982; 18: 257–273. https://doi.org/10.1177/002188638201800303

Specchia ML, Cozzolino MR, Carini E, Di Pilla A, Galletti C, Ricciardi W, Damiani G. Leadership styles and nurses'

job satisfaction: Results of a systematic review. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 2021; 18: 1–15. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18041552

Spicer A, Alvesson M. Critical management studies: A critical review. Journal of Management Studies. 2025; 62: 446–483. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.13047

Stogdill RM. Manual for the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire form XII. Ohio State University, Bureau of Business Research: Columbus. 1963.

Stogdill RM. Personal factors associated with leadership: A survey of the literature. The Journal of Psychology. 1948; 25: 35–71. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980.1948.9917362

Sveningsson S, Alvesson M. Managing managerial identities: Organizational fragmentation, discourse and identity struggle. Human Relations. 2003; 56: 1163–1193. https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267035610001

Sy T. What do you think of followers? Examining the content, structure, and consequences of implicit followership theories. Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes. 2010; 113: 73–84. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2010.06.001

Tavares GM, Sobral F, Goldszmidt R, Araújo F. Opening the implicit leadership theories' black box: An experimental approach with conjoint analysis. Frontiers in Psychology. 2018; 9: 1–11. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00100

Tourish D. The dark side of transformational leadership: A critical perspective. Routledge: London. 2013.

Uhl-Bien M, Marion R, McKelvey B. Complexity leadership theory: Shifting leadership from the industrial age to the knowledge era. The Leadership Quarterly. 2007; 18: 298–318. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.04.002

Uhl-Bien M. Relational leadership theory: Exploring the social processes of leadership and organizing. The Leadership Quarterly. 2006; 17: 654–676. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2006.10.007

van Ameijde JDJ, Nelson PC, Billsberry J, van Meurs N. Improving leadership in higher education institutions: A distributed perspective. Higher Education. 2009; 58: 763–779. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-009-9224-y

Vuković S, Carpentier N. The vertical and horizontal dimensions in the social construction of leadership: A case study on the social media followers of the Croatian politicians Zoran Milanović and Miro Bulj. Leadership. 2023; 19: 530–548. https://doi.org/10.1177/17427150231202557

Weick KE, Sutcliffe KM, Obstfeld D. Organizing and the process of sensemaking. Organization Science. 2005; 16: 409–421. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1050.0133

Wittgenstein L. Philosophical investigations (G. E. M. Anscombe, Trans.). Blackwell: Oxford. 1953.