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MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP (GK5909)

Group Project Report

Leadership and Learning at Work: A Systematic Literature Review of Learning-oriented Leadership

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Contents

1   Introduction

Learning and education are among the key leadership factors that require special attention, as they enable organizations to adapt quickly to changes. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, educational institutions faced significant shifts, such as transitioning to online learning, which emphasized the urgent need for leaders to swiftly adapt to new technologies and teaching strategies. Leaders had to collaborate and encourage teachers not only to adopt technology, but also to develop flexible teaching skills and foster creative learning environments for students. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to analyze the role of leadership in promoting learning to ensure adaptability and growth in changing conditions.

2   Article Analysis

2.1   Overview of the article

The article, "Leadership and Learning at Work: A Systematic Literature Review of Learning-oriented Leadership," was published on October 25, 2022, in the Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies. It aims to synthesize and evaluate 105 studies on the relationship between leadership and learning. The paper focuses on exploring leadership approaches that support learning at three levels: individual, team, and organizational.

The article focuses on three main objectives:

First, it synthesizes existing research related to the connection between leadership and learning, showing that leaders can promote learning through various styles such as transformational, supportive, and creative leadership. These styles enhance employees' problem-solving skills and reflective thinking, thus fostering individual and team learning.

Second, it analyzes and highlights mediating factors, demonstrating that organizational culture, psychological safety, and team engagement play a critical role in the relationship between leadership and learning. This underscores that leaders not only directly but also indirectly influence organizational learning and development through environmental factors.

Third, the article suggests directions for future research, including further exploration of moderating factors such as industry, gender, and other organizational structures that may impact the relationship between leadership and learning. Additionally, there is a call for more in-depth studies on specific leadership behaviors that promote learning, as well as the development of more accurate measurement tools for learning in the workplace.

2.2   Methodology

2.2.1   Sources of Records

To locate relevant studies, the primary databases used were Scopus and Web of Science, chosen for their broad and interdisciplinary scope, making them highly applicable for researching the leadership-learning relationship. The researchers also searched two additional databases, Emerald and Business Source, but these did not yield any new studies. The searches in Scopus generated a total of 8,283 hits, while Web of Science produced 4,178 hits. After removing duplicates, this resulted in 8,954 unique hits. Beyond the database searches, 23 additional studies were identified

through serendipitous findings—studies not found in the database but encountered during the review process.

2.2.2 Reviewing Process

The team employed a comprehensive search strategy that combined leadership- and learning-related terms to capture a broad range of studies. Keywords related to leadership included terms like "leader*," "manage*," and "supervisor*." Learning-related terms included "workplace learning," "learning at work," "learning in the workplace," "work-based learning," "organizational learning," "learning organization," and "informal learning." Additionally, specialized terms such as "learning-oriented leadership," "learning-centered leadership," "leadership for learning," and "learning leadership" were used. These search terms were developed based on the study's research questions, existing literature, and collaborative discussions among the team members.

The review process adhered to systematic guidelines (Page et al., 2021) to ensure a thorough and reliable filtering process. First, an initial screening involved reviewing titles and abstracts against inclusion criteria, with potentially relevant or hard-to-assess studies moved to a full-text eligibility assessment. Out of 1,124 studies initially identified, 1,017 full-text articles were assessed in detail. Ultimately, 136 studies met all inclusion criteria, though some were excluded due to data duplication, leaving 100 relevant studies. Additionally, 23 studies identified serendipitously were reviewed, with five meeting quality standards and included in the final analysis.

2.2.3 Evaluation Metrics

The inclusion criteria required that studies focus on (P) working life and workplace contexts, (E) leadership styles, behaviors, or roles, and (O) employee learning. Eligible studies were peer-reviewed scientific articles published in international academic journals, written in English, and containing empirical data collected in workplace settings. These studies needed to statistically test the relationship between leadership and learning, with a focus on how leaders promote workplace learning. Exclusion criteria ruled out studies on non-workplace learning (e.g., teacher-student relationships in education), qualitative studies, and studies that addressed learning outcomes without exploring the learning process.

To ensure rigor, a quality assessment template Tompa et al., 2007 categorized studies into low, medium, and high quality, with only medium- and high-quality studies included in the final review. This assessment narrowed the database-sourced studies to 100, and an additional 5 serendipitous studies were also included after passing quality checks, resulting in a total of 105 studies.

In the final review, 105 studies were analyzed using a narrative synthesis. Central information, such as leadership constructs and mediators, was compiled and grouped into categories, enabling the identification of patterns. Leadership theories were classified into five categories based on the framework by Dinh et al., 2014, while learning was categorized into organizational, group, or individual learning according to the survey instruments used in each study. This categorization provided a structured understanding of how various leadership styles influence learning at different levels within organizations.
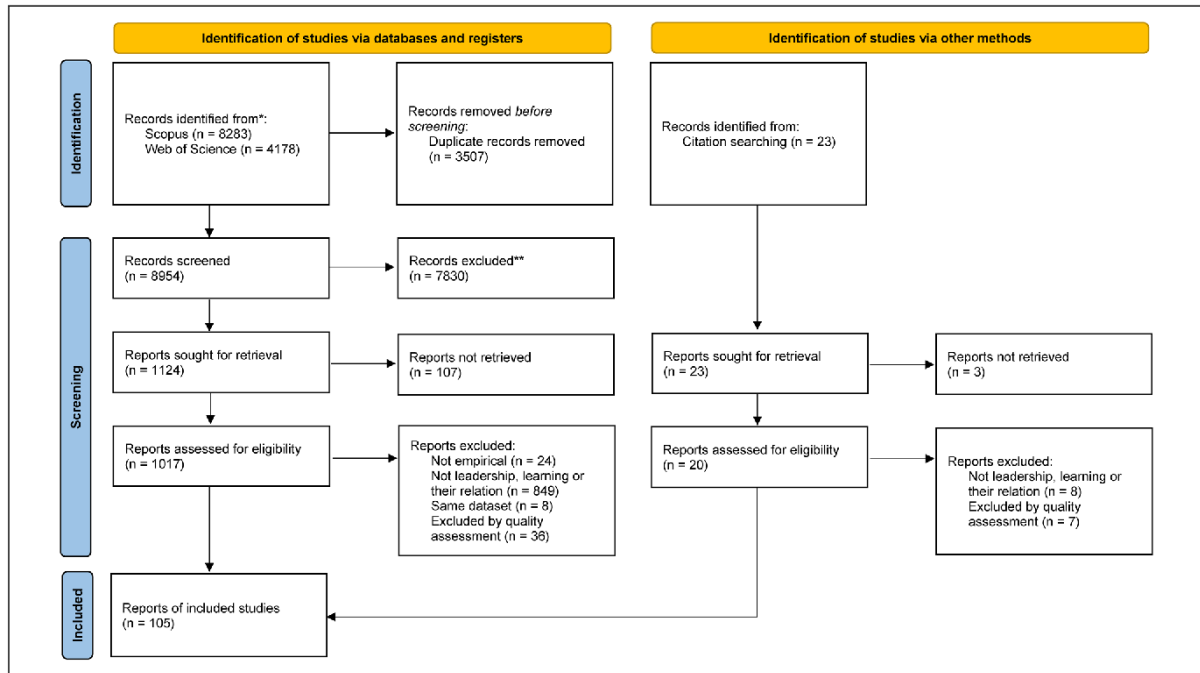
Figure 1: Flowchart of the identification process Lundqvist et al., 2022

3 Paper Findings

3.1 Transformational Leadership and Organizational Learning

The review reveals that transformational leadership improves organizational learning by instilling a culture of innovation, shared vision and solving challenges in a flexible manner. Each of the four main dimensions of transformational leadership - intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, idealized influence and inspirational motivation - was found to contribute to improvements in learning outcomes. Transformation leaders improve 40% of employees' willingness to engage in learning activities within the organization and increase the implementation of innovative solutions by 35% (Anselmann and Mulder, 2020). Leaders' intellectual stimulation has led to a substantial 25% improvement in departments' ability to creatively address problems, as employees are encouraged to question the status quo and look for new approaches (Calisir et al., 2016).

Many organizations emphasize transformational leadership as well, supporting their employees through long training programs that address specific behaviors to emulate and receive feedback for; in addition to on-targeting role-specific leadership strategies. A review of this training reported 80% increased confidence in developing team learning and a roughly 20% improvement on measures related to innovation after one year following the completion of transformational leadership training (Barling et al., 1996). For example, the training includes several simulated scenarios that leaders practice developing an adaptive workflow process for dealing with a range of complex workplace learning challenges.

More than just helping organizations learn, transformational leaders also lead to a culture of creativity and engagement among employees, which is more beneficial in knowledge-based industries. Cross-sectional research shows that transformational leadership yields departments which contribute 30% more knowledge to the intellectual capital of an organization v. other aspects like their shared actions with one another, by creating new collective learning initiatives (Berson et al.,

2015). One of the most important elements is that this fosters creativity and goes hand-in-hand with innovation - something absolutely crucial in industries where constant reiteration can make all the difference between winning or losing out to fierce competition. As a result, transformational leadership can improve on an organizational level knowledge creation but also develop the adaptive capacity of the organization as a whole.

3.2 Individual Learning and Leadership for Creativity

Also, it highlights the significance of creativity-focused leadership in promoting personal learning. Managers who value learning at the individual level empower employees with autonomy to make decisions and work together in solving problems, fostering conditions for personal development. That is, learning-focused leadership behavior (e.g., positive feedback and provide-y role modeling) enhances employees' engagement in self-directed learning initiatives by 45% along with increased on-the-job task performance by 30% over leaders demonstrating less of these behaviors (Oude Groote Beverborg et al., 2015). Employees working under such leadership are also much more likely to engage in active learning mindsets, with 65% of employees indicating higher job satisfaction resulting from the ability to take courses and increased autonomy (Brunetto et al., 2015).

In terms of individual learning, leaders encourage an environment where team members are motivated to learn new skills and gain greater insights on their own. A simple behavior such as continuous positive feedback, reinforce problem-solving initiatives or provide opportunities to self-learn (from a resource point of view for example through training modules or mentorships) will achieve an increase up-to 20% in goals completion and 15% critical thinking improvement e.g. by being: consistent about when they get their stats back from you? (Coetzer, 2006) Leaders must aim to recognize and create clear pathways for each employee's professional brand - which not only aligns well with strategic company challenges but also ensures that employees are prepared to adapt, grow and contribute in an ever-evolving role within the organization.

For example, in industries like information technology and healthcare where continuous skill updates are critical to success the impact of a self-directed learning style is even more dramatic as leaders focused on creating empowerment for employees amidst organizational boundaries reported 50higher rates among their staff (Camps and Rodríguez, 2011). The data from above reinforces the value of having leaders who can customize that approach to support each person's learning needs, and even more so in knowledge-based or high-change environments.

3.3 Mediators Enhancing Leadership-Learning Associations

While leadership is a key factor in delivering learning outcomes, its effectiveness tends to be conditioned by different organizational, team and personal considerations. In short, by enhancing the effect of leadership and moreover enabling leaders, behaviors are translated into practical learning processes.

Firstly, at the organizational level, absorptive capacity and a knowledge-sharing climate serve as crucial mediators. Absorptive capacity, defined as an organization's ability to recognize, assimilate, and apply new knowledge, has been shown to amplify the impact of transformational leadership. Organizations with high absorptive capacity are 50% more likely to successfully implement innovative solutions introduced through leadership initiatives (Imran et al., 2016). A knowledge-sharing climate, meanwhile, enhances employee willingness to share and receive information, which has been linked to a 30% improvement in cross-functional collaboration and 20% higher rates of information exchange (Camps and Rodríguez, 2011). Together, these factors create an environment

where transformational leadership efforts translate directly into organizational growth and learning.

Secondly, team-level mediators, such as team trust, psychological safety, and team reflexivity, play a pivotal role in reinforcing learning behaviors within groups. Team trust, characterized by mutual respect and reliability among team members, significantly impacts learning activities, as teams with higher trust levels report a 40% higher participation in collaborative learning and 30% greater openness to feedback (Hirak et al., 2012). Similarly, psychological safety-the belief that one can take risks without fear of negative consequences-encourages open dialogue and experimentation. Teams that cultivate psychological safety show a 50% increase in learning behaviors and are more likely to embrace constructive criticism and change (Carmeli et al., 2012). Team reflexivity, or the practice of collectively reflecting on team performance and identifying improvements, serves as an additional reinforcing factor. Studies show that teams practicing reflexivity improve their learning rates by 25% and have enhanced problem-solving capacities (Matsuo, 2017).

Thirdly, at the individual level, mediators like self-efficacy and learning agility influence the extent to which employees engage in learning activities initiated by leaders. Employees with high self-efficacy, or confidence in their learning abilities, are more likely to take on challenging tasks and pursue skill development independently. Leaders who encourage and support individual learning find that employees with strong self-efficacy report a 30% higher engagement rate in self-directed learning and exhibit greater adaptability to new roles (Oude Groote Beverborg et al., 2015). Learning agility, the ability to learn quickly from experience and apply that knowledge, also mediates leadership-learning relationships by enhancing employees' readiness to adapt and grow in response to leader-directed initiatives.

Overall, these mediators emphasize the significance of a supportive and adaptive environment for facilitating this leadership-learning connection. Organizational interventions targeted at absorptive capacity, team cohesion and individual self-efficacy can help improve the impact of leadership on driving learning outcomes, so these mediators should be central to any development programs designed to cultivate a culture of learning.

4 Relation with existing lessons

4.1 Comparing with slides and lessons

Based on what the main points of the paper that our team has just described, we have done some re-evaluation, and linked with what we learned from class sessions. Some of the points that we would like to point out would be as follows.

First, we did agree that, to cultivate for learning at any different levels, from individual up to organizational, it is necessary that a matching culture must be set up. In an environment where innovation is encouraged, development can be built upon. One of the case studies that our team can recall is "Google Creates Unique Culture", in which Google, to outcompete its competitor in the Search engine market, relies very much based on its employees innovations and cutting-edge technology. This is also true for neo-charismatic leadership. To be a neo-charismatic leader is to be visionary. Similar to Rachel Adams and her Independent Center for Clinical Research (ICCR), having a visionary leader helps motivate with the learning and the growth of the research center, resulted in many successes at the early time.

In our class lessons, leadership styles are discussed in broader terms, encompassing a range of approaches that include trait, behavioral, and situational theories. This text offers a comprehensive overview of different models and their applications, from traditional leadership theories to contemporary perspectives. While Leadership and Learning at Work zeroes in on the concept of learning-oriented leadership, normal textbooks takes a wider lens, providing a foundational understanding of how various styles can support or hinder learning. The concept of transformational leadership, which motivates and empowers team members, serves as a bridge between the texts, as both recognize its potential to create a supportive learning environment.

Finally, Leadership and Learning at Work presents learning-oriented leadership as a distinct, integrative approach that combines coaching, feedback, and collaboration to sustain organizational development. Meanwhile, textbooks and slides explore similar ideas but does not prioritize learning as the central focus of leadership. Instead, it explores a variety of goals that leadership can serve. Overall, while both texts acknowledge the importance of growth and adaptability, Leadership and Learning at Work treats learning as a key objective, whereas the slides situate it as one of many possible outcomes within the broader landscape of leadership effectiveness.

4.2 Comparing with textbook - "Leadership Theory & Practice"

As a textbook for this subject, *Leadership Theory & Practice* is what we would also like to take into comparison when researching about the topic of growing team members. Both of these documents examine the role of leadership in supporting organizational growth and development, but they differ significantly in their focal points. *Leadership Theory & Practice* provides a broad overview of leadership theories, including transformational, transactional, servant, and situational leadership, and discusses how each theory can be applied in diverse organizational contexts. It emphasizes how different leadership approaches impact organizational success and employee motivation. In contrast, Leadership and Learning at Work narrows its focus specifically to learning-oriented leadership, exploring how leadership styles and behaviors directly foster learning and knowledge-sharing within the workplace.

In terms of practical application, *Leadership Theory & Practice* presents leadership as a flexible tool that can be adapted to various organizational goals, such as improving productivity or innovation.

While learning and development are part of this framework, they are not the central objective. On the other hand, Leadership and Learning at Work frames learning as the core function of effective leadership, arguing that fostering a continuous learning environment is crucial for organizational adaptability and resilience. It introduces the concept of learning-oriented leadership as a model that prioritizes skills development and knowledge transfer, positioning leaders as coaches who facilitate structured reflection and collaborative learning.

Another distinction lies in how each source treats the outcomes of leadership. *Leadership Theory & Practice* explores a broad range of outcomes, such as team cohesion, performance improvement, and employee satisfaction. It sees learning as one of many paths toward these ends. Leadership and Learning at Work, however, sees learning as a primary outcome of leadership and positions it as essential for long-term success. By promoting specific strategies for creating a learning-centered culture, such as feedback loops and reflective practices, it redefines leadership effectiveness in terms of how well leaders can cultivate an adaptable, knowledge-driven workforce.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, *Leadership and Learning at Work: A Systematic Literature Review of Learning-oriented Leadership* offers a comprehensive overview of how leadership directly and indirectly promotes learning in the workplace. By synthesizing findings from 105 studies, the paper highlights the critical role of leadership in fostering learning across individual, team, and organizational levels. Key leadership styles—such as transformational, supportive, and creative leadership—are shown to enhance problem-solving skills, reflective thinking, and adaptability among employees, creating an environment conducive to continuous learning and growth. The article also underscores the importance of mediating factors, such as organizational culture, psychological safety, and team engagement, which help strengthen the leadership-learning relationship. These insights demonstrate that effective leaders are not only motivators but also facilitators of a learning-centered culture that supports both personal and professional development.

This paper closely aligns with our classroom discussions, which have covered a range of leadership theories and their impact on team dynamics and organizational success. In particular, the focus on transformational leadership as a driver of innovation and engagement reinforces our understanding of how this style builds a foundation for continuous learning. Additionally, concepts from class, such as team cohesion, feedback loops, and psychological safety, are echoed in the paper as essential elements in creating a learning-focused workplace. While our class has addressed leadership's multifaceted role, *Leadership and Learning at Work* highlights learning as a core outcome of effective leadership. This emphasis invites us to view leadership not only as a means to achieve performance and productivity but as a strategic pathway for fostering adaptability, knowledge-sharing, and resilience within the organization. Through this integrative approach, the article deepens our understanding of how learning-oriented leadership can be applied to cultivate a workforce prepared for ongoing change and innovation.

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