

The Development of a Comprehensive Model of Leadership

Roger W.T. Gill
Durham University Business School
Durham, UK
r.w.t.gill@durham.ac.uk

Matthew J. Grawitch
Saint Louis University
Saint Louis, Missouri, USA
matt.grawitch@slu.edu

Steven L. Winton
Saint Louis University
Saint Louis, Missouri, USA
steven.winton@slu.edu

The Development of a Comprehensive Model of Leadership

This paper reports the development of a comprehensive model of leadership that comprises a “back-to-basics” definition and six core themes and practices through which leadership is demonstrated. The paper explains how there is no consensus on what leadership actually is. The understanding and practice of leadership therefore are confused and contentious and their proper scientific study impossible and leadership development programmes unreliable. Following a hermeneutical approach to the leadership literature, we propose an over-arching definition of leadership as showing the way and helping or inducing others to pursue it. We developed a measure of six core leadership themes and practices, which was validated through a multi-stage process comprising expert review, psychometric assessment with 479 subjects employing exploratory, and confirmatory factor analysis. The measure showed strong model fit, and a pilot study showed initial utility of an integrated Leadership Insights Coach AI tool.

Track: Leadership and Leadership Development

Word count: 6,716

The Development of a Comprehensive Model of Leadership

The burgeoning literature on leadership is fragmented and not yet adequately synthesized. This makes leadership a mysterious phenomenon for many people. For instance, the first co-author has frequently found that, in social situations, when he mentions to others that he studies leadership, they become silent, mystified, and eager to change the subject. This phenomenon also means that productive discussion of it and its scientific study are problematic. We contend that the problem is that there is no common and accepted concept or definition of what leadership is. Many definitions exist, with as many models and theories of leadership.

Mumford and Fried (2014) point out that many models of leadership focusing on leader behaviour and based on values or ideology have been proposed. These include authentic, servant, ethical and spiritual leadership, among others. These models, they say, have only modest predictive power with respect to organizational performance and they are beset by significant methodological problems and other issues, such as explicitly confounding of leadership and morality and inappropriate assumptions about follower needs, but they are united in an emphasis on moral behaviour. Hannah *et al.* (2014), however, argue that some models, especially charismatic and transformational leadership theories, do fill gaps in the leadership literature in several ways, such as by including morality in leadership, and they display validity and practical effectiveness. Nevertheless, what Marturano, Wren and Harvey (2013) said in 2013 is still true today:

... for all the virtues of the social sciences in terms of methodological rigor, burgeoning models, theoretical formulations, and a steady stream of insights into leadership dynamics, we believe that a significant gap remains in how leadership today is explored, engaged with, and understood.

One problem is that, however valid and useful these theories or models are in their own right, they address particular and different aspects of leadership and not leadership as a whole: none is a sufficiently comprehensive theory or model of leadership. In other words, each model or theory of leadership is only one piece in the ‘jigsaw puzzle’ that is leadership: we need to see the complete picture, which arguably is greater than the sum of its parts. Crawford and Kelder (2019) highlight the limitations of assessments that focus narrowly on traits, arguing instead for tools that prioritize actionable, real-world leadership behaviour. Banks, Woznyj and Mansfield (2023) and Fischer *et al.* (2023) concur: many existing tools rely heavily on subjective evaluations or emphasize abstract, leader-centric traits while neglecting the relational and contextual dynamics intrinsic to leadership effectiveness.

Part of the problem undoubtedly is that even the definition of the term ‘leadership’ is not agreed on among leadership scholars. Without consistent terminology and framing, ideas lack clear meanings. Indeed, misunderstanding and misinterpretation of findings from research inevitably result because, certainly in the case of leadership, the term is used by different scholars to mean different things. Indeed, “leadership” is a Humpty Dumpty word:

When I use a word, Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less. The question is, said Alice, whether you can make words mean so many different things. The question is, said Humpty

Dumpty, which is to be master – that’s all.

(Lewis Carroll, 2003, p. 87).

The philosophers Gilbert Ryle (1900-1976) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) were exercised about the way language and concepts were used inconsistently and inappropriately in explaining the nature of reality. As Hart (1998, p. 137) also points out; ‘many problems in science [and, especially, in our view, in social science and in particular leadership studies] were the result of a widespread... inappropriate use of concepts... usually [leading] to confusion.’ Even a group of top leadership scholars in the early 2000s, led by the esteemed ‘father’ of modern leadership studies, James MacGregor Burns, could not produce a general theory of leadership (Goethals & Sorenson, 2006) and did not advance our understanding much further than seeing leadership as an influence process assessed in terms of ethical and moral values and the change it produces (Burns, 2006, p. 239). But as Kelly (2014) says, ‘There will always be the possibility of a better definition’...

A casual meeting of the first author with a distinguished expert in business strategy at a conference in Edinburgh in June 1998, in which he pointed out that leadership scholars had rarely, if ever, considered the place of strategy in leadership theory and practice, inspired him to explore this and its ramifications (Mumford, 2021, p. 41). This was initially an informal but wide-ranging review of the nature and importance of leadership and the major theories that attempt to explain it. Several recurrent themes and associated practices of leadership emerged from the scholarly, practitioner and popular literature that appeared to more comprehensively describe leadership. These findings were published in a book in 2006 (Gill, 2006), providing a discussion of the many different definitions and models of leadership and a proposal for five common core themes and practices of leadership. Further work resulted in a proposed integrating definition of leadership and a supporting model of six core themes and practices of leadership published in 2011/2012¹ in a second edition of the book (Gill, 2011/2012), which was short-listed for the UK’s Chartered Management Institute’s ‘Management Book of the Year’ and ‘Management Textbook of the Year’ Awards in 2013.

Meanwhile, unknown to the first co-author, a partial but promising validation study of the 2006 model by a team at Saint Louis University in the United States was carried out and published in 2013 (Rupprecht, Waldrop and Grawitch, 2013). This study found support for the criterion validity and construct validity of the model. This led to a psychometric leadership assessment questionnaire based on the model in online and paper versions with a 39-item self-assessment questionnaire with “self” and “other” assessment versions available, an answer sheet, a demographic information sheet, and interpretation guidelines. The first co-author was alerted to this by an enquiry from the head of a medical school at an American university about using this model of leadership in a leadership development programme for medical staff. Follow-up led to collaboration between the author of the book, one of the co-authors of the original 2013 study (which was based on the 2006 model), and the director of a program that used the self-assessment as a part of a graduate program. This culminated in the decision to validate an updated measure that was inclusive of the 2011 model, which the current paper introduces.

We start with a discussion of the problem of defining leadership and our proposal for a working definition, followed by a discussion of our literature review and a summary of the

¹ UK edition 2011 and USA edition 2012

model of six core themes and practices of leadership that resulted. We then discuss the validation process and how this new model of leadership has been used, along with its potential for further theoretical research and application in leadership assessment and development programmes that are more comprehensive, focused and effective.

A “New” Definition of Leadership – Back to Basics

Leadership has many definitions and, unsurprisingly, many theories and models that purport to explain it. Practitioners such as chief executives, journalists and scholars – both between and within these groups – do not agree on what leadership is. Unfortunately this makes the scientific study of leadership – and even its discussion – problematic to say the least.

Yukl (1998, pp. 493-494) described the field of leadership in 1998 as having been in a state of contention and confusion for many decades: “The confused state of the field can be attributed in large part to the sheer volume of publications, the disparity of approaches, the proliferation of confusing terms, [and] the narrow focus of most researchers...As the old adage goes, it is difficult to see the forest for the trees.” A problem is interpretation: the ‘meaning of a word [in our case ‘leadership’],’ Pondy (1978, pp. 87-99) says, ‘is the set of ways in which it is used’. Yukl elaborates:

Sometimes different terms have been used to refer to the same type of behaviour. At other times, the same term has been defined differently by various theorists. What is treated as a general behavior category by one theorist is viewed as two or three distinct categories by another theorist. What is a key concept in one taxonomy is absent from another. Different taxonomies have emerged from different research disciplines, and it is difficult to translate from one set of concepts to another

(Yukl, 2002, p,61).

Terry (1993, p.11) recognised that discussion of leadership ‘suffered from a lack of a common language’. This leads to confusion. How can one scientifically investigate something that is beset by its multiplicity of definitions? Indeed the very existence of ‘leadership’ as an observable phenomenon in daily life in organizations has been questioned by some scholars, such as Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003). They say: ‘Our general impression is that it is difficult to say anything of the possible existence of leadership in the great majority of organizations and management situations’. For example, they found the accounts that managers in a research-and-development company gave of leadership to be ambiguous, incoherent and often contradictory. Kelly (2008) questions whether the problem that Alvesson and Sveningsson see is ‘a consequence of the research methods being used to make leadership visible and researchable in the first place’.

Many definitions of leadership and associated theories tend to focus on motivating, influencing or inspiring people to pursue a common objective. We argue that this group of definitions and theories is wholly inadequate by themselves. Underlying the highly regarded leadership development programmes at The Leadership Trust in the UK is the definition of leadership as ‘using our personal power to win the hearts and minds of people to achieve a

common purpose (Edwards, Bailey and Winter, 2002, p. 15). This definition identifies the existence of a common purpose (or mission) and winning people's engagement with it. Collins and Porras (1996) add the concept of vision and see the function of a leader as 'to catalyse a clear and shared vision of the organization and to secure commitment to it and vigorous pursuit of that vision.' These two definitions foreshadow the model of leadership that we propose.

Etymology – the history or derivation of a word (Kahn and Wilson, 1985, p. 221), its origin and development (Crystal, 2007, p. 213) – together with establishing convention can help us to avoid the confusion we have described. Consulting the etymology of the word, then, is a useful starting point. Here, however, we immediately confront the 'etymological fallacy'. This states that asserting that an earlier or original meaning of a word is its true or correct meaning is fallacious because it ignores semantic change over time, and most words change in meaning throughout their history (Crystal, 2007, p. 229). The problem is that there are so many ways in which the meaning of leadership varies because of this 'semantic change', resulting in confusion about the term's general meaning.

Consider the etymology of 'lead' and 'leadership'. The word 'lead' comes from the Old English *lædan*, corresponding to the Old Saxon *ledian* and Old High German *leiten*, meaning 'take with one', to 'show the way' (Hoad, 1988). *Ledere* was the term for a person who shows other people the path to take and guides them safely along the journey (Kets de Vries and Florent-Treacy, 1999, p. 5). The Old Icelandic derivative *leidha* means 'the person in front', referring to the person who guided ships through the pack-ice in spring. The word 'leader' appeared in the English language in the 13th century, and 'leadership' appeared only in the early-19th century. Grint (2000, p. 420) sees this in a more modern light: leaders 'in front', 'pulling' followers after them, and 'sharing the way' rather than showing the way. We argue, therefore, that showing the way is fundamental to the essence of leadership. Our definition of leadership, which underpins the model of six core themes of leadership, is this: leadership is showing the way and helping or inducing others to pursue it (Gill, 2011/2012, p. 9).

The word 'induce' is used in preference to 'influence' because it has a wider meaning: 'to succeed in persuading or leading (someone) to do something' (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 2004, p. 725), 'prevail upon', 'bring about', 'cause' or 'attract' in addition to 'influence'. 'Influence', on the other hand, has a more restricted meaning: 'to have an effect on the character or behaviour of someone' (Concise Oxford Dictionary (2004, p. 729). The wider meaning of 'induce' embraces leadership behaviour that employs position power or authority, such as directing or insisting on (even enforcing) particular actions by others in appropriate situations, as well as personal power – using influence or persuasion – in more usual situations. This definition allows for the possibility of leading not only in the sense of 'being followed' but also in the sense of getting others to follow the way shown by the leader. It does not prescribe whether the leader personally participates in that activity or whether others necessarily (though desirably) are voluntarily willing, which is the focus in the increasing interest of scholars in followership.

'Showing the way' presupposes knowing or at least believing in the way. And 'the way' implies the route to a destination: a vision of a desirable future position – *what* we want or need to be or *where* we want or need to be. This may be a state of being or a position or place or even more specifically a goal, an objective or a target. Knowing or believing in 'the way' also presupposes the desirability of the known or believed-in destination, which relates to

why one wishes to promote or pursue a particular vision. One reason is that vision relates to our purpose or mission. A purpose or mission is what we do and why we do it; a vision is a mental image of what the future will or could be like, based on imagination or wisdom (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 2004, p. 1,615). A related reason is that the vision relates to what we believe in, what we feel is meaningful, valuable and worthwhile and motivates us in our work, and perhaps in our life in general. This spiritual dimension concerns our purpose or mission, values and beliefs in relation to emphasising human wellbeing. So leadership is about promoting and pursuing a vision and a mission or purpose that reflect particular values, which entails that effective leadership includes the creation and sustaining of a *shared* vision, mission or purpose and values.

But *how* do leaders and followers effectively pursue vision and mission within a framework of shared values? They do so through *strategies* – the ‘ways and means’ that involve the use of resources, such as funds, materials, technology, information, time, and not least people. Hence we have financial strategies, marketing strategies, product strategies, IT strategies, research strategies, people strategies, and so on. Because leaders – managers and indeed all of us – get things done with, by and through other people, we need to consider that special resource – people. What does it take for human beings to get things done? An answer is the ability (power) to do so and the desire to do so; in other words empowerment and motivation. Leadership therefore is about empowering people to be *able to do* what needs to be done and influencing, motivating or inspiring people to *want to do* what needs to be done. Influence, motivation and inspiration constitute what is now popularly known as *engagement*.

This definition underpins the model of six themes and associated practices of leadership that we propose. This model is a synthesis of the extant themes, models and theories in the leadership literature. It prescribes the *practices* of effective leadership – *what effective leaders do*. The outcome of *effective leadership* is the achievement and display of what was intended – both the results (such as objectives or states of being achieved) *and* appropriate behaviour (such as the following of ethical principles and the display of shared values). The current interest in spirituality at work and spiritual leadership explores this, focusing on meaning, purpose, beliefs and values (in particular, moral values, or virtues), a sense of community or belonging, and a sense of value or worth in one’s life that contribute to human well-being (Gill, 2022, pp. 45-73).

We speak of effective leadership at a variety of levels: in oneself, one-to-one (as in coaching or counselling, for example), team or group, organization-wide, sectoral, national, regional or global. ‘Good’ leadership, however, is defined by intentions (purpose or mission, vision, goals), achievement (of what was intended) and behaviour (in achieving it) that are judged by those involved or affected to be ethical or moral (on the basis of their personal values, shared values and societal norms). *Effective* leadership may be ethical (e.g., kindly or compassionate) or unethical (e.g., cruel, wicked or lacking compassion). The gold standard is ethical and effective leadership.

Literature Review

The foregoing analysis provided the basis for a literature review. Literature reviews may result in fresh, new understanding of the subject matter, and this in turn may yield significant reconceptualization of it (Torraco, 2005) that may also have wide practical applicability (Patterson, 1986, pp. xiii-xxvii). The literature review in our case was not a systematic review or a rigorous or critical evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of published or

available material on leadership. It was a theme analysis and a hermeneutic approach² aimed at interpreting and making sense of the leadership literature: an exploration and identification of recurring common (core) themes and practices. The literature review took place in two distinct phases: 1998 to 2005, which led to the 2006 model; and 2008 to 2011, which led to the 2011/2012 model.

The process was to analyse the literature on leadership to unpack it into constituent parts or elements and then infer or determine the relationship among them; then to synthesize these elements to show the main organizing themes and associated practices – indeed the meaning – of leadership. Hart (1998, p.22) says: ‘Making new insights is not merely about being able to synthesize difficult and large amounts of materials, it also involves knowing how to be creative and, perhaps, original.’ Baker (2003, p.55) points out that a literature review ‘encompasses the evaluation of *all* sources of information... that relate to a topic and is not confined solely to academic publications’. An essential part of a literature review of a topic, especially one that aims to discover common themes or practices, is classification and categorization of information (Hart, 1998, pp.143-144).

Our plan in exploring the literature on leadership was to search the widest possible range of publications in what may be called the academic (scholarly), practitioner and popular domains (Gill, 2015). The academic literature primarily comprised peer-reviewed journal articles, other academic journal articles, scholarly books, academic (theory-oriented) research reports, dissertations and theses, case studies, conference proceedings, and monographs. The practitioner literature consisted of articles by leadership and management consultants and training specialists, case studies, articles by practising managers at all levels, including chief executives, in the private, public and third (non-profit and charity) sectors, conference reports, practice-oriented research reports and books, reported speeches and talks, and articles by scholars, practitioners and journalists and other commentators in magazines, newspapers and other media. The popular domain overlapped somewhat with the practitioner domain but also included less ‘serious’ sources such as relevant humorous and satirical magazines and books and ‘how to...’ guides on leadership.

The Model of Six Core Themes and Practices of Effective Leadership

Several types of leadership behaviour emerged from our literature review. We categorized them into six core themes and practices: vision, purpose/mission, values, strategy, empowerment and engagement (Figure 1).³

² Hermeneutics is concerned with sense-making through interpreting and understanding both linguistic and non-linguistic media.

³ More detail, with a chapter on each core theme and practice, is provided in (Gill, 2011/2012).

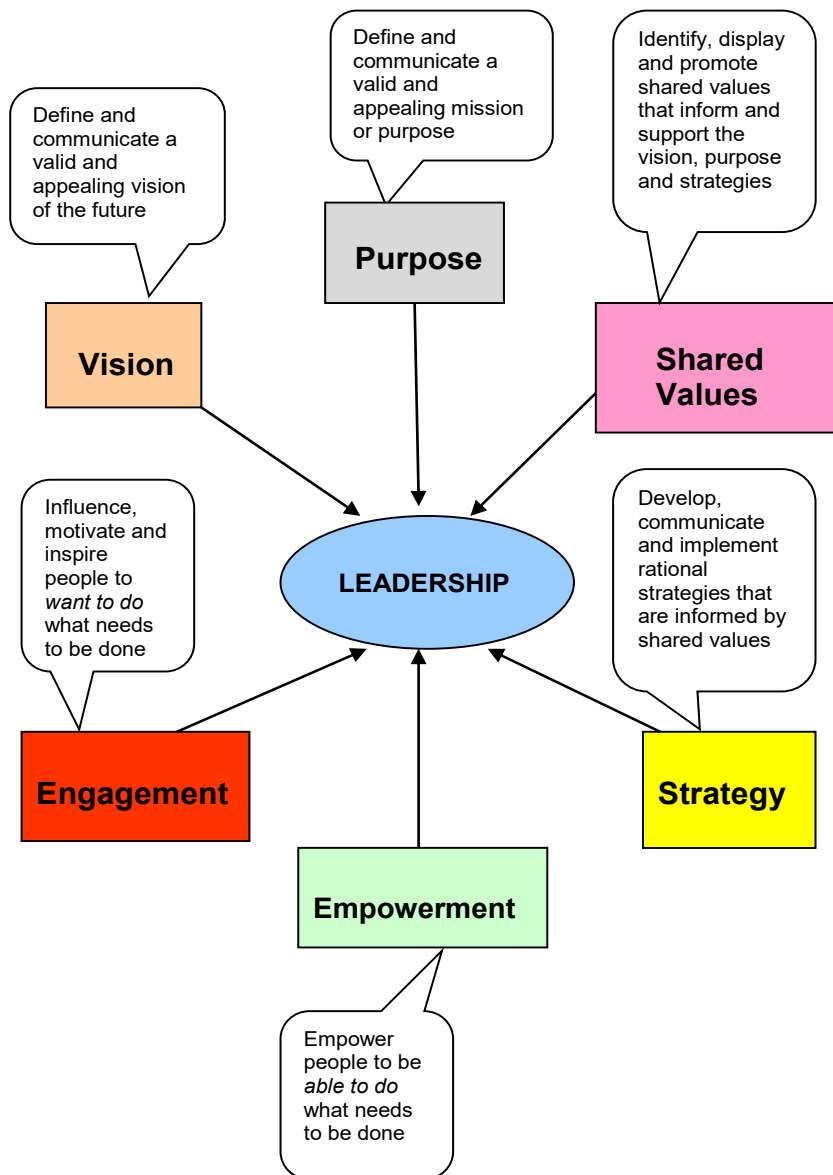


Figure 1. A model of six core themes and practices of effective leadership (Gill, 2011/2012, p. 101)

Vision

Effective leaders define and communicate a valid and appealing vision of the future (Gill, 2011/2012, p. 108). Together with purpose or mission, this is fundamental to the concept and practice of effective leadership. Lack of a clear vision causes a sense of being lost, of not even knowing the destination (Carbonell-López, 2013). Indeed, we even see in the Bible that ‘without a vision, a people perish’ (Proverbs 29: 18, *The Bible*). So perhaps will a company, a government, any group with a cause.

Vision is an image in the mind of what the future will be or could be like. A vision defines what or where the organization wants or needs to be (a ‘destination’). It requires leaders to

think about the future with imagination and wisdom. It represents ‘true north’, acting like a magnet, and a vision statement is one’s compass. Vision is fundamental to effective leadership and, with purpose, is the driving force for organizational achievement as well as organizational change and development. Having a vision that is valid and appealing intellectually, emotionally and spiritually makes the difference between extinction, survival and success of a team or an organization. A vision that has validity and appeal may provide meaning and a sense of identity for people that are motivating and even inspiring. A vision that is shared by all members of the organisation is the one that is most likely to be committed to and an effective driving force in its mission or purpose, and people’s dedication to its values and strategies.

Purpose or Mission

Effective leaders define and communicate a valid and appealing mission or purpose (Gill, 2011/2012, p. 136). Purpose is the reason for which something is done or for which something exists (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 2004, p. 1,167). The terms ‘purpose’ and ‘mission’ are usually used interchangeably in organizational and leadership studies, for example in my use, but sometimes they are used differently. We interpret ‘mission’ as ‘a strongly felt aim or calling’ (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 2004, p. 914), and the term is also used to mean a long-term assignment, an expedition, or a vocation of a political party or a religious organization to spread its faith. An organization’s purpose or mission, then, is the reason for which it exists – to do what and why, its identity. A vision of the future – likely or possible and desirable – is the basis for determining an organization’s purpose or mission. Together with vision, this core theme and practice underpins leadership as a whole. A sense of purpose is the hallmark of great organizations, as it is with great teams and indeed individual people (Kurtzman, 2010). People are attracted to leaders with a clear and consistent purpose, particularly one that accords with their own aspirations and values.

Profit and shareholder value are frequently espoused types of purpose in commercial, for-profit organizations (CIPD, 2009, p. 4). However, this is potentially misguided and dysfunctional (Gill, 2011/2012, pp. 146-151). As Collins and Porras say:

A primary role of core purpose is to guide and inspire. Maximizing shareholder wealth does not inspire people at all levels of an organization, and it provides precious little guidance (Collins and Porras, 1996).

It is sadly ironic that the most commonly espoused purpose is also the least engaging for employees and the least likely to be shared, inspiring or, indeed, effective.

Values

Effective leaders identify, display and promote values that inform and support the vision, mission or purpose and, as we shall see, strategies (Gill, 2011/2012, p. 161). Values are beliefs, principles or standards that are considered to be important or beneficial. ‘Moral’ values, or virtues, are values that are regarded as ‘good’ as opposed to ‘bad’, right as opposed to wrong. The ability to distinguish between right and wrong is known as ‘moral intelligence’ (Lennick and Kiel, 2011). Values serve as guiding principles for behaviour for everybody in a group or organization. Moral values in a business context that are translated into rules of conduct are known as business ethics. Values may be perceived as moral, immoral or amoral.

Both effective and ineffective leadership may be associated with any of these types of values as it represents nothing but ‘showing the way and helping or inducing others to pursue it’ (Gill, 2011/2012, p. 9). But effective and ethical or moral leadership is about doing this for a vision or a purpose or reason and in ways construed by ethics or morals. Typical core values in the best companies to work for include honesty and truthfulness, integrity, trust and trustworthiness..

The more personal values and corporate values are aligned, and the more values are shared, the stronger the corporate culture will be: the happier and more engaged and effective people in the organization will be, people are allowed to behave authentically, and the more spiritually healthy the organization as a whole will be (Gill, 2011/2012, pp. 161-162). And a strong culture with the right values – those that inform and support the organization’s vision, purpose and strategies – characterizes an effective organization. Unfortunately, however, a wide-scale study reported in January 2025 found that only 18% of employees, including managers, felt that their companies’ stated values were very aligned to their actual culture and 25% believed that the behaviour of their leader did not reflect the stated values (Whysall, 2025). An effective leader ‘lives’ the core values of the organization and sets an example as an inspiring role model. A mismatch between leaders’ actions and espoused values suggests hypocrisy, which destroys their credibility and trust in them.

Strategy

Effective leaders develop, communicate and implement rational strategies that are informed by vision, purpose or mission and shared values (Gill, 2011/2012, p. 200). Without strategies, vision is a dream. But strategies that are non-existent, unintelligent, unviable, not understood or not supported by those with a stake in them, or are poorly implemented, have led to the demise of many a company. We see, in politics, government and business great ideas ultimately coming to nothing – because of the lack of plans – a strategy.

Expressed in the simplest possible way, strategy is about ways and means: how to get from where we are now to where we want or need to be. It is a journey plan and a route map for travelling to the destination (represented in a vision). Strategy also serves the purpose or mission of a team, an organization or a nation and is informed in its execution by its core values. Strategies, as a core theme and practice in leadership, are ways of pursuing the vision and purpose by identifying and exploiting strengths and opportunities; identifying, anticipating and responding to threats and opportunities; and not only responding positively to the need for change for survival and success but also creating change for the better.

In a celebrated lecture at the Harvard Business School in 1931, Alfred North Whitehead, the eminent philosopher, identified strategic foresight as ‘the crucial feature of the competent business mind’ (Fiol and O’Connor, 2002). By this he meant the ability to anticipate future developments – to reflect on change and novelty, see through confusion, foresee trends, see emerging patterns, and understand social currents that are likely to shape future events. Today we have a variety of tools to help us in strategy development, such as PESTELI analysis, SWOT analysis, the Balanced Scorecard⁴ and scenario planning.

Empowerment

Effective leaders empower people to be able to do what needs to be done (Gill, 2011/2012, pp. 231, 236). Empowerment is giving people the knowledge, skills, technology, facilities, equipment, self-confidence, opportunity, freedom, authority, time and resources to manage themselves and to be accountable fairly for their performance. The ‘best’ leaders have followers or employees whom they empower and whose motivation, satisfaction and effectiveness come, in part but significantly, from a sense of self-efficacy – the feeling of personal capability or competence to perform a task – and the feelings associated with achievement. Nurturing the creativity of people entails empowering them. More than 60 years ago, Hafile (1962) pointed out that creativity needs people to have appropriate roles and goals, appropriate infrastructure and support, permission and freedom to experiment and make mistakes, and recognition and reward of their achievements and for these to be put into use. Many studies show that empowering people generally enhances both job satisfaction and organization performance, measured in various ways (Gill, 2011/2012, pp. 236-254). Transformational leaders are more empowering than transactional leaders (Gill, 2011/2012, p. 236).

While the term ‘empowerment’ is relatively new, the practice is not – for example, giving decision-making authority to employees, enriching their jobs and delegating to them. The underlying concepts of empowerment are also not new, for example McGregor’s Theory Y (McGregor, 1960), Likert’s ‘new patterns of management’ (Likert, 1961), Herzberg’s job enrichment (Herzberg, 1966), Hackman and Oldham’s Job Characteristics Model (Hackman and Oldham, 1976) and the Quality of Working Life movement of the 1970s (Davis and Cherns, 1975). Empowerment also captures the two dimensions of individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation in Bernard Bass’s model of transformational leadership (Bass, 1985). The idea of empowerment more recently has developed to encompass sharing power, energizing employees, enhancing self-efficacy – belief in one’s own capabilities to do what needs to be done – by reducing powerlessness, and increasing opportunities for intrinsic motivation at work (Menon, 2001).

Barriers to empowerment include bureaucracy, risk aversion, the need for control over others, fear of loss of control, lack of trust, the skill and time required to do it, and resistance to being empowered among those receiving it due to their distrust of the motives and consequences. Research by Edmondson (1999) and Edmondson and Bransby (2023) on psychological safety has shown how leaders who foster trust and encourage risk-taking improve empowerment. Empowerment varies across cultures according to cultural values, requiring understanding and recognition of local values and flexible leadership behaviour. Ignoring cultural differences in empowering people may make the effort a failure. But merely accepting cultural stereotypes as a reason for not empowering people is misguided. For example, a study of financial institutions in Russia by Levene (2015) called into question the stereotypical image of autocratic leadership in the culture of Russia and suggests that there is a preference for a more involving, empowering and engaging leadership style, at least at senior levels. This preference, however, is not manifest in the country’s leadership so far.

Engagement

Effective leaders engage other people by influencing, motivating and inspiring them to want to do what needs to be done (Gill, 2011/2012, p. 255). The common definition that effective leaders focus on motivating or influencing people to pursue a common objective relates to

what we call engagement. This is arguably only what most leadership theories and models address. Employee engagement is the extent to which people in an organization willingly, even eagerly, give of their discretionary effort over and above doing what they have to do because they see purpose, meaning and value in it. They are willing and eager to give of their best, display creativity and use their initiative (and are empowered to do so).

Senior executives see employee disengagement as one of the three biggest threats facing their businesses; yet, according to 43% of them, issues concerning morale and motivation are rarely discussed at the board level and some 90% of their companies simply choose to ignore the problems caused by disengaged staff (Gill, 2015, p, 74). Such leadership is a major weakness among many of those in leadership positions, both in what they stand for and how they communicate it and in the example they set. It is probably the area of leadership that has gained the greatest attention in the popular non-fiction media, unfortunately beset by much hype and pseudoscience reflective of the perceived commercial opportunities for unprofessional consultancy exploitation (Grawitch and Ballard, 2019).

We need to understand that engagement is not just about inspiring employees but also creating conditions for proactive behaviour and meaningful work. For employees to be engaged with their work they also need to be empowered to be able to do it. Our analysis showed a high correlation (0.87) of engagement with empowerment. Understanding what motivates people at work, how it does so, what leaders do when they influence and inspire employees, and how they create the conditions in which intrinsic motivation can emerge is essential to engaging employees with their work and the organization. Employees are engaged – they are influenced, motivated or inspired – in their work when they see purpose, meaning and value in it that accord with their personal values.

Validation of the New Model of Leadership

The development and validation of the new model of six core themes and practices (Gill, 2011/2012) was carried out between 2018 and 2024, based on a holistic leadership framework integrating six core leadership dimensions (themes and practices). We took account of recent critiques of leadership assessment that highlight over-reliance on subjective evaluations and abstract constructs in favour of observable behaviours and measurable outcomes and that behaviour alone is inadequate without considering context and counter-factuals (Banks, Woznyj and Mansfield, 2023; Fischer *et al.*, 2023).

Unlike leader-centric approaches (e.g. trait, transformational), this framework focuses on the psychological conditions necessary for engaged followership. The previous validation in 2013 based on the original 2006 model (Rupprecht, Waldrop and Grawitch, 2013). demonstrated the framework's utility, internal validity, construct validity and criterion validity but highlighted areas for refinement, particularly in distinguishing constructs like vision and purpose. Building on this foundation, this study satisfactorily evaluated the refined measure's psychometric properties, testing whether its factor structure comprised of distinct yet interrelated constructs, and aligned with established leadership measures and work outcomes.

The validation study comprised three phases: item generation and content validation; survey administration, analysis and validation employing convergent, discriminant and outcome measures; and user validation using pilot feedback.

Phase 1 comprised the compiling of a pool of some 150 items from the 2011 GILL model and the previous validation study, a review of the items for their definitional correspondence by 18 leadership scholars and practitioners and selection of items with > 80% agreement, resulting in a 67-item version for the survey validation.

Phase 2 started with the recruitment and acceptance of 479 respondents through CINT, a recruitment platform. The diverse sample⁵ comprised 51.1% males and 48.0% females; 47.0% corporate, 9.8% non-profit, and 35.7% public employees; 16.1% upper-level and senior managers, 15.4% middle-level managers, 16.5% lower-level managers, and 51.0% non-managerial (specialist/administrative) employees; 9.0% aged 21-25 years, 17.7% aged 26-35 years, 31.1% aged 36-45 years, 23.4% aged 46-55 years, and 18.8% aged 56+ years; 15.3% with less than one year's tenure, 41.3% with 1-5 years' tenure, 20.3% with 6-10 years' tenure, and 23.3% with more than 10 years' tenure; 15.0% working from home, 24.0% working partially from home, and 61.0% working 100% at the employer's premises.

The administration of the survey and existing validated measures of transformational leadership followed, in which respondents rated their immediate supervisor on overall leadership, transformational leadership, management, complexity leadership, ethical leadership and authoritarian leadership, and themselves on proactive behaviour, work alienation, meaningfulness of work, vigour and job satisfaction.

Phase 3 comprised an assessment of user validity using the full version of the GILL 2.0 adapted for self-assessment. Twenty-one graduate students at Saint Louis University completed the self-assessment, and each student received personalised AI-generated feedback through a customised Leadership Insights Coach and wrote a personal action plan based on it together with feedback on the process in terms of perceived accuracy and helpfulness. 76% of the students reported a close match, and others with discrepancies explained them as due to situational demands and variations in their roles.

Now available as an open-source tool, the resulting General Inventory for Lasting Leadership (GILL 2.0, see Appendix: Table 1 below), demonstrates overall strong validity and relationships with transformational, complexity and ethical leadership, moderate to strong correlations with management and administrative leadership as well as outcomes including meaning, vigour and proactive behaviour. As anticipated, there was weak correlation with authoritarian and paternalistic leadership and a negative correlation with work alienation.

The Contribution and Use of the New Model of Leadership

The aim of the project was to make sense of the burgeoning and fragmented leadership literature and to produce a comprehensive, valid and useful framework for understanding leadership, not least a proposed common definition, and improving leadership assessment, leadership development, and leadership research and scholarship. The model of six core themes and practices that resulted extends to practices that concern the functional demands of

⁵ Figures do not include "other" responses so do not necessarily add up to 100%.

leadership, and task focus and accomplishment, in particular strategy, which has largely been ignored by leadership scholars but is a core theme and practice in our model of effective leadership in 'showing the way'. The GILL model presents a new way of looking at leadership, an integrated and comprehensive framework of six core themes and practices which comprises more aspects of leadership than has been evident so far been in both the academic and practitioner domains.

The model includes values and the moral or ethical aspects of leadership, which in many models and theories of leadership are not addressed as a core or coherent theme or practice, except servant leadership, associated with Robert Greenleaf (1977), which does so but ignores leadership in business organisations, where leaders are usually expected to serve their owners (shareholders) rather than their employees (Gill, 2011, pp. 68-71). And the Full-Range Leadership (FRL) model (Bass, 1985; Bass and Avolio, 1994), while probably the most researched and well-known model of leadership, defines leadership only in terms of laissez-faire, transactional and transformational behaviour, in which the latter corresponds in the GILL model to empowerment and engagement (the four 'Is' – individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and idealised influence). In fact, in the earlier validation study (Rupprecht, Waldrop and Grawitch, 2013), confirmatory factor analysis revealed that the GILL 1.0 measure had a similar fit to the transformational leadership scale and predicted variance in employee outcomes similarly. This suggests that the GILL model is a viable alternative to the Bass FRL model in this respect and indeed more comprehensive in terms of defining leadership by including the other four themes and practices: vision, purpose, values and strategy.

So a primary value of this new model of core themes and practices of effective leadership is its comprehensiveness in its coverage of what core areas constitute effective leadership, defined as showing the way and helping or inducing others to pursue it. This, of course, raises the question of what else may characterize effective leadership. Research to answer that question continues. A systematic review would add weight. Further research may also explore the relationship between leadership and management, cross-cultural commonalities and differences in leadership, and indeed leadership in times of crisis, in relation to the new model.

The GILL model has been used successfully in leadership development programmes with groups of top-level, senior and middle-level managers in a variety of industries and sectors in the UK, USA, Russia (by St. Petersburg Christian University in leadership development programmes for pastors until 2014); since 2014 in Ukraine by Hodos Institute; in the classroom in leadership development programmes in business organizations in the USA by Hodos Institute; in MBA degree programmes in the UK at the Leadership Trust and the University of Strathclyde Business School and in other universities by the first author in the UK, Germany, Switzerland, Singapore, Malaysia, the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman; and in an MA degree programme in the USA by the second and third authors. Case studies are being considered for publication in due course.

Work currently is focused on using existing questionnaire items and adding further items to create two new instruments: one to assess attitudes to leadership and the other, in two versions, to assess oneself and to assess another person (e.g. one's boss or supervisor, subordinate or group member, peer, or other person) and possibly a third version to assess and describe collective organizational or group leadership. These instruments are yet to be validated and the results presented at appropriate future seminars and conferences and

published in both the academic press and practitioner media. We aim to provide further data and case-based evidence that we hope will further strengthen the concept and model of leadership that we propose.

Perhaps unusually, and importantly, it is intended that the instruments and supporting guidelines for use will be made available on an *open-source basis*, i.e. free of charge. We would like to see the widest possible use of the model and the associated instruments in practical use and further research as our contribution to leadership theory and research and especially to sorely needed improvement in practical leadership assessment and leadership development in the world of work.

Appendix

Table 1. General Inventory for Lasting Leadership (GILL 2.0): Items Listed by Factor

VISION

1. States where or what the organization or group wishes or needs to be
2. Ensures the vision is translated into strategies and action
3. Ensures the vision is maintained during changing circumstances even when things become difficult
4. Ensures the vision is a driving force for sustainable change
5. Communicates a vision that appears to be realistic or make sense
6. Communicates an imaginative vision of the future

PURPOSE/MISSION

1. Explains why the organization or group exists
2. Ensures that people know what the organization or group does
3. Constantly reminds us of the importance of what we do
4. Communicates a mission or purpose that is informed by shared values
5. Ensures the mission or purpose is shared by all stakeholders (e.g., employees, shareholders, investors, customers, public authorities, government, local community)

6. Emphasizes the mission or purpose when interacting with external stakeholders (e.g., employees, shareholders, investors, customers, public authorities, government, local community)

SHARED VALUES

1. Respects individuals' personal values
 2. Demonstrates honesty, integrity and trustworthiness
 3. Ensures everyone in the organization, department, or group is "on the same page" with regard to values
 4. Displays in his/her own behaviour the shared values of the organization, department, or group
 5. Makes decisions and takes action consistent with the values of the organization, department, or group
 6. Fosters a sense of community or belonging among members of the organization, department, or group
-

STRATEGY

1. Considers external/environmental factors (e.g., political, economic, social, technological, legal, ecological) when developing strategy
 2. Takes time out to think about the "big picture", apart from managing day-to-day operations
 3. Develops strategies based on rigorous analysis, insight, and foresight
 4. Identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the organization, department, or group before developing strategy
 5. Acts on information or facts rather than assumptions
 6. Develops a strategy that will translate vision and mission/purpose into reality or results
-

EMPOWERMENT

1. Delegates authority to make decisions or take action to followers or employees
2. Encourages people to take an active role in decision making on matters that affect them
3. Gives followers or subordinates the freedom to decide what to do and how to do it

4. Expresses confidence in the capabilities of others
 5. Makes it safe for people to say what is on their minds
 6. Encourages confronting issues, problems or assumptions rather than assigning blame
-

ENGAGEMENT

1. Ensures that work is meaningful to people
 2. Shares success fairly with all those who contributed to it, however much
 3. Encourages people to act together to change circumstances that affect them adversely
 4. Recognises the effect of his/her own emotions and behaviour on others' feelings, behaviour or work performance
 5. Ensures that people feel valued in terms of who they are and what they do
 6. Recognizes or rewards performance and achievement objectively and fairly
-

References

- Alvesson, M. and Sveningsson, S. (2003) 'The great disappearance act: difficulties in doing leadership', *The Leadership Quarterly*, 14, pp. 359-381.
- Baker, M.J. (2003) *Business and management research: how to complete your research project successfully*. Helensburgh: Westburn Publishers.
- Banks, G. C., Woznyj, H. M., and Mansfield, C. A. (2023) 'Where is "behavior" in organizational behavior? A call for a revolution in leadership research and beyond', *The Leadership Quarterly*, 34(6). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2021.101581>
- Bass, B. M. and Avolio, B. J. (1994) 'Introduction', in B. M. Bass and B. J. Avolio (eds), *Improving organizational effectiveness through transformational leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Bass, B.M. (1985) *Leadership and performance beyond expectations*. New York: Free Press.
- Burns, J.M. (2006) 'Afterword', in G.R. Goethals and G.L.J. Sorenson (eds), *The quest for a general theory of leadership..* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Carbonell-López, J.I. (2013) 'Leading change through passion, vision, and humility', *Leadership Advance Online*, XXIV. Available at: www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/lao/issue_24/2lao-carbonell-lopez.pdf (accessed June 2014).

Carroll, L. (1871) *Through the looking glass, and what Alice found there*. London: Puffin Classics, New Edition, 2003.

Champy, J.A. (1997) 'Preparing for organizational change', in F. Hesselbein, M. Goldsmith and J. Beckhard (eds) *The organization of the future*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

CIPD (2009) *Shared purpose and sustainable organisation performance*, Research Insight. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, October.

Collins, J.C. and Porras, J.I. (1996) 'Building your company's vision'. *Harvard Business Review*, September–October.

Collins, J.C. and Porras, J.L. (1996) *Built to last: successful habits of visionary companies*. London: HarperBusiness. Available at: [com/11497b51blayfousubkh3iqaaaaaatxj54ucgpj2syyaaaaa](https://www.harperbusiness.com/11497b51blayfousubkh3iqaaaaaatxj54ucgpj2syyaaaaa)

Concise Oxford Dictionary, Eleventh Edition (2004) Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Crawford, J. A. and Kelder, J. A. (2019) 'Do we measure leadership effectively? Articulating and evaluating scale development psychometrics for best practice'. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 30(1), pp. 133-144.

Crystal, D. (2007) *How language works*. London: Penguin Books.

Dabash, H. (2000) 'In the absence of the face', *Social Research*, 67 (1).

Davis, L.E. and Churns, A.B. (1975) *The Quality of Working Life*, Volume 1. London: Free Press.

Dent, F. and Brent, M. (2001) 'Influencing: a new model'. *Training Journal*, July, pp. 14-17.

Edmondson A.C. (1999) 'Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams'. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), pp. 350–83.

Edmondson, A.C. and Bransby, D.P. (2023) 'Psychological safety comes of age: Observed themes in an established literature. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 10: pp. 55-78.

Edwards, G., Bailey, J. and Winter, P. (2002) *Leadership in management*. Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire: The Leadership Trust Foundation.

Fiol, C.M. and O'Connor, E.J. (2002) 'Future planning + present mindfulness = strategic foresight'. Paper presented at the International Conference on 'Probing the Future: Developing Organizational Foresight in the Knowledge Economy', University of Strathclyde Graduate School of Business, Glasgow, 11-13 July.

Fischer, T., Hambrick, D. C., Sajons, G. B. and Van Quaquebeke, N. (2023) 'Leadership science beyond questionnaires'. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 34(6), 101752.

Friedman, M. (1970) 'A Friedman doctrine: the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits', *The New York Times Magazine*, September 13.

Gill, R. (2006) *Theory and practice of leadership*. London and Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Gill, R. (2011/2012) *Theory and practice of leadership*, 2nd edn. London & Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Gill, R. (2015) 'Studying leadership through the lens of the literature on leadership: A hermeneutic model', in Y. Krasnikoa, A. Negrov and V. Sarapulov (eds) *General and special methods to study leadership*, Leadership: theory and practice, Issue 2. St Petersburg, Russia: St. Petersburg Christian University.

Gill, R. (2022) 'Leadership and spirituality', in Y. Altman, J. Neal and W. Mayrhofer (eds) *Workplace spirituality: making a difference*. Vol. 1 in the Management, spirituality and religion series. Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 45-73.

Goethals, G.R. and Sorenson, G.L.J. (eds) (2006) *The quest for a general theory of leadership*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Grawitch, M.J. and Ballard, D.W. (2019) 'Pseudoscience won't create a psychologically healthy workplace', in R. J. Burke and A. M. Richardsen (eds), *Creating psychologically healthy workplaces*, Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp.42-64.

Greenleaf, R. (1977) *Servant leadership*. New York: Paulist Press.

Grint, K. (2000) *The arts of leadership*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hackman, J.R. and Oldham, G.R. (1976) 'Motivation through the design of work: Test of a theory'. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 15, pp. 250-279.

Hafley, J.W. (1962) *Creativity and innovation*. New York: Reinhold.

Hannah, S.T., Sumanth, J.J., Lester, P. and Cavarretta, F. (2014) 'Debunking the false dichotomy of leadership idealism and pragmatism: Critical evaluation and support of newer genre leadership theories', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 35, pp. 598-621.

Hart, C. (1998) *Doing a literature review: Releasing the social science research imagination*. London: SAGE Publications.

Herzberg, F. (1966) *Work and the nature of man*. Cleveland, OH: World Publishing.

Hoad, T.F. (ed) (1988) *The concise Oxford dictionary of English etymology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Johnson, I. (2005) *Strategic conversation: Defining, measuring and applying the construct in organisations*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Griffith University, Australia.

- Kahn, J.E. and Wilson, R. (eds) (1985). *The right word at the right time*. London: The Reader's Digest Association.
- Kay, J. (2010a) 'The cash comes second'. Appointments, *The Sunday Times*, 28 March, p. 6.
- Kay, J. (2010b) *Obliquity*. London: Profile Books.
- Kelly, S. (2008) 'Leadership: a categorical mistake?' *Human Relations*, 61 (6), pp. 763-782.
- Kelly, S. (2014) 'Towards a negative ontology of leadership'. *Human Relations*, 67 (8), pp. 905-922.
- Kets de Vries, M. and Florent-Treacy, E. (1999) *AuthentiZiotic organizations: Global leadership from A to Z*. Working Paper 99/62/ENT, INSEAD, Fontainebleau, France.
- Kurtzman, J. (2010) *Common purpose: How great leaders get organizations to achieve the extraordinary*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Lennick, D. and Kiel, F. (2011) *Moral intelligence*, 2nd edn. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.
- Levene, F. (2015) *A study of leadership and its impact on vision, strategy and change management in three Russian financial services businesses using a case-study approach*. Unpublished DBA thesis, Henley Business School, University of Reading.
- Likert, R. (1961) *New patterns of management*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Marturano, A., Wren, J.T. and Harvey, M. (2013) 'Editorial: The making of *Leadership and the Humanities*', *Leadership and the Humanities*, 1(1), pp. 1-5.
- McGregor, D. (1960) *The human side of enterprise*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- McKinsey & Company (2011) 'Creating more value with corporate strategy, McKinsey Global Survey results', *McKinsey Quarterly*. Available at: <http://e.mckinseyquarterly>.
- Menon, S.T. (2001) 'Employee empowerment: An integrative psychological approach', *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 50 (1), pp. 153-180.
- Mumford, S. (2021) 'There's no substitute for those casual conversations', *Times Higher Education*, No.2481, 29 April.
- Mumford, M.D. and Fried, Y. (2014) 'Give them what they want or give them what they need? Ideology in the study of leadership', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 35, pp. 622-634.
- Patterson, C.H. (1986) 'Preface', *Theories of counselling and psychotherapy*. 4th ed. New York: Harper and Row.
- Pondy, L.R. (1978) 'Leadership is a language game', in M. W. McCall Jr and M. M. Lombardo (eds) *Leadership: where else can we go?* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Proverbs 29: 18, *The Bible*.

Rupprecht, E. A., Waldrop, J. S., and Grawitch, M. J. (2013) 'Initial validation of a new measure of leadership', *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 65(2). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0033127>

Terry, R.W. (1993) *Authentic leadership: Courage in action*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

The Bible, 1 Timothy 6:10.

Torraco, R. J. (2005) 'Writing integrative literature reviews: Guidelines and examples' *Human Resource Development Review*, 4, pp. 356-367.

Whysall, Z (2025) 'Organisational culture survey shows widespread mismatch between behaviour and policies', Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University, 14 January. Available at: www.ntu.ac.uk

Yukl, G. (1998) *Leadership in organizations* (4th ed). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Yukl, G. (2002) *Leadership in organizations* (5th ed). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.