

# Ignorant Certainty: Leadership in a Dogmatic Haystack

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**Abstract: Background:** *There is no absolute certainty of truth in the social sciences*, but some try. On one hand, several researchers argue that we still search for a robust *leadership theory* – a heuristic Bayesian probabilistic explanation of reality. This view is based on the numerous leadership definitions which suggest the absence of an integrative framework thus producing confusion. On the other hand, many researchers seemingly imply leadership theory is finalised and based on a contemporary broadly agreed upon but limited definition emphasising relationships. Our stance is continuously updating possibilities with new and, in this paper, *old* but unfashionable research evidence that may clarify. **Purpose, design/method/approach:** Because concepts make a crucial contribution to theory, we assessed the concept leadership by conducting *concept analysis*. **Findings:** The purported consensus leadership definition states *relationships* or *'cooperation'* as the fundamental quality of leadership. Research demonstrates that relationships/cooperation are necessary, but an insufficient condition to encapsulate the complete concept of leadership. Many researchers agree that leadership is a solution to the problem of collective effort (cooperation), bringing people together (coordination), and combining their efforts (integration) to promote organisational success – the crux of competitive advantage. This description signifies leadership solves the *organising problem*, namely, *division of labour* and *integration of effort*. Hence, leadership entails more than relationships/cooperation. Coordination galvanises cooperation. Nonetheless, coordination is missing in the purported consensus leadership definition and is often evident in observed poor organisational results. **Contribution:** We propose an alternative leadership definition from the earliest ('old') management literature. Our definition clarifies and remedies the shortcomings of the ignorant certainty asserted in the consensus definition. We believe that we provide an alternative way of thinking about, understanding, explaining, practising, and developing leadership. Consequently, laying the foundation for a unified leadership framework, if not theory, that can guide further refinement and expansion. **Limitations:** We carefully followed one recognised approach to concept analysis. This approach is useful in advancing debate and stimulating insights in the spirit of ongoing efforts to refine leadership theory. We **recommend** further calibration studies.

**Keywords:** Leadership theory, Coordination and cooperation, Solving the organising problem, Competitive advantage, Conceptual paper

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## 1. Introduction

Despite years of study, *leadership* seemingly remains an enigma. This puzzle is conspicuous in the numerous and varied definitions and conceptualisations (Gutterman, 2023; Haslam, Alvesson and Reicher, 2024). Some scholars argue that leadership suffers from overlapping but disconnected theory proliferation. The disconnection points to the lack of an overarching integrative theoretical framework. These theories are imprecise and, therefore, remain insignificant (Antonakis et al, 2024; Deng et al, 2023). This account is typical of applied disciplines, including leadership as an aspect of general management (hereafter 'management'). Applied disciplines struggle to connect sound theory and practice by balancing concepts and practice in lieu of integrative frameworks (Parker-Follett, 1933b; Stewart, 1997; Swanson and Chermack, 2013). Some researchers portray leadership as independent from and exalted over management (Alvesson, 2022; Stewart, 1997), which intensify the problem.

This enigma is problematic because leadership is imperative for (a) successful organisations which (b) permeate the wealth-creating capacity of societies, and (c) touch the wellbeing of societal members and, thus, significant for the positive impact on people and societies (Hogan and Sherman, 2020). Nonetheless, theory is never final or complete; there is always room for refinement (Popper, 1963; Shoemaker, Tankard and Lasorsa, 2004; Stewart, 1997; Swanson and Chermack, 2013). Abundant attention to leadership is understandable. The lack of progress with theory development is perplexing but consistent with theory development in management sciences (Suddaby, 2010; Whetten, 1989).

We attribute the lack of progress in leadership theory development to several regretful scholarly practices. On one hand, the leadership enigma is perpetuated by the *publish or perish* imperative, resulting in mountains of trivial additions asserting their distinctness from similar works (Deng et al, 2023). On the other hand, progress is impeded by detrimental publishing orthodoxy favouring the recent new while simultaneously discounting the foundational old, preferencing certain methodologies, and advantaging so-called scholarly *elite(s)* (Hannah,

2024; Merrill, 1970). Scholars have noted the lack of progress in theory on leadership and provided guidelines to address this shortcoming. Nonetheless, progress seems elusive (Antonakis et al, 2024; Haslam, Alvesson and Reicher, 2024).

The current status of leadership theory offers an opportunity to advance debate and stimulate insights. We conducted concept analysis to uncover understanding of leadership, enhancing its precision and calibrating theory (cf. Gunawan, Aunguroch and Marzilli, 2023; Honkavuo et al, 2018; Nuopponen, 2010; Suddaby, 2010; Whetten, 1989). Our concept analysis demonstrates (a) an alternative leadership definition, encapsulating what is necessary and sufficient, based on pioneering general management scholars who stood the test of time, (b) contextualised in an organisation, (c) accomplishing *coordination* and *cooperation* that *align key actions with strategic intent*, thus solving the *organising problem*, (d) that is consequential for *effective strategy execution* ensuring *organisational success*, and (e) offers a precise theoretical framework. This concept analysis provides an alternative way of thinking about, understanding, explaining, practicing, and developing leadership which can benefit society.

We start by creating common ground by reminding readers what theory in applied social science disciplines is. Then, we contextualise leadership, necessitating a brief revisiting of what an organisation is and what leadership's role in successful organisations is. Thereafter, we explicate the purported consensus leadership definition indicating shortcomings and culminating in an alternative leadership definition from the mute – the old – body of management knowledge. The alternative definition clarifies and remedies the shortcomings of the (purported) consensus leadership definition without adding complexity or assailing it. Thus, we lay the foundation for a precise leadership framework, if not theory, which lends itself to further refinement and expansion. Finally, we close with conclusions, limitations, contributions, and recommendations for further research.

## 2. Theory in Applied Social Science

Leadership, an aspect of management, forms part of the field of economics in *social science* – a *socially constructed* and, thus, *subjective phenomenon* – showing how the parts cohere (Shoemaker, Tankard and Lasorsa, 2004). Social science deals with *human behaviour*, specifically *motivation*, *wellbeing*, and *morality* within its context (Shoemaker, Tankard and Lasorsa, 2004; Swanson and Chermack, 2013). Science is about *theory*, a falsifiable explanation (approximation) of reality, such as a phenomenon, behaviour, or event, and how reality works (Antonakis et al, 2024; Parker-Follett, 1925; Popper, 1963; Whetten, 1989).

A complete theory comprises four key elements, namely: (a) *What* – the essential factors that reasonably should be considered as part of the explanation of the phenomena of interest and meeting the criteria of *comprehensive* (accurate) and *parsimonious* (simplicity in adding value to understanding), (b) *How* – are these factors (causally) related, (c) *Why* – specifying the underlying dynamics justifying the selected factors and the proposed (causal) relationships, and (d) The temporal and contextual boundary factors (*who, where, when*) limiting the theory's application (Whetten, 1989). What and how elements describe and comprise the domain of the theory. Why explains characteristics and comprises the assumptions of the theory that holds it together (Whetten, 1989).

The purpose of theory is to inform our understanding, i.e., the meaning, nature, and functioning (process knowledge) of reality as well as to explain and predict (outcome knowledge) how reality works to allow us to improve our future behaviour (Shoemaker, Tankard and Lasorsa, 2004; Swanson and Chermak, 2013). Theory building is the continuous process of studying, confirming or refuting, adapting, applying, and calibrating theory (Swanson and Chermack, 2013; Whetten, 1989). In theory building logic substitutes data as the basis for evaluation (Whetten, 1989).

Sound theory and theory building are *precise* and comprise two essential qualities, viz. *rigor* (valid) and *relevance* (useful). Rigor consists of three key aspects, namely, (i) a clear and accurate theoretical or conceptual framework, which provides a solid basis for (ii) an appropriate methodology, contributing to (iii) robust empirical findings facilitating the development of cumulative knowledge that can be used with confidence to guide better action and practice (Antonakis et al, 2024; Honkavuo et al, 2018; Nuopponen, 2010; Suddaby, 2010; Swanson and Chermack, 2013; Whetten, 1989). Relevance means the theory is useful for improved action in practice, and through its application theory can be further developed and refined/improved from experience and learning as vital sources of knowledge (Suddaby, 2010; Swanson and Chermack, 2013).

Applied disciplines are domains of study that are fully understood through their use in the functioning world, necessitating an examination from a comprehensive perspective (Johns, 2024; Swanson and Chermack, 2013) – in this instance running a successful organisation. Applied theories are complete representations of system activities and may incorporate models derived from methodological approaches applying specific techniques, but models are not theories (Shoemaker, Tankard and Lasorsa, 2004; Swanson and Chermack, 2013). Philosophical orientations impact theory (building), as do paradigms, whether grand (generalisable), midrange or local (minimally transferable) theories (Swanson and Chermack, 2013).

### **3. Contextualising Leadership from a General Management Perspective**

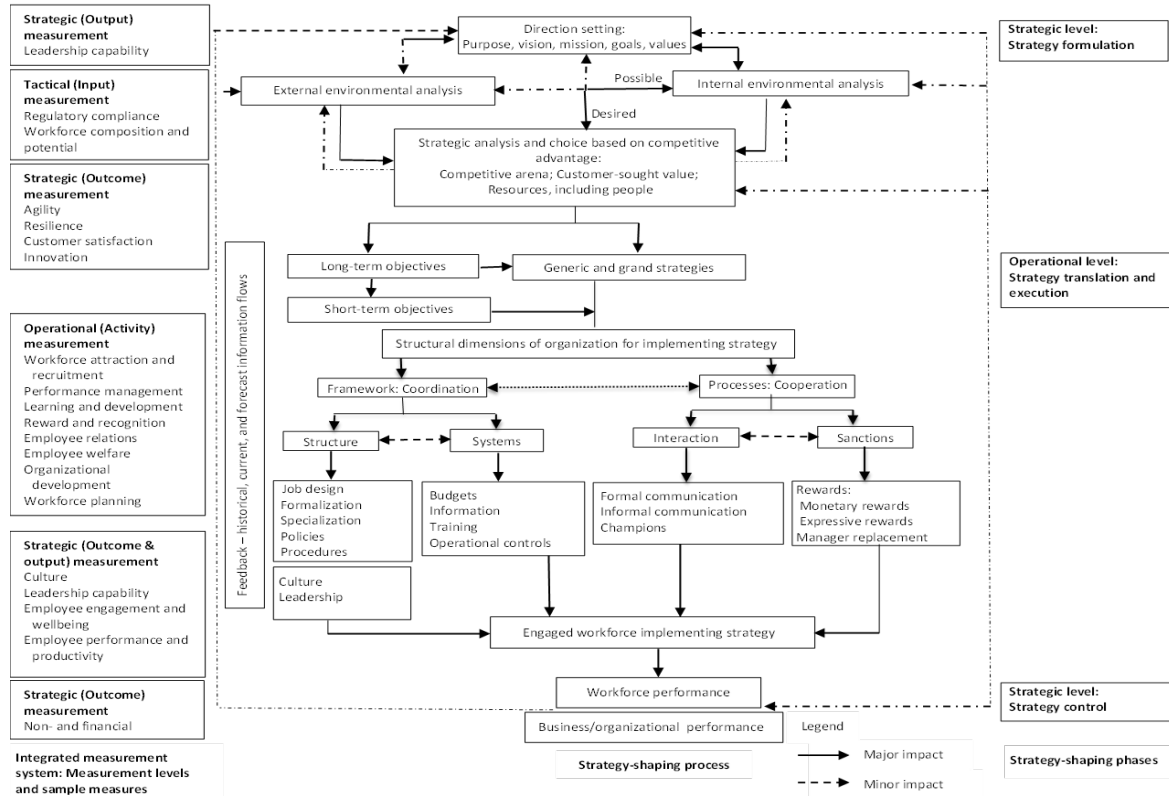
Because theory in applied disciplines (a) is understood through its use in the functioning world and (b) takes a comprehensive perspective, we contextualise leadership from a management perspective as practiced in formal organisations. Management means to (a) foresee the future and plan action to realise the future, (b) organise the human and material structure of the organisation, (c) command – analogous to cooperate – ensure the smooth running of the organisation by guaranteeing people perform at their best (flourish), benefitting the total organisation, (d) coordinate – harmonise and unify all activities and effort throughout the organisation by rendering them their rightful proportions to facilitate the organisation's functioning and success, and (e) control, i.e., ensure everything happens according to planning, 'a' above (Fayol, 1916[2013]:6). Although each of these essential factors ('a-e') comprises its own features, management retains coherence. Furthermore, management permeates the total organisation with higher hierarchical levels of management playing a larger part than lower hierarchical level management in ensuring organisational success. Leadership, an aspect of management, is central to running a successful organisation, necessitating a brief revisiting of organisations (Johns, 2024; Kaiser, LeBretton and J. Hogan, 2015; Parker-Follett, 1933a; Stewart, 1997; Yukl and Gardner, 2020).

Organisations are (a) open systems of (b) coordinated action (c) among individuals inhabiting specific roles, and groups with diverse competences, needs, wants, and aspirations, (d) in conjunction with other resources, notably information, (e) collectively working (cooperating) at (f) attaining a mutual goal, viz., the long-term joint survival of the organisation and its members, (g) by fulfilling a specific purpose in society and therefore, are important social institutions (Hogan and Sherman, 2020; March and Simon, 1993; Puranam, Alexy and Reitzig, 2014). Leadership, specifically the head of the organisation, is ultimately charged with organisational success namely, fulfilling the organisational purpose enduringly in society. Implying workers desire (a) competent leaders generating a solid reputation, (b) who treat all stakeholders morally (just, proper, respectful), that is, having their interest at heart and act for the good of the diverse group – the most important quality of leadership, (c) make sound decisions using relevant and timeous information embracing integrity, and (d) having a clear and compelling vision, that inspires employee engagement that delivers successful organisations (Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003; Kahn, 1990; Kouzes and Posner, 2021). Figure 1 captures the organisational description in a simplified illustration.

Figure 1 shows the coherent and interacting components of an organisation that can guide management/leadership to attain organisational success. The Figure 1 organisational components can be classified into three *interrelated* parts, namely, planning, implementation, and control which manifest at the organisational strategic and operational levels. Planning, at the organisational strategic level, corresponds to Fayol's (1916[2013]) management function to foresee the future. Implementation, at the organisational operational level, corresponds to Fayol's (1916[2013]) management functions of organising, command, and coordination which flow from planning. Implementation represents action to realise the planned future by translating planning into action. The mechanism structural dimension of organisation for implementing strategy is pivotal in actioning the planned future. Control ensures that the planned future materialises. Figure 1's feedback loop provides information from the integrated measurement system and ensures success.

A few salient points from Figure 1 need emphasis. Organisational direction guides and unifies all activities throughout the organisation (Fayol, 1916[2013]; Parker-Follett, 1933b). This means coordination originates from organisational direction. Organisational direction is attained by strategy, encompassing multidimensional decisions that manifest at the different organisational levels, based on competitive advantage (Hautz, Seidl and Whittington, 2017; Porter, 1985; Thompson et al, 2024). Competitive advantage anchors strategy by (a) offering innovative customer-sought-value expressed in customer satisfaction, (b) in a chosen competitive arena through (c) competent workers doing their daily jobs, viz., transforming value-creating resources into innovative customer-sought-value, (d) in a coordinated system of cooperation, and (e) that align key actions with strategic intent to attain the organisation's purpose. Workers' daily jobs, specified in job design, are categorised according to Fayol's (1916[2013]) six interdependent functional groups. These are (a) production, (b) exchange, (c) finance,

(d) security, (e) accounting, and (f) managerial, i.e., planning, organising, coordinating, commanding (analogous to cooperating), and controlling, which are congruent with Porter’s (1985) value-chain. These interdependent functions require corresponding and proportionate competence to execute in congruence with the worker’s hierarchical position (Fayol, 1916[2013]; George, 2021; Parker-Follett, 1933a; Stewart, 1997; Young, 2024). Therefore, these interdependent functions should not be separated according to hierarchical position which will impede coordination (Stewart, 1997).



Source: Adapted from Nienaber and McNeill, 2022

Figure 1: Simplified illustration of an organisation

Competitive advantage arises from the mechanism structural dimensions of organisation for implementing strategy which aligns strategy, structure, and processes (Skivington and Daft, 1991; Thompson et al, 2024). The mechanism’s *framework dimension* accomplishes coordination, and the *processes dimension* accomplishes cooperation. Coordination and cooperation aim at division of labour (task division and task allocation, i.e. job design) and integration of effort (information and rewards provision) guided by policies and procedures, supported by culture, enabled by leadership, allocation of requisite resources, and reinforced by communication and rewards, monetary or otherwise – functions present at both the organisational strategic and operational levels illustrated in Figure 1.

Thus, coordination and cooperation solve the interlinked problem of division of labour and integration of effort, i.e., the organising problem – the key to successful organisational performance. It minimises intra-organisational competition/conflict while leveraging interorganisational competition to outwit rivals (Hogan and Sherman, 2020; March and Simon, 1993; Puranam, Alexy and Reitzig, 2014; Young, 2024). Consistent with the management pioneers (cf. Merrill, 1970), proper coordination and cooperation inspire employee engagement by actuating individual workers and groups towards collectively realising the organisational purpose. This allows them to express their competence (getting ahead), realise autonomy (find meaning), and experience relatedness (getting along), which are critical for their wellbeing (Hogan and Sherman, 2020; Kahn, 1990; Ryan and Deci, 2017).

Figure 1 aids our understanding of leadership as an aspect of management as conceived by pioneering management scholars in running a successful organisation. This conception will become clearer in the next section analysing leadership definitions. Figure 1 suggests organisational success requires management/leadership down the line to be up to the task (competent) to perform their function, i.e., fulfilling

the purpose of the organisation, through inspiring organisational members to willingly cooperate towards goal achievement by expressing competence, realising autonomy, and experiencing relatedness, in a coordinated fashion. Management/leadership uses the mechanism *organisation structure* to accomplish success through orchestrating coordination and cooperation. As such, effective management/leadership requires both a *functional* and *people orientation* (Kaiser, LeBretton and J. Hogan, 2015; Parker-Follett, 1933a; Yukl and Gardner, 2020). Hence, consideration to management/leadership, specifically (a) who they are as a person, pertinently their reputation produced by expressing their competence, (b) in executing their function, as well as (c) the influence they exert through their behaviour in inspiring people to cooperate, are imperative for organisational success (Parker-Follett, 1933a; Yukl and Gardner, 2020). Therefore, management/leadership as person, function, and style are syncretic (Nienaber and McNeill, 2024; Parker-Follett, 1933a). With the context of leadership covered, we now turn to the definitions of leadership.

#### **4. Leadership Definitions**

Concepts, precise definitions capturing what is necessary and sufficient to encapsulate a concept, terms and language form the building block of theory. In this paper we use concept analysis as method to clarify a known concept (in this case leadership) which requires clarification. This uncover the different explanations of the concept examined (i.e., leadership) by searching for foundational features or essential factors that reasonably should be considered as part of the explanation of the phenomena of interest (i.e., leadership) which meet the criteria of *comprehensive* (accurate) and *parsimonious* (simplicity in adding value to understanding) (cf. Whetton, 1989), including the phenomena hidden behind the meanings of the concept being examined (i.e., leadership). This may include the analysis of etymology, semantics, and discrimination between closely related concepts to distinguish the concept examined (i.e., leadership) (Gunawan, Aunguroch and Marzilli, 2023; Honkavuo et al, 2018; Nuopponen, 2010; Suddaby, 2010; Whetten, 1989). Our focus is on semantics, as the original meaning of the concept 'leadership' did not survive in current language usage.

##### **4.1 Consensus Leadership Definition**

Originally, the term *leadership* had been associated with a *person* (Grace, 2003). However, definitions evolve over time. The purported consensus leadership definition is: "The process whereby one or more people motivate one or more other people to contribute to the achievement of collective goals (of any form) by shaping beliefs, values, and understandings in context rather than by exercising stick-and-carrot behavioural control" (Haslam, Alvesson and Reicher, 2024:3). This definition is consistent with studies focusing primarily on leadership as social influence or relatedness, i.e., relationships/cooperation (Deng et al, 2023). Although helpful in some ways (necessary), the purported consensus definition falls short in several important ways. Why?

The consensus definition holds relationships/cooperation as fundamental quality of leadership. Relationships are an important part of leadership but woefully (a) insufficient to motivate people to (joint) action to attain organisational success, i.e., mutual goals, demonstrated by the management pioneers' work (cf. Merrill, 1970) and thus, (b) does not accurately/comprehensively capture leadership as concept (cf. Whetton, 1989).

Motivating people to action, i.e., willingly cooperate to contribute to attaining mutual goals (organisational success), requires them to feel they are doing something good and valuable through (a) expressing their competence, (b) realising autonomy, and (c) experiencing relatedness in doing their jobs, i.e., strategy implementation (Hogan and Sherman, 2020; Ryan and Deci, 2017). Competence, autonomy, and relatedness are inborn human needs experienced as the ability to get ahead, find meaning, and belong and serve as the *motivational levers* ensuring people perform at their best, which nurtures their wellbeing (Hogan and Sherman, 2020; Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003; Kahn, 1990; Parker-Follett, 1933a; Ryan and Deci, 2017).

Competence means people need to master their environment through learning and growth by 'training' opportunities they deem indispensable for and meaningful in job performance (Hogan and Sherman, 2020; Ryan and Deci, 2017). Autonomy means to be one's authentic self by experiencing free-willed and self-endorsing behaviour congruent with one's values which provides one with a sense of control over one's decisions, actions, and consequences and requires time to think, experiment, learn, and involves risk-taking and innovative behaviours, enabling one to proactively adapt to change (Hogan and Sherman, 2020; Ryan and Deci, 2017). Relatedness means fostering a few sincere relationships, i.e., personal connections based on peoples' morality leading to trust – a willingness to rely on each other to perform as expected, without monitoring each other or by taking advantage of each other's vulnerabilities. Satisfying/frustrating the need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness produce behaviour, emotion, and thought, culminating in engagement/alienation (Hogan and Sherman, 2020; Kahn, 1990; Kouzes and Posner, 2021).

Research demonstrates that many workers inhabit positions that do not allow them to express competence, realise autonomy, and experience relatedness in doing their jobs (Gallup, 2025; Nienaber and McNeill, 2022). This mismatch results in alienation, strategy implementation breakdowns, and poor organisational performance (cf. Hautz, Seidl and Whittington, 2017; Morkel, Nienaber and McNeill, 2021; Nienaber and McNeill, 2023). The mismatch between worker competence and organisational position represents a failure in division of labour (task division and task allocation, i.e., job design) and integration of effort (provision of information and rewards) as division of labour and integration of effort interact. This mismatch thwarts solving the organising problem and represents a failure of coordination and cooperation – a management/leadership failure. Correcting this mismatch and improving organisational performance requires adjusting the mechanism structural dimensions of organisation for implementing strategy, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Division of labour and integration of effort (solving the organising problem) fall in the scope of hierarchical appointed management accountability. Because workers do not have control over these decisions, they cannot ‘motivate each other,’ suggested by the purported consensus leadership definition. Division of labour and integration of effort relies on *leadership competence*, perceived or real. Leadership competence produces a *reputation*, i.e., consensus of others’ (dis)approval of leadership behaviour, that prompts follower behaviour, either engagement or alienation (George, 2021; Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003; Kahn, 1990; Kouzes and Posner, 2021; March and Simon, 1993; Parker-Follett, 1933b; Yukl and Gardner, 2020).

#### 4.1.1 Competence

Competence, a variously defined performance capability, is generally accepted to comprise knowledge, skills, experience, and behaviour necessary to productively do a job and can be learned (George, 2021; Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003; Kouzes and Posner, 2021; Parker-Follett, 1925). Different jobs require different kinds and degrees of competence and people have different aptitudes and flourish in different conditions, necessitating a person-job fit (Young, 2024). Information about requisite competence is available from Figure 1’s integrated measurement system (cf. Nienaber and McNeill, 2022, 2023).

Hogan and Warrenfeltz’s (2003) developmental competence taxonomy integrates all competency frameworks and models and is particularly applicable to leadership. Hogan and Warrenfeltz’ (2003) developmental competence taxonomy comprises four domains, viz., (i) intra-personal, which develops first and is the most difficult to master; (ii) interpersonal, (iii) business/technical, and (iv) leadership, which develops last and builds on all three preceding domains. Competence can be classified according to the Five-Factor Model (FFM) of Personality, a useful taxonomy of reputation. The FFM domains are (a) emotional stability, (b) conscientiousness, (c) extraversion, (d) agreeableness, and (e) openness. Table 1 summarises competence reflected in reputation.

Competence, reflected in reputation, indicates who we are as a person and predicts how we will lead or our leadership behavioural style (Kaiser, LeBretton and J. Hogan, 2015).

**Table 1: Competence reflected in reputation**

Competence	Qualities	Reputation
Intra-personal	Internalised standards of performance reflected in one’s ability to regulate one’s emotions and behaviour comprising self-esteem, attitudes towards authority, and self control	Emotional stability Conscientiousness
Interpersonal	Self-awareness which draws on communication skills and impacts initiating, building, and maintaining positive relations with diverse people to get work done	Extraversion Agreeableness
Business	Knowledge, skills, and experience needed to productively do a job corresponding to Fayol’s (1916 [2013]) interdependent organisational functions, including management. The managerial function aims at (a) direction setting, (b) communicating, (c) identifying, hiring, and deploying suitably competent workers in appropriate positions, (d) delivering innovative customer-sought-value in a (e) coordinated system of cooperation in (f) chosen competitive arenas that (g) deliver planned results, financial and otherwise, (h) congruent with environmental demands	NA
Leadership	Depends on intra-, interpersonal, and business competence and relates to (a) identifying, recruiting, and deploying suitably competent people in appropriate positions, (b) retaining talented people, (c) motivating the team by using the inborn motivational levers of competence, autonomy and relatedness, (d) providing direction, set and communicate a compelling vision, set performance standards, support and care about reportees, develop competence of reportees, challenge reportees, (e) persist and persevere	Openness

Source: Composed from Hogan and Warrenfeltz (2003); Kaiser, LeBretton and J. Hogan (2015)

#### 4.1.2 Leadership behavioural style

Leadership behavioural styles are variously classified. Yukl and Gardner’s (2020) hierarchical behavioural taxonomy is a precise, comprehensive, and parsimonious classification. The meta-categories are (a) *relations-oriented*, (b) *task-oriented*, (c) *change-oriented*, and (d) *external-oriented* leadership behaviour. A relations-

oriented leadership style is interpersonal in nature and can be either forceful or enabling. An operational/task- and strategic/change-oriented leadership are functional in nature and relate to what one leads, i.e., the purpose of the organisation relying on technical competence. An operational/task-oriented leadership style is associated with operational leadership that focuses the organisation on tactical needs to implement short-term plans (Kaiser, LeBretton and J. Hogan, 2015; Yukl and Gardner, 2020). A change-oriented leadership style is associated with strategic leadership at higher organisational levels that positions the organisation in its environment to leverage its competitiveness by setting the organisational direction, enhancing employee competence, and supporting innovation (Kaiser, LeBretton and J. Hogan, 2015; Yukl and Gardner, 2020). External behavioural style is both interpersonal and functional in nature (Yukl and Gardner, 2020). These behavioural styles can be used in a positive or negative way, namely, too little or too much (Kaiser, LeBretton and J. Hogan, 2015). Kaiser, LeBretton and J. Hogan (2015) found that a functional, i.e., task (operational) and change (strategic) leadership style were twice as likely as an interpersonal (forceful and enabling) style to derail organisational performance. This finding is consistent with research indicating that a lack of business/technical competence, specifically accomplishing coordination and cooperation, delivers poor organisational results owing to strategy implementation breakdowns (cf. Nienaber and McNeill, 2022, 2023). Research findings illustrating the predictions between competence and leadership style are summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2: Competence reflected in FFM reputation domains and predicted leadership behavioural style**

Who we are (personality) predicts		How we lead (associated leadership style)			
Competence domain	Reflected in FFM domain	People focused		Functional focused	
		Forceful	Enabling	Operational/task	Strategic/change
Intra-personal	Emotional stability	Negative	Positive		
	Conscientiousness		Negative	Positive	Negative
Interpersonal	Extraversion	Positive	Negative		
	Agreeableness	Negative	Positive		
Leadership	Openness			Negative	Positive
Business/technical – not empirically tested					

**Source:** Compiled from Hogan and Warrenfeltz (2003), Kaiser, LeBretton and J. Hogan (2015)

Given the above exposition cooperation/relationships is a necessary but insufficient condition to encapsulate the complete concept of leadership (cf. Whetten, 1989). As pointed out, coordination failures interacting with cooperation derail strategy implementation (what followers do) and, consequently, organisational success as demonstrated by research across contexts and time (cf. Hamilton and Sodeman, 2020; Levenson, 2018; Nienaber and McNeill, 2022). The consensus definition thus does not capture the essential factors to come under the concept leadership (cf. Whetten, 1989). We offer an alternative definition from the mute pioneering management literature, which subsumes and remedies the consensus definition, without adding complexity.

#### 4.2 Our Alternative Definition of Leadership

From the literature, the term ‘management’ appeared later than the term ‘leadership’ (Grace, 2003). Management pioneers generally used the terms leadership and management interchangeably and often simultaneously as person, function, and influence (Parker-Follett, 1933a). We adopt the leadership definition of Morkel, Nienaber and McNeill (2021:26), which they based on pioneering management scholars who stood the test of time. “Leadership is employees’ perception of the capacity of their hierarchical superiors (which stems from the superiors’ behaviour) to direct their subordinates’ activities and behaviours to pursue a desired outcome in an (intended) coordinated system of cooperation in conjunction with other resources, all of which are interlinked.” Why?

This definition captures coherently the essential factors necessary and sufficient, comprehensively and parsimoniously, constituting leadership (cf. Whetton, 1989). Each of these essential factors is based on distinct features. However, the leadership construct retains an overall coherence that is more than the sum of its essential parts. Coordination and cooperation are also essential factors of management. Thus, leadership and management overlap, as suggested by pioneering management scholars (cf. Fayol, 1916[2013]; Parker-Follett, 1933a).

This comprehensive leadership definition indicates its interrelatedness with management and shows how it practically works in organisations, illustrated in Figure 1 and consistent with the organisation definition provided earlier. Coordination and cooperation are central to (a) competitive advantage, (b) the universal problems of organising (division and allocation of tasks, i.e., division of labour; information and rewards provision for efforts towards goal achievement, i.e., integration of effort), and (c) attaining successful organisational performance, the joint responsibility of management/leadership down the line shown in Figure 1. This exposition illustrates that person, function, and influence are amalgamated. Thus, leadership is a multidimensional rather than unidimensional concept. The alternative definition is comprehensive and provides the basis to integratively study leadership to overcome the challenges of studying leadership from a singular perspective, i.e., person, function, or social influence (Nienaber and McNeill, 2024).

## **5. Conclusions, Limitations, Contribution, and Recommendations for Further Research**

Our study was triggered by some researchers who argue that we still search for leadership theory in view of proliferating leadership definitions. This suggests an absence of an integrative theoretical framework. Concepts are the building blocks of theory. To be effective, concepts must be clearly, accurately (comprehensively), and concisely (parsimoniously) defined. Therefore, we assessed the concept leadership by conducting a concept analysis. The aim of the concept analysis was to clarify the concept leadership by calibrating and enhancing its precision.

Our concept analysis revealed: The purported consensus leadership definition states *relationships/cooperation* as the fundamental quality. Research demonstrates that relationships/cooperation is necessary, but an insufficient condition to encapsulate the complete concept of leadership. Our findings further show that leadership is a solution to the problem of collective effort (cooperation), bringing people together (coordination), and combining their efforts (integration) to promote organisational success by solving the organising problem – division of labour and integration of effort. This oversight is corrected in our alternative definition. The organising problem is solved by adjusting the mechanism structural dimensions of organisation for implementing strategy, which arranges coordination and cooperation, while coordination galvanises cooperation. Using this mechanism can permit or obstruct workers to express their competence, realise autonomy, and experience relatedness, satisfying or thwarting their inborn motivational needs, and impacting their and the organisation's performance. Clearly, leadership entails much more than relationships/cooperation.

Coordination, together with cooperation, aligns key actions with strategic intent and accomplishes competitive advantage, the hallmark of an effective strategy producing organisational success. Coordination and cooperation are fundamental management functions that require specific competence (performance capacity) that is vested in a person and proportionate to the hierarchical level occupied in the organisation. Competence in executing a function produces a consequent reputation that results in corresponding worker behaviour, either engagement or alienation, impacting organisational success. These factors are captured in our alternative leadership definition. Furthermore, our leadership definition, in the context of an organisation, addresses the 'what, how, and why' of leadership.

Our limitations: We carefully followed only one recognised approach to concept analysis appropriate to this study. This represents the major limitation of the study. Nevertheless, this approach is useful in advancing debate/understanding and stimulating insights in the spirit of ongoing efforts to refine leadership theory – despite seemingly ignorant certainty of *truth found*.

Our main contribution is the proposed alternative leadership definition revived from the mute and discounted (old) management literature. The alternative definition clarifies and remedies the shortcomings of the purported consensus definition by including coordination that galvanises cooperation. The alternative definition provides a more complete way of thinking about, understanding, explaining, practising, and developing leadership. As a result, laying the foundation for a unified leadership framework, if not theory, which lends itself to further refinement and expansion. This paper attained its primary objective.

We recommend further calibration studies, specifically (re-)examining the works of the management pioneers.

**Ethics and AI Declarations:** Ethical clearance is not required for conceptual papers. We have not used AI tools to assist in writing the paper.

## **References**

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