

Emerging Leadership Traits in the Post-Covid Era

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Master of Science

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Submitted to Dr. MMag. **Stefan Bauer**

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AFFIDAVIT

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“When written in Chinese, the word ‘crisis’ is composed of two characters - one represents danger, and the other represents opportunity.”

John F. Kennedy, former President of the United States of America

ABSTRACT

Today, more than ever before, individuals, as well as teams and organizations, need authentic, adaptive types of leaders, able to navigate through crises, support innovation and inspire towards a common purpose. The post-pandemic is confirming the importance of training leaders who encourage self-motivation, who remain flexible and resilient to any type of challenge and who prioritise a healthy work-life balance. In this research, we developed a tool to evaluate within an expert sample with proven track record in the field of leadership, what specific, acquired or learned skills and traits may better identify the leaders of tomorrow.

Up until COVID-19, literature focused on the role of leadership in managing crises, evidencing how *servant* and *transformational leadership* proved to be very effective during such times (Khan et al., 2021) and how *benevolence*, *self-efficacy* and *employee performance* could be positively related (Pratiwi & Nawangsari, 2021). Several studies attempted to examine the impact of the pandemic on workplaces and on employees (Caldas et al., 2021, Trougakos et al., 2020) but few investigated what constitutes effective leadership in the workplace (Hu et al., 2020; Yuan et al., 2021). Our research contributes to literature by evidencing what traits and common practices seemed to have a positive effect in different workplaces during COVID-19 and how future leaders may use this expertise to adopt new effective leading styles to better navigate the uncertainties of the future, and also motivate and inspire their followers.

Results from our study confirm that leaders who are better equipped to take decisions under pressure, who are open to innovation and change, who adapt quickly and stay resilient, who practice transparent communication and show humility, authenticity and honesty, are most likely to lead organizations and teams towards development and positive change in the future. Such type of leaders embody skills and traits that make them most suitable for coping with the uncertainties of this era, with the fast pace of technology, with the challenges of global crises and, ultimately, may be more effective in the long term to bring real change in this world.

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In that respect I wish to mention my little daughter whose pure and so very often clear vision of life truly inspired me to go further. Despite being only five and six years old during my MBA studies, she always looked at me while I was preparing to leave for Campus or connect on Teams, prior to asking me in her baby Italian: *“Dad, why MBA?”*.

This uncertain, complex and ambiguous future we are so often scared to look at, unaware about what to do, should never be less than an opportunity for us to grow, evolve and thrive, just like our grandparents, their grandparents before them, and those before them did, over and over again since generations.

May this work serve as an inspiration to find new ways to listen, understand and empower our colleagues, friends and loved ones. For there can be no happiness without progress, and no opportunity without challenge. But sure thing, there can never be neither true success, nor gratifying achievement, without the joy of sharing it with those who made it possible.

Angelo D’Agostino

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI	Artificial Intelligence
BCG	Boston Consulting Group
CCL	Centre for Creative Leadership
CMB	Common Method Bias
EI	Emotional Intelligence
GQ	Global Intelligence
HPO	High Performance Organization
MBSR	Mindful Based Stress Reduction
MLQ	Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire
PWC	PricewaterhouseCoopers
PTG	Post-Traumatic Growth
RBL	Result Based Leadership
SCT	Social Cognitive Theory
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SME	Small to Mid-Sized Enterprises
VUCA	Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous
WLB	Work Life Balance

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Evolution of Leadership

The Great Man Theory defined leadership as an innate set of valuable qualities that chosen individuals seemed to own since birth. The 1930s led to behavioural theories, asserting that *“leaders are largely made, rather than born and that particular behaviours can be learnt to ensure effective leadership”* (Benmira & Agboola 2021). During the 1960s, the role of external factors was recognized, leading to the situational and contingent era of leadership theories, as studied and developed by Fiedler (1974). During this time, studies on charismatic leadership (House, 1977) and leadership in political science (Burns, 1978) suggested the new transactional leadership idea which relied on authority to motivate employees, implementing a punish and reward system. In 1985, Bass then introduced the concept of transformational leadership able to lead teams through change and innovation, inspiring and motivating individuals to achieve long-term goals, by suggesting a vision first, and then providing a sense of commitment to it.

Era	Period	Theory	Description
Trait	1840s	Great Man	Focus on natural born leaders
	1930s-1940s	Trait	Focus on finding traits & characteristics of effective leaders
Behavioural	1940s-1950s	Behavioural	Focus on evaluating the actions and skills of leaders. Autocratic, Democratic & Laissez-Faire (Lewin, 1930s)
Situational	1960s	Contingent & Situational	Focus on leaders able to adapt their style by taking into account the environment and contingent events
New leadership	1980s	Transactional	Focus on leadership as a cost-benefit exchange
	1990s	Transformational	Focus on an inspirational style with long term vision
	2000s	Collaborative	Focus on engaging followers (people-centered)
	2000s	Servant	Focus on helping others develop by sharing power
	2010s	Inclusive	Focus on leveraging individual differences inclusively
	2010s	Complexity	Focus on thriving through turbulent times & crisis
Post-Pandemic	2020s	Ethical	Focus on the dignity of rights, beliefs and values of others
		Digital	Focus on leading people working remotely and online
		Crisis	Focus on leading people & organizations during crises
		Recovery	Focus on leading during times of recovery from emergency
		Responsive	Focus on acknowledging circumstances before taking action

TABLE 1.1 - SUMMARY OF THE MAIN LEADERSHIP THEORIES (SOURCE BJM LEADER)

Table 1.1 summarizes some key dates and turning points in the history of leadership theories. As the world became dominated by increasing complexity and rapid change, towards the end of last century new leadership theories emerged that could take into consideration our system as a whole, and the complex interactions that developed between leaders, followers and the environment. Probert et al. (2011) debated the need to renew assumptions about leadership development, in order to reflect the new challenges faced by organizations in the future.

More than a century later, research recognized again some aspects of trait theories, accepting that a mixture of innate qualities and distinctive experiences, supported by new tools and a continuous learning process, may be what is needed to shape good leaders (Organ, 1996). The trait ideology that was originally discarded ("*leaders are made, rather than born*") partially returned through the concept that having a learned set of skills and competences will not be enough for the leaders of tomorrow unless they will also show high-value traits and attitudes. In chapter 4.6 we will talk about *Result Based Leadership* (RBL) and *NextGen* leaders (Bawany, 2016), and the role of emotional intelligence and emotional competence (Goleman, 1998).

These concepts and new styles of leadership all embody a specific set of values, skills and tendencies, that encompass emotional sensitivity, clarity of communication and authenticity, all more suitable to cope with a future that will offer less certainties but expect fast decisions. Both Digital transition, remote working and AI, will play a growing influence in the life of people and organizations (Smith & Green, 2018). Leaders will have to choose the right people for the right tasks, take challenging decisions during unexpected crises, support innovation and inclusion, protect organizational culture and nourish a fruitful balance between work and private life.

Studies that started during COVID-19 connected leadership and social entrepreneurship (Oberoi et al., 2021; Brown & Crawford, 2022), or the effects of COVID-19 on SMEs and how to revive organizations in the post-pandemic era with ambidextrous leadership style and agile strategies (Baporikar, 2021), but more research is being carried out to analyze new trends and patterns.

Some researchers even pointed out that much has been said about leadership and yet there seem to be opposing views about virtually anything connected to leadership. In academia, it is perhaps acknowledged by now, that "*leadership is a circumstantial relationship between a leader and his or her followers*" (Silva, 2014). Not all individuals occupying high positions are leaders, there is no permanent leadership status, but some people are accepted as leaders in specific situations and circumstances, for a certain period of time.

Taking into account all these notions, we framed our area of study. We developed a survey that we fine-tuned as we progressed, and asked a selected group of professionals who occupy positions of influence or have experience in the field of leadership, to witness how they lived through crisis and how they shifted to new roles and habits. We looked for trends and patterns that could help us answer our question and suggested further studies to be made in the future.

1.2 Research Questions and Aims

Given the anticipated introduction to existing theories which we will analyze further in chapter 2, we developed a questionnaire and addressed selected professionals in positions of influence who have been chosen according to the method described later (chapter 3). Starting from the following questions, we structured it in a way that it would refer to each candidate's path and recent learnings, prior to discussing in person how these may impact future leaders and their success in the world of tomorrow. The main questions can be summarized as follows:

1. Which skills, traits or both best define the leaders of tomorrow?
2. What will effective leadership look like in the post-Covid era?

These main topics were discussed during follow-up interviews via phone or in person, with the aim of integrating the survey presented in Appendix 1, developed prior to starting. Our survey was used to analyse potential patterns and later fine-tuned to cross-identify more efficiently emerging traits and trends among leading figures. In *fig. 1.1*, we see for instance a summary of the five emerging characteristics of **global leaders**, according to Goldsmith et al. (2003).

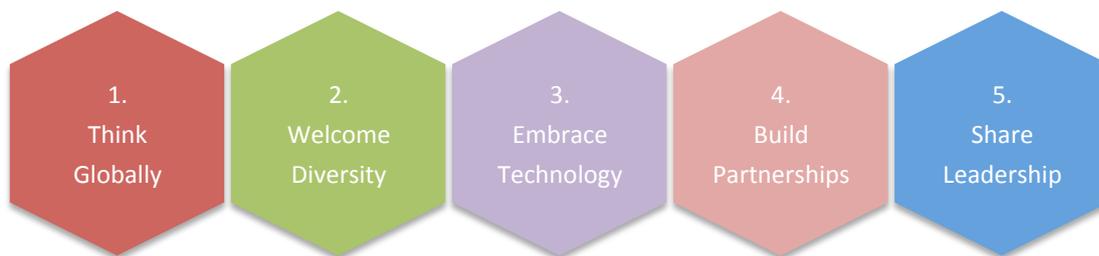


Fig. 1.1 - The five characteristics of Global Leaders according to Goldsmith et al. (2003).

A study by **Accenture** about “*Responsible Leadership*” in collaboration with the Young Global Leaders Program of the World Economic Forum, confirmed these findings almost two decades later (Jabari, 2020). Future leaders will have to share, creating an inclusive environment and will look for integration, rather than control, encouraging smart teams to work together. They will have to be connected at a global level and understand economic, cultural and political differences. They will definitely have to support cultural diversity, not only of gender, race and values, but also of leadership styles and understand different strategies to motivate teams across different cultures. They will have to be tech-savvy and open to innovation, embracing the use of AI and other new technologies to generate competitive advantage and step ahead of times. Future leaders will also have to be able to build partnerships and alliances, as the roles between customers and collaborators or enemies and competitors will become more blurred. Ultimately, future leaders will have to share their leadership roles as required, aware of their own strengths but never shy of leaning on the complementary strengths of others.

1.3 Goals of Work

This study investigates the specific trends and traits in leadership that our candidates naturally practice and relate to. During the interviews, we addressed open questions that offered room for dialogue on selected topics in the process. One goal was to evidence if our understanding that “*NextGen*” leaders will be less dependent on a pure reward and value system and that they will not actually be tied up to the organizational hierarchies that past leaders had lived through (Horner, 1997), will be mirroring our future or not. At the same time, we investigated specific skills, traits and qualities that many leaders had to acquire and develop to live through the COVID-19 crisis, navigate through uncertainty and inspire confidence and trust. Ultimately, then, we may summarize the two main goals of this research as follows:

- 1) Develop a questionnaire that may assess future leadership traits effectively, based on the outcome of recent research and, most interestingly, on newly acquired knowledge about the topic, using the work of this thesis itself to fine-tune our analytical tool.
- 2) Find relevance within the processed interviews to support or dismiss existing theories and perhaps add a level of analysis that may offer new interpretations to existing views.

Effectively, this research will provide an analysis of leadership traits and skills in the post-Covid era, through purposive sampling of a representative population. Given the limited number of primary data sources available and the anthropological nature of our study, the intuitive approach allowed by this kind of sampling was chosen over any other. To reduce personal bias as well as judgement errors created by this type of approach, we investigated the acquired data and analysed all findings with an impartial eye, letting the candidates talk for us. The method will be analyzed in the course of chapter 3 and findings outlined in chapter 4.

1.4 Significance and Contribution

Today’s leaders are already coping with a generally diffused tendency generated by fear, self-doubt, confusion, uncertainty and sense of failure, which we might identify as *post-Covid Swirl* (Seehra, 2021). Future leaders will need authenticity and emotional intelligence to connect with their followers, showing both empathy and transparency (Goleman, 2013). Several workplaces introduced the concept of mindful based stress reduction (MBSR), to lower stress levels and allow leaders to focus on the moment, avoiding judgement or bias, find inner balance in times of crisis and acquire new energy to react calmly to external challenges (Chaskalson, 2011).

By extending the understanding of these topics too, this study offers to gain insights into the personal traits and habits of leaders with proven track record, evidencing some of the principles they live by, including their values, motivations and practices. In addition to existing literature, this work encourages further exploration and room for discussion, also from a philosophical point of view, raising attention upon the urgency of effective leadership for a better world.

1.5 Structure of Thesis

This thesis is divided in 5 chapters. Chapter 1 evidences the goals of work and general purpose while chapter 2 describes the literature connected to our topic and a wide introduction to leadership theories. Chapter 3 discusses the approach and mixed-method used to acquire the primary data through a survey and narrative interviews, followed by the summary of what we learned and a revision of the questionnaire used to assess our findings. In chapter 4 we will discuss the main themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of our interviews, and we will then summarize our findings and contributions in chapter 5, addressing the validity of the research and its limitations. The chapter ends with suggestions about possible future research.

Throughout chapter 3 and 4 we will provide data and suggest how our method could be fine-tuned to improve future research, we will draw conclusions regarding the main themes and potential traits and trends observed, and will better describe an ideal portrait of the type of leaders our society will need in the future. This study developed ongoing to reveal findings that helped answer our original statement. We addressed some considerations also from an angle that had not been considered when we started (chapter 4), in tune with the purpose of this work to highlight new elements of relevance and compare them with existing literature.

1. *Introduction*
 - *Context and connected research*
 - *Research goals*
 - *Structure of thesis*

2. *Literature Review*
 - *Traditional framework connected to the topic of leadership*
 - *New types of leadership needed to cope with future challenges*
 - *Crisis Management & Connection to Leadership*

3. *Methodology*
 - *Approach to Conducting the Survey*
 - *Data from Part I of Questionnaire*
 - *Data from Part II of Questionnaire*

4. *Results and Discussions*
 - *Main themes from Analysis*
 - *Traits and Trends that emerged from our study*
 - *Additional Remarks*

5. *Conclusions*
 - *Contributions to knowledge*
 - *Implications for stakeholders*
 - *Future Research*

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Several studies recently addressed the impact of COVID-19 on emerging leadership trends and strategies (Hahang et al., 2022), and recalled the core principles of effective crisis leadership (Kaul et al., 2020). Scholarly articles addressed different sectors, from health and public sector to private enterprises where COVID-19 had a profound impact on organizational leadership, to human resources and the redefinition of work across most industries (Chen & Sriphron, 2021).

Recent studies evidence how leaders are particularly important in the process of shaping the meaning of specific events and in guiding stakeholders' understanding of the nature and the effects of evolving crises (Sobral et al., 2020). However, ongoing research is addressing the relationship between crises management and emerging leadership skills and traits and how these can positively impact the future after the experience of COVID-19. In the next chapters we will recall the connection between crisis management, emerging leadership traits and some of the first learnings derived from the COVID-19 crisis, as evidenced in literature.

Our assumption is that future leaders will need to have exceptional abilities, an extraordinary emotional intelligence and empathy, to guide their followers effectively, and will have to be equipped to navigate innovatively and constructively the uncertainties of the future. As we will see, however, our research evidences an apparent trend that *servant leadership* seems to have been gradually abandoned in modern workplaces, or rather transformed into something new.



Fig. 2.1 - Core Principles of Effective Crisis Leadership according to Kaul et al. (2020)

(Kaul et al., 2020) summarized the key practices that effective leaders should embody during a time of crisis, from the ability to communicate and take firm decision under pressure, to being able to look outward, enable others to lead, innovate and stick to one's core values (fig. 2.1). We built our study upon these premises, and in next chapters we will analyze the existing framework and further research and theories developed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2 Context and connected research

Prior to COVID-19, institutions and scholars have been studying future scenarios, forecasting profound changes in the socio-economic conditions that could invest the world between 2020 and 2030. According to Goldin and Mariathasan (2014), two major threats to our future will be the increasing inequality and level of complexity leading to systemic risk. This includes the risk of pandemics, climate change, financial crisis and overpopulation. Technological advancement will generate incredible opportunities but also increasing inequality among those that will have access to it and be able to afford it and those that will not (Hanushek et al., 2019). How will we be able to grow wiser and support societies through this transition? The impact that similar turning points in recent history will have on global scale at economic and socio-political level, are the starting points of a chain reaction whose end result is effectively unknown.

It became clear in recent times, that western system needs to be re-designed but turning to a cashless economy controlled by centralized institutions, for instance, clashes with the inspiring intention of using new disruptive technologies to decentralize authority. Concurrent views paved the road for potential outcomes prior to the COVID-19 era. In 2018, PWC presented a research study on Red and Blue economies: on one side, the “red world”, made of innovative start-ups working towards a more sustainable economy for the benefit of all, and on the other the “blue world”, holding a group of centralized corporations that would serve consumers globally, rather focused on controlling their habits and needs. Both represent since some time plausible scenarios in which leaders of the future could find themselves sooner than imagined.

Some challenges began to manifest already as the first outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic emerged. Future leaders could be facing considerable increase of mental health issues in a disrupted society (Ren & Guo, 2020, Bil et al., 2021; Vadivel et al., 2021), as well as the growing impact of the digital divide (Alvarez, 2021), but not only in connection with internet access or literacy. Society may see differentiation in first and second-class citizens, classified by level of education, social record and financial access. Only hyper-skilled professionals might find well paid jobs in firms that reward skills, experience and expertise, while all others might have to adapt and accept lower profile jobs or live on universal state income. Will most people really be “*have nots*” to the benefit of a restricted niche of “*have all*”? (Hanushek et al., 2019).

De Blasio & Selva (2020) discussed that “*concepts such as emotional governance, affective citizenship and transformational leadership point at the way governments are addressing the COVID-19 crisis from an emotional perspective*”. According to Chen & Sriphron (2021), good managers will need great leadership skills, as well as valuable communication skills to share information with empathy and handle change ethically during times of uncertainty. In a more recent study they also argued that “*Authentic leadership and social exchange relationships are required to increase trust during a crisis*”. Their recent work indicated that authentic leadership influences positively relationships and trust in organizations (Chen & Sriphron, 2022).

Dirani et al. (2020) suggest that what we identify as responsive leadership is most likely one of the best starting points for the development of future leadership in our society. Anticipating change, reacting quickly to external circumstances and experimenting before planning, are all active habits of responsive leaders that learn to turn difficulties into opportunities, innovate beyond resisting change and create new vision from learned experiences. As evidenced in the research carried by BCG in 2018, (*"Boosting their Head, Heart and Hand model for the future of organisations"*), such leaders will have to work towards a culture of cooperation, empowering people as the heart and centre of the organisation, executing simultaneously and with agility.

This type of leaders will have to embody traits of curiosity, humility, empathy and resilience, and be able to shift between several leadership styles according to the situation. They should keep a correct balance between *autocratic, democratic or laissez-faire styles*, and support a transition from past to future values (Seehra, 2021). A transition from profit to purpose culture control to empowerment, privacy to transparency and hierarchy to networking, enabling a more effective leading style to cope with the uncertainties of the future (Borgo & Sasia, 2021).

The social and economic disruption experienced since 2020 will become most prominent in the years leading towards 2030 (Goldin, 2021). New qualities will be needed in leading companies and firms as well as governments and institutions. Future leaders have the responsibility to build a world that will not fall prisoner of the corporations privileging profit for the benefit of few. Ahead of a social and economic system that will no longer function the way we have been accustomed to since last century, new vision and new leaders will be needed (George, 2017).

According to Murphy (2011), leaders have the ability to find good fits, and *"should not hire for skills, but rather for attitude"* because great leaders appreciate their followers and can choose the right person for the right job. According to Schwartz & Rubel-Lifschitz (2009), responsive leadership, an approach that adapts to the changing needs and challenges, involves *"being proactive and agile in response to evolving situations and in taking a people-centered approach that prioritizes the well being of employees, customers and other stakeholders"*.

Hogan & Kaiser (2005), explain that good leadership promotes effective group performance, which enhances the well-being of the individuals involved, while bad leadership degrades the quality of life of everyone associated with it. They also consider that personality does predict leadership (*who we are is how we lead*) and this can be useful in selecting future leaders and in improving the performance of followers. Nations will seek authentic leaders, bearing values of honesty, transparency and fairness. Only with mutually shared values and goals for people to empathize with, it will be possible to motivate working forces to venture through challenge and reach consistent, sustainable objectives (Kaftan et al, 2023). People in the modern world, especially the young generation, will seek different values than in the past, as their priorities have changed and the promise of economic reward will no longer be enough unless personal wellness, individual freedom and mindful working conditions will be met (Seehra, 2021).

2.3 Constructionist Stance on Leadership

Hacking (1999) and Fairhurst (2007) suggest “*a constructionist stance on leadership*”, a very interesting view according to which leadership is rather in the mind of the observer than in the quality of the leader, in analogy with the concept of beauty. This has been also confirmed by Billsberry (2013) who addressed in his paper how this philosophical base can be used to create a teaching strategy for leadership and hence create a base for skill development. This view explains why different people see different qualities in a leader, why very diverse definitions of leadership emerged (Stogdill, 1974) and why totally different approaches in leadership work in different situations, and why theories still develop year after year (*table 2.1*). Research agrees that determining leadership effectiveness is “*follower-centric*” (Meindl, 1995) and that leaders may be expected to act differently, depending on culture and country (Gerstner & Day, 1994).

Leadership Type	Short Description	Selected Reference
Authentic	Genuine in terms of values, ethics and self-will	(Bishop, 2013)
Charismatic	Connected to Bass' conceptualization of charisma	(Fuller et al, 1996)
Cultural	Focused on organizational culture	(Trice & Beyer, 1991)
Digital	Focused on the digital environment	(Sagbas & Erdogan, 2022)
Entrepreneurial	Having common characteristics with entrepreneurs	(Fernald et al, 2005)
Ethical	Normatively appropriate conduct	(Brown et al, 2005)
Moral	Altruistic and virtuous	(Hannah et al, 2005)
Quantum	Unstructured and unpredictable	(Erçetin & Kamacı, 2008)
Servant	Focused on serving others	(Greenleaf, 1991)
Spiritual	Focused on the creation of a sustainable workplace	(Samul, 2019)
Transformational	Providing new direction, inspiration and behaviours	(Tucker & Russel, 2004)
Visionary	Based on a clearly articulated vision of the future	(Loughead, 2009)

TABLE 2.1 - A SELECTED LIST OF MODERN LEADERSHIP STYLES AND THEIR REFERENCES

According to Gini (1997), “*the concept of leadership (...) must be distinguishable and definable separately from our understanding of what and who leaders are*”, but he adds that the concept itself can only be measured in the specific instance of a leader doing his job. After all, this finds support in the famous line by Plato: “*The Measure of a Man is what he does with his power*”. Plato himself argued how democracy could dangerously turn into anarchy, if this was seen as a means for people to have too many liberties without duties. In a functional social system or working environment, true, functional governance requires both leaders and followers to meet specific rules for the benefit of an organization, and this in turn supports success in reaching goals and creating value for all. Plato believed in the doctrine of Socrates, stating that “*knowledge is virtue*”. According to Plato then, leaders had to be selected in relation to their intellectual and moral qualities (Shaw, 2022). So as wrongly interpreted democratic principles can lay out the road to tyranny, “*poorly chosen leaders may most likely pave a road to failure*”.

2.4 The Role of Emotional Intelligence

Since the end of the 1990s, growing influence on leadership has been attributed to *Emotional Intelligence* (Goleman, 1995). For Goleman, EI embodies four components that allow people to handle relationships with others, strategically and productively. These are *self-awareness*, *self-management*, *social awareness* and *relationship management* (fig. 2.2).

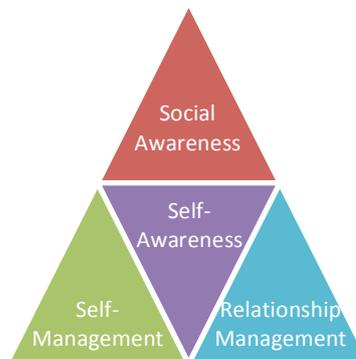


Fig. 2.2 - The components of Emotional Intelligence according to Goleman (1995)

Self-awareness and *self-management* let us control our initial impulses of anxiety during any confrontation, while *social awareness* is distinctive of highly developed empathic skills, and allows people to read any situation from the point of view of others. On the other hand, being able to handle conflict requires *relationship management skills*. Goleman also explains that a key skill connected to this is empathy and this can be differentiated in three types (fig. 2.3).

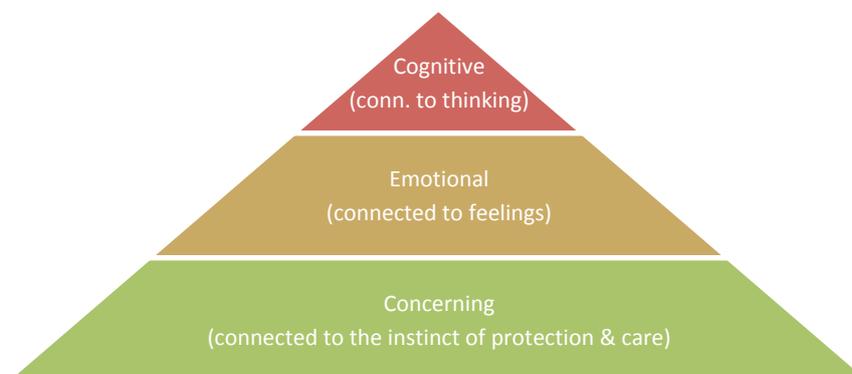


Fig. 2.3 - The different types of empathy according to Goleman (1995)

An authentic leader needs to develop all three to avoid becoming manipulative, even against his or her own will. A leader that presents only cognitive and emotional empathy, will learn to reach consent by knowing how his team members think and feel, yet he or she may be not interested in what impact this has on their life (long working hours, stay away from family, be ethically wrong), and this may plant the seeds for discomfort or burnout. According to Hodges & Wegner (1997), empathy is “a state of mind that we can reflect upon, control and modify”.

Leadership involves influencing others and leaders are people who are able to focus on what they *want* and *why*, and learn how to achieve it (Brown, 2020). Further studies confirmed that “*emotional intelligence of followers affects job performance and job satisfaction, while the EI of leaders affects their satisfaction and extra-role behavior*” (Wong & Law, 2017).

One common mistake in evaluating people’s actions is giving importance to the *how* and *what* before a clear *why* is shared. When an authentic leader has clear focus and stable core, he or she will be able to guide their team through any challenge. Unexpected events and crises can modify situations quickly, create stress and anxiety but authentic leaders will be able to adapt to changing conditions and guide followers through the storm Chen & Sriphron (2022).

According to Cialdini (2006), tools of persuasion should be used to empower people and not to influence them negatively. Connected to empathy is the principle of *reciprocity* that states that we get back what we give people, so a leader should show respect, positive attitude, good communication and transparency, in order to foster a healthy team culture in the organization.

Research suggests since long that emotional intelligence may overrule cognitive ability and technical expertise (Kemper, 1999), and that emotionally intelligent leaders have the ability to help organizations create competitive advantage with motivation, innovation, performance, trust, teamwork and effective use of time and resources (Smith, 2004). In 2017, Smith recalled Goleman theories adding two competencies that a leader must follow in order to cultivate emotional intelligence: *authenticity* and *ability to inspire* (performance).

Some do dismiss the correlation between emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness (Antonakis, 2004) and question if emotional intelligence is needed or simply how to measure it methodologically (Antonakis, et al., 2009). Others support the idea that emotional intelligence is rather connected to transformational leadership (Gardner & Stough, 2002) perhaps due to flaws in the mixed model associated to it, which fails to match other findings (BeShears, 2004).

Since the original studies of charismatic leadership (House, 1977) and leadership in political science (Burns, 1978), the idea of transactional leadership shifted to one of transformational leadership, to be found at all levels of organizations where transformational leaders inspire to go beyond personal interests, for a higher collective purpose (Bass, 1985). The change that Bass introduced compared to House and Burns, was that leadership was not seen any longer as something belonging to an elitary level of executive members, but could be extended across all organizations at all levels. Bass & Avolio (1990) then developed the *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire* (MLQ), supporting further this concept of leadership (Chemers, 1997).

Later findings confirmed that transformational leadership does have an emotional component (Antonakis & House, 2002). These findings led to approach leadership again in terms of traits, and not only acquired skills, as discussed by O’Neill (1996), Goleman (1998) and other authors.

2.5 Authenticity and Core Values

According to Chemers (2014), “Leadership is a process of social influence in which one person is able to enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task”. From this definition we understand that leadership is a group activity revolving around a clear task, that involves social interaction and influence, identified as an ongoing process. This does not take into account the complexity of leadership generated by the interaction between internal factors like thoughts and emotions with external processes like communication and influence, which have an effect over a dynamic changing environment.

Amey (2005), explains that leadership is a continuous process that requires learning. A leader must be willing to learn from his or her own mistakes and welcome feedback from others. The *golden rule* or *ethic of reciprocity*, which is common to all religions according to Jefferson (1604), leads to the so called *principle of influence*. People can be judged for *who they are* from *their own behaviours*. If we want others to be honest, with dedication, effort and commitment, we must provide a leading example through our own behavior and give the “good example”. Just like wise parenting, this is what good, authentic leadership is about. According to Avolio & Gardner (2005), authentic leaders support the development of authenticity in followers too.

According to Robbins (2012), to exert influence over people we must affect their values and core beliefs, because values affect the way people make decisions and how they act in life. All great changes start with small steps that may lead to a final goal that requires large efforts. Good leaders know how to facilitate this process, helping their teams grow and move towards a common goal and mastering these skills defines the same essence of good leadership.



Fig. 2.4 - Core leadership values according to Herry (2020)

Herry (2020) agrees that to become a better leader, an individual must identify and improve his or her own *core leadership values* (fig. 2.4). This is a set of beliefs and principles that best characterizes leaders in their personal and professional lives, and allows them to recognize, lead and manage others effectively. They determine how leaders take decisions and create the foundation for growth, encourage performance and inspire trust.

2.6 The Effects of COVID-19 & VUCA Vision

In relation to this study, we asked how the pandemic influenced the topics mentioned so far. Surely, the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the psychology of influence and leadership (Kaul et al., 2020). The sudden shift to remote work and virtual communication made it more difficult for leaders to effectively connect with and influence their teams. Just as ordinary people had to re-learn, also people in leading positions had to adapt to the ongoing circumstances and re-design working processes. Eventually, the levels of uncertainty made it more challenging for leaders to maintain a positive and optimistic outlook which is essential for effective leadership. The crisis we experienced highlighted the importance for leaders to maintain adaptability and resilience, called more than before to make difficult decisions and navigate such uncertain times. Overall, the pandemic revealed the need for leading figures to remain flexible and nurture values of *empathy, transparency and authenticity* (Seehra, 2021). This set of skills and traits became more and more vital to effectively guide teams through these challenging times, and lie at the heart of transformation for the future.

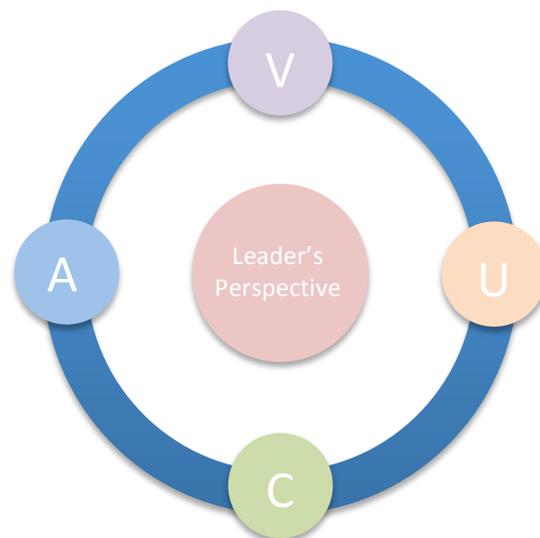
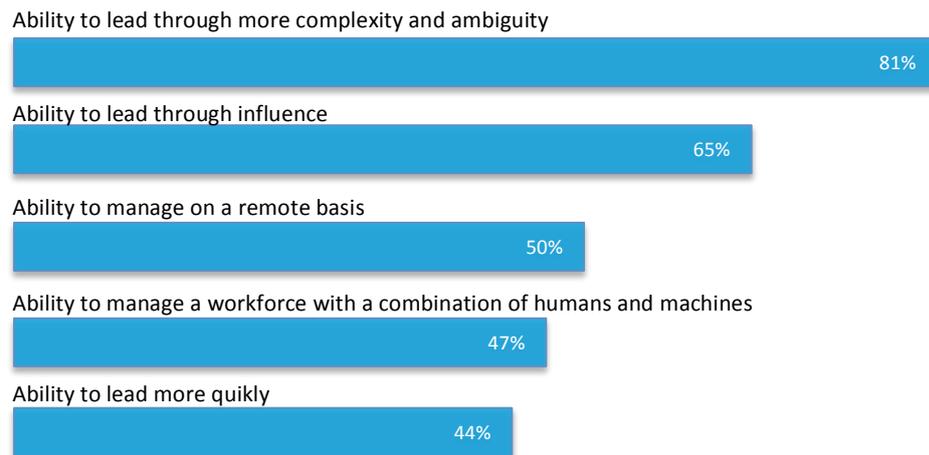


Fig. 2.5 - Leader's Perspective on a VUCA World (MoneyBeedAdvisors, 2018)

Another concept that developed in recent years is that of the VUCA world. As reported by Meri (2021), VUCA is an acronym that stands for *Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous* and was coined in 1991 by the US Army War College, after the end of the cold war when the Iraq and Afghanistan wars seemed to be just short before happening. The term was picked up by private organizations and used ever since, denoting the speed of change affecting all aspects of our life. Never like now the world faced such technological advancement and speed, and the only certainty we are now facing is that of permanent, everlasting change occurring in virtually all areas of our life. Deloitte (2019) recently published studies evidencing what leading in the VUCA world really meant. According to the study (fig. 2.6), *"Leaders may be well-served by anticipating change around every corner, modeling scenarios, developing agile and adaptive responsiveness, both in their thinking and across their business"* (Arkenberg, 2019).

21st Century Leaders Requirements



Respondents who believed that 21st century leaders faced new and unique requirements answered the question: "What do you believe are the unique requirements of the 21st century leaders? Select all that apply."

Fig. 2.6 - Deloitte Study on 21st Century Leaders - Source: Deloitte (2019)

Deloitte went on to publish "*The world remade by COVID-19: Scenarios for resilient leaders*," presenting four scenarios with increasing degree of disruption (Blau & Steinmann, 2020).

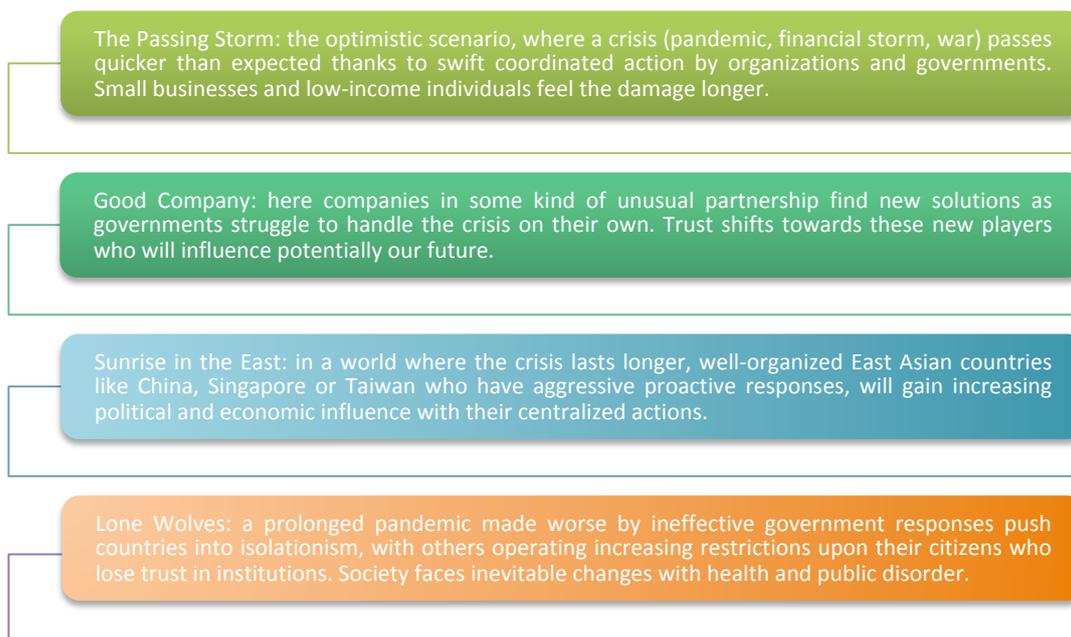


Fig. 2.7 - *The World remade by Covid-19: Scenarios for Resilient Leaders*- Source: Deloitte (2020)

These scenarios offer a starting point for organizations to lay the basis of what might be "*the new normal*" in three to five years from now, asking the following questions:

1. Which previous expectations need to be rethought?
2. What are the biggest threats to current business in these potential scenarios?
3. Which scenario best describes the future, and are we ready for different outcomes?
4. What would we need to do differently should any of these scenarios become reality?

2.7 Skills needed by Future (VUCA) Leaders

In the book *“Leaders make the future: Ten New Leadership Skills for an Uncertain World”* (2012), Johansen writes that leaders will face upcoming challenges that have no solutions but will have to take decisions in any case, being *“positive agents of change in the midst of chaos”*. He then argues that in order to survive through these times and create a new future, leaders will have to build and apply a specific set of leadership skills that include clarity, ability to turn dilemmas into advantages and opportunities, attention to sustainability, empathy, ability to inspire credibility and trust, innovation, communication and collaboration.

In order to do this, leaders will need to be able to *anticipate*, be prepared, inspire others and keep strong mental discipline, filter noise and distraction by staying centered, adjust pressure and urgency according to the situation, being able to listen and at the same time tell engaging stories, imagine the future, act with courage and clear intent, be humble and authentic, live a life in self-efficacy and connect the experience of today to the possibilities of tomorrow.

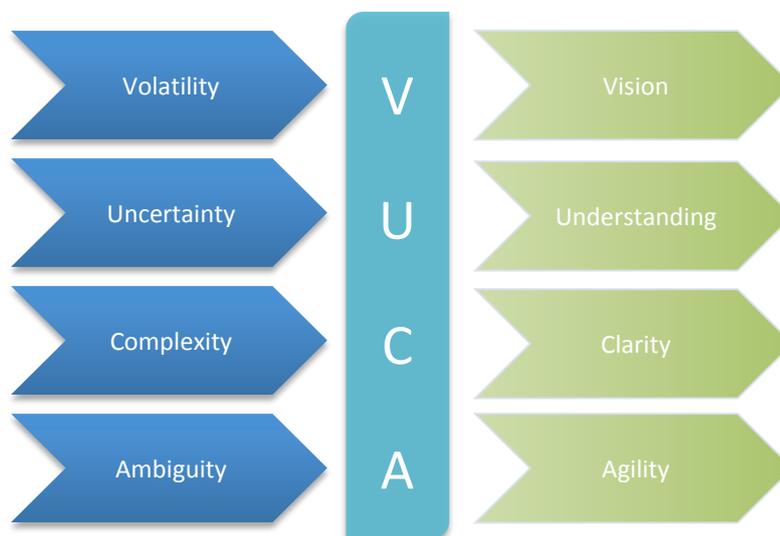


Fig. 2.8 - The VUCA Model for future leaders according to Johansen (2012)

Still according to Johansen (2012), the VUCA philosophy can be turned around, associating a positive framing to effective leadership (fig. 2.8). Here, the qualities that leaders of the future will work with, will turn into *vision, understanding, clarity and agility*.

The Centre for Creative Leadership developed a *crisis leadership self-assessment* questionnaire, for leaders to determine how well they would perform in a series of selected activities that helped them better address the future (Appendix 2). By rating their own performance, leaders could evaluate their standing and get ready to step in unfamiliar territories and practice new skills ahead of unexpected challenges, with a mindset to get the most from each experience. This helped reflect on one’s own leadership journey, assessing what choices or experiences mostly affected each individual leading ability and style. New skills and insights can emerge from analyzing the past if we rely upon solid foundations to address the future (CCL, 2020).

2.8 NextGen Leaders

According to Bawany (2014), organizations have been already for long on the look for what he describes as “*NextGen*” Leaders who will be expected to operate in an increasingly volatile and uncertain system, where new competencies will be needed to succeed. In this terms, the ability to identify “*elusive potential*” will be even more advantageous in the future (Silzer and Dowell, 2010). Charan, Drotter and Noel (2000) introduced the concept of *leadership pipeline* which is necessary within an organization to develop the next generation of leaders. Bawany (2016) went on to introduce a *result based leadership model (RBL)*, connected to developing the “*NextGen*” leadership competencies in the complex world of the future (*fig. 2.9*). Bawany (2017) relates also to the work of Goleman on *emotional intelligence* (1995), to reflect how an individual’s potential for mastering the skills of *self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management* can effectively identify successful leadership paths. According to Goleman (1998), *emotional competence* is defined as the “*learned capability based on emotional intelligence that results in outstanding performance at work*”.

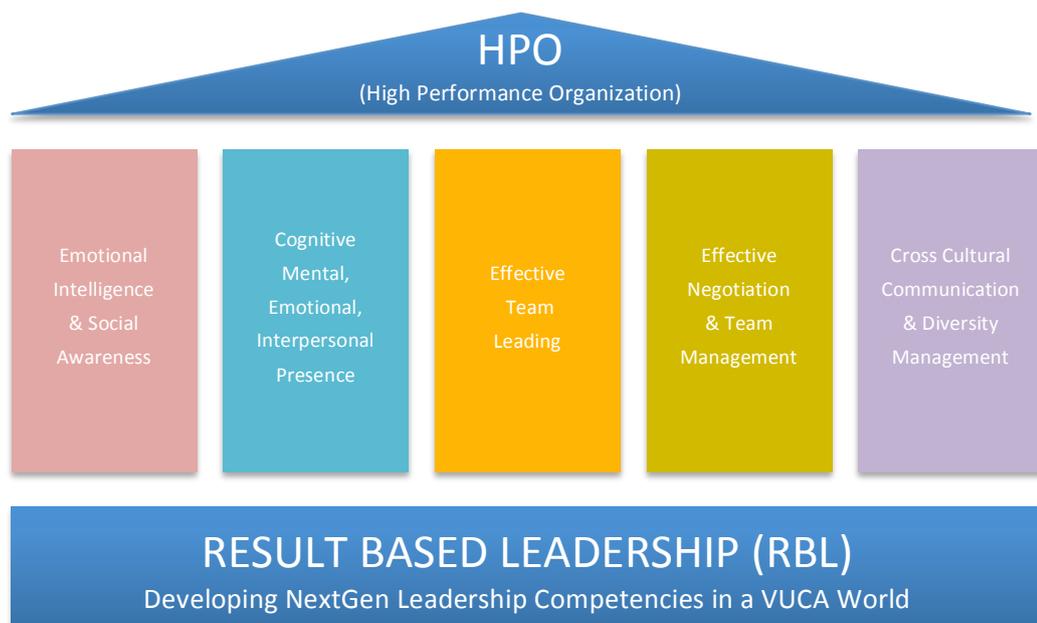


Fig. 2.9 - NextGen Leadership Competencies for an HPO according to Bawany (2016)

Bawany (2018) associates **seven** key skills to the *NextGen* leaders that sum up to a “*heightened cognitive readiness that allows to maintain a better sense of self-control in stressful situations*”: being able to regulate emotions, manage focus and attention, connect the dots to see a wider picture, trust their own intuition and be creative in solving challenges, be ready to adapt to fast changing circumstances and inspire others to take action, practicing clear communication.



Fig. 2.10 - The seven key skills associated to NextGen leaders according to Bawany (2018)

2.9 Crisis Management & Leadership

In *fig. 2.11* we see the six key aspects for crisis formulation according to Al Eid & Arnout (2020) inspired by Barton (2007) - *surprise, lack of information, escalation of events, loss of control, panic* and the absence of a “*fix-all*” solution while *fig. 2.12* evidences the model by Oberoi et al. (2021) that followed the experience made with the COVID-19 pandemic.



Fig. 2.11 - The six stages of crisis management according to Al Eid & Arnout (2020)

Crisis Management is a complex matter, and is vitally important in major disruptive events like the ones experienced with COVID-19. As Christensen and Lægheid (2020) pointed out: “*Major crisis strike at the core of democracy and governance and hence constitute challenges not only for capacity but also legitimacy and trust. Planning and preparing for the unexpected, dealing with uncertainty and ambiguity, tackling urgent issues, and responding to citizens' demands and expectations are crucial and difficult tasks for the public authorities.*”

Recent studies have focused on different sectors (Brown & Crawford, 2022) and countries (Comfort et al., 2020), education or SMEs (Baporikar, 2021), revealing how adaptive leadership has been able to navigate successfully through the crisis. There is no real ground of study that is able to identify yet with certainty what future leadership will look like, however all literature hints at the qualities, traits and set of skills that seem to better respond to the uncertainty, overflow of information and exceptional conditions experienced in recent times globally.



Fig. 2.12 - Key stages of crisis management in crisis according to Oberoi et al. (2021)

2.10 The Role of Education

Sinek (2022) reminds us that we succeeded as a species for our ability to form cultures, and companies are culture: an ensemble of people united by the same set of values and beliefs. So, finding the best fit between a company and its employees, between leaders and teams is like finding the perfect match in a marriage between two individuals. Teams are successful thanks to underlying motivations and sense of belonging that allow this perfect match on the journey.

According to Sinek (2009), leaders don't have to be in charge but need to "*take care of those in charge*", and an advanced education serves to acquire the tools needed. This education should take place in the work place, through coaching, training and continuous improvement, and in academic institutions during the business studies. However, a true, effective education starts from the very early years in which people's identities are shaped, so from childhood.

Johnson and Fuller (2014) connect leadership and school education, through the definition of culturally responsive leadership, deriving from culturally responsive pedagogy. While this can be originally connected to another branch of research which studies cultural competency, and culturally relevant leadership and pedagogy, it opens the door to another important concept: leaders that will be better equipped in the future to sail through difficulties and uncertainties, will feature traits and personal characteristics that first of all originate from their education, personal growth and background. This aspect deserves further study, as coaching and personal development are surely part of any leader's journey, but these times did clearly identify new necessities. Schools and pedagogues should teach children how to respect diversity, how to exhibit an ethic of care, how to communicate with others and the importance of being honest, nurture social justice and practice a culture of inclusivity and care (Hollander, 2012).

According to the ancient Greek concept of *Panta Rhei*, everything in life flows and develops as *life is change*. This highlights the importance of being *ready for change* and, independently of the realm of action a good leader learns to deal soon with such needs and acts effectively in the interest of followers, teams and organizations (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Only by integrating such concepts with education, we may expect in the future to see different approaches to such issues, a different culture of work and welfare, and a more effective and human-centered approach to crises, challenges and unexpected events. Going away from the hedonistic and capitalistic culture of the 80s and 90's, we truly needed to re-think what we will value the most in five or ten years from now. By accepting that changes today are global and affect the vast majority of society, as seen during COVID-19, we might consider how to bridge the gap between cultures and organizations and how closer than ever in this century we have come in doing this. This is an example of how new opportunities may derive from crisis and studies in this direction make space for new, fascinating theories (Hanushek et al., 2019).

2.11 New Types of Leadership

According to Hussain & Hassan (2016), effective leaders must react quickly to changing events by adapting their style. In essence, good leaders must be ethical, show integrity in their values, practice a healthy communication with subordinates and take care of their well being. Such leaders were classified before as authoritative, democratic, pace-setting or transformational. Authoritative leaders are driven by a sense of vision and achievement, pace-setting leaders privilege authenticity, innovation and creativity, democratic leaders align skills to their teams and tasks to their goals, and transformational leaders create high-energy environments with strong sense of purpose. With the advent of COVID-19, new characteristics quickly developed.



Fig. 2.13 - The traditional categories of effective leaders according to Hussain & Hassan (2016)

Kurt & Erdogan (2021), describe three new types of leadership that emerged during COVID-19: Ethical, Digital and Pandemic Leadership - an intersection of which, paved the ground to shape new, effective leaders able to bring benefit to organizations and working teams.



Fig. 2.14 - New Leadership types that emerged during Covid according to Kurt & Erdogan (2021)

Digital leadership is perhaps not strictly connected to COVID-19, but saw an acceleration during the digital transition that the Pandemic caused. This includes the use of technology to better lead, manage and engage in communication with teams and followers. Digital leaders learned to use effectively the new digital tools and platforms with the ultimate purpose of achieving new goals and engaging with stakeholders in new and innovative ways.

Ethical leadership refers to leadership practices based on moral principles and values, such as honesty, fairness, and responsibility. Ethical leaders work hard to generate good decisions that are in the best interest of their organizations and in alignment with their moral values.

Pandemic leadership derives from the unique set of challenges that quickly arose during the pandemic, which included managing remote workforces to guarantee operations and navigate unprecedented disruptions in supply chains and markets. This approach was needed to come out of an unprecedented, unfamiliar situation, with more strength and resilience than before.

In the post-Covid era, key challenges have been to restart operations after an unprecedented halt, to redesign organizational structures, define new skills and competences, adapt to new technology and undergo a profound cultural shift that impacted both work and private life. According to Ako Nai (2020), post-Covid leaders will have to *lead by example* and identify skills and competences that will fit each task required, motivate employees, provide transparent communication but also implement new reward systems able to celebrate innovation, bring value at all levels and integrate work with private life.

The leadership styles dilemma in the business world refers to the challenge that leaders face in choosing the most effective leadership style for a given situation, as different styles may be more appropriate for different scenarios. For example, an autocratic leadership style may be effective in a crisis situation where quick decisions are needed, but may not be as effective in a more collaborative, participative environment. Understanding different leadership styles and when to use them is a key aspect of effective leadership in the business world (Nawaz 2016).

The pandemic exposed pre-existing issues, inequalities across societies and shortcomings in global health development strategies that were somehow already in place. In the uncertainties of the (VUCA) world we described in chapter 2.7, countries and leaders will have to develop new skills to predict situations and implement solutions that will be able to build a better society (UNDP, 2020). Darling & Heller (2011) evidence how the stress deriving from environmental turmoil has driven responsive leaders to act in recent times, and that leaders communicate with *“thoughts and feelings that are based upon their attitudes”*. Sense of self, purpose, motivation, internal balance, adaptive skills and strategies, here set aside effective leaders from others.

According to Page et al. (2021), leaders should bear the qualities of kind-heartedness, think about the needs of others and *“cooperate with other individuals calmly, congruently and with a feeling of solidarity”*. Servant leaders build trust and privilege a sense of benevolence for their followers' needs, which creates relationships able to extract the most from supporters and followers (Liden et al., 2008). A positive relationship between *transformational leadership* and *employee self-efficacy* was evidenced by Gong et al. (2009) while a relationship between self-efficacy and employee's performance was confirmed by Pratiwi & Nawangsari (2021).

The concept of self-efficacy, the confidence in achieving constructive results when undertaking a task, was first introduced by Bandura (1977). Late research correlated self-efficacy with effective leadership (McCormick, 2001; Anderson et al., 2008; Paglis, 2010). Bajaba et al. (2021) argue that managers with adaptive personality, tend to have an increased self-efficacy and this resulted in increased motivation during the COVID-19 emergency. Studies from different authors (Grant, 2008; Jiang et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2015; Dagar et al., 2022), showed that leaders with consistent self-belief were more effective in generating positive impact when confronted with challenging issues, suggesting a correlation between effective leadership and adaptive personality.

2.12 Additional Considerations

Leadership and *management* are complementary but the second cannot substitute the first, and the first would not be able to provide solutions on its own. The clear direction and vision that leadership provides needs good, experienced management to implement solutions and bring them to action (Răducan & Răducan, 2014). The COVID-19 crisis forced organizations to think and plan in new ways (Sheth, 2020). According to Nohrstedt (2018), crisis management can be an opportunity to develop relationships, mindful interdependency, trust, and resilience.

Being a leader that embodies all these skills can be summarized in becoming an exceptional example for organizations, employees and followers alike. In their paper, Kaftan et al. (2023) note that future leaders will be called to focus on the new trends and challenges pertaining the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) and that *innovation* and *digitalization* are becoming main drivers for a sustainable economic transformation of SMEs in the post-pandemic period.

Atiku and Randa (2021), evidence how *ambidextrous* leadership is associated with innovation in the high-tech sector both in developed and developing countries. This style was adopted to drive innovatively through the pandemic period and is vital to nurture creativity, continuous process improvement and resource-efficiency. COVID-19 highlighted the critical role of leaders and leadership during unexpected events that may effectively threaten the existence of any organization (Bundy et al., 2017). Every crisis carries an opportunity for new learnings, change and innovation. Not all leaders are equipped to bear this pressure, succeed in leading their followers out of a crisis or save organizations from economic failure. Still according to Bundy et al. (2017), leaders' success is also connected to their capability of processing information, act quickly and influence other individuals inside and outside their realm of action.

As we mentioned throughout this research, most of these skills should be present in any leader regardless of circumstances, but crises generate additional levels of stress and challenge. With this respect, a good leader must be able to bring together multiple pieces of information, keep their own biases at bay and influence decisions effectively (Hadley et al., 2011). One technique is to maintain distance and calmness, so that they can remain detached from the situation and focus on the best way to navigate it (Garcia, 2006). To do this effectively, good leaders need to cope with uncertainty and remain open-minded while adapting to ongoing events throughout a crisis (Hadley et al., 2011).

Given the extent of a crisis or the ambiguity of situations experienced during COVID-19, people have been liable to experience both extreme emotional reactions and to develop divergent interpretations of events (Sobral et al., 2020). In order to manage such complex situations, leaders will have to work also on the way the events are perceived both inside and outside the workplace. Responsive, transparent communication and accountability become vital as much as empathy in showing concern for the well being of their followers (Bundy et al., 2017).

The exceptional events connected to the pandemic presented leaders with new challenges that evidenced how the ability to react to disruptive events in a timely, yet calm manner, is key to generate positive response, build trust and find innovative solutions. Central role in the process of leadership development is played by experience, and any type of crisis whether local, sector related or global), provides ideal conditions for leaders to acquire new skills and find new solutions to problems strictly related to the unprecedented experience (Prewitt et al., 2011).

Surviving a highly disruptive event offered the opportunity to enhance a leader's confidence in dealing with crises and increase their motivation to lead in general (Chan & Drasgow, 2001). However, not all leaders may be equipped to embrace this opportunity due to extraordinary amounts of social and emotional stress imposed, which may reflect also on a physical level, and perhaps evidence lack of necessary skills that the leader has no time to develop or acquire in such short time. Many appointed leaders may either not have such skills or never have been asked to display them, and this offers room for new type of leaders who are better equipped to emerge and engage in the required leading positions. This is where attitudes of humility, transparency and responsibility become vital: good leaders recognize their own limits and seek help through qualified experts and consultants, elected to advise in specific realms of action.

Studies on leader humility showed that people in managing positions who are willing to learn from others with desire to achieve self-improvement may inspire collective action and increase company performance (Chiu, Owens, & Tesluk, 2016). Not less importantly, this contributes to decrease the emotional pressure on employees and followers, hinting that such qualities will in the future be key factors to determine the leading abilities needed not only to survive through crises, but to emerge and thrive in the world fo the future.

Eventually, working remotely and adapting to the new technological opportunities requires adaptability also in managing any form of traditional performance assessment or employee engagement. The growing degree of uncertainty and the disruptive, emerging new trends we are experiencing, make old theoretical approaches inadequate (e.g., Cho, 2020) and studies like ours support the idea of what type of leaders might help better handle the future.

One final note worth mentioning, is relative to the difference in our evaluation of skill or trait. According to the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1991), personal factors affect behavioural patterns of individuals. A manager showing adaptive performance, is then more likely to have an adaptive personality, but although the concept of adaptivity has been extensively discussed in literature (Ployhart & Bliese, 2006; Hirschi et al., 2015; Rudolph et al., 2017), little research was made to distinguish it as a personality trait rather than a skill, motivation, or capacity.

So, in the course of this study, we often refer to traits and skills but, like in the case of adaptivity, in few cases the line between one or the other may not be perfectly drawn, reviving the core dilemma of leadership theories: *is leadership a skill or a trait?*

2.13 Conclusions from Chapter 2

From the mentioned literature, it appears that the COVID-19 pandemic did impact the concept of leadership significantly, with the main effect that it generated a transformation with respect to the way leaders approach their role. Some of the common emerging themes can be divided in the areas of remote leadership, organization culture and leading style.



Fig. 2.15 - Main areas of study, emerging from literature, confirmed by our research.

Organizations and leaders learned to adapt to a system of remote working which requires focus in being effective also remotely, especially in the recovery of SMEs in the post-pandemic period (Amah, 2022). These changes also influenced the need to stimulate employee's engagement while preserving an appropriate organizational culture (Chatman & O'Reilly, 2016).

The pandemic has likely led to the emergence of new leadership styles that proved to be more effective in managing the challenges of the post-Covid era. We will address them in detail again in chapter 4, but these essentially require authenticity, focus, innovation, empathy, creativity, resilience, adaptation, self-awareness, emotional intelligence and clear, honest communication skills, with attention to adaptive, transformational and *ambidextrous* leadership, seemingly having proven to be very effective in the realm of SMEs (Atiku and Randa, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated a transformation that had already been in place, either normalizing what was exceptional before, or remodeling new ways of working and coping with challenging issues in times of uncertainty (Vyas, 2022).

The literature we analyzed, studied leadership developments during COVID-19 across different sectors (Oberoi et al., 2021) and countries (Comfort et al., 2020), from education (Brown & Crawford, 2022) to SMEs (Baporikar, 2021), healthcare-medical (Bil et al., 2021), public and banking sector (Khan et al., 2021). Beyond these macro-areas, specific research investigated further that business and society are mutually interdependent and can't be treated separately (Sheth, 2020). With regards to future leadership styles, the study by McKinsey (2020), confirmed that future leaders will have to be able to take fast decisions, tackle challenges in conditions of uncertainty and persevere despite the impact of external events (De Smet et al., 2020).

Their learning is that organizations need to find future leaders and redeploy talent skillfully. Not only leaders but team members at all levels of the hierarchy, in business and organizations just like in private, will have to acquire the ability to adapt and stay flexible in their thinking. These companies recognize that the pace and scale of learning will have to keep up with the one of innovation and technology. New leading teams will face the challenge to release the capabilities of their followers and “*unleash, energize and empower winning teams*” (De Smet et al., 2020).

These leaders will have to invest time and resources in communicating clearly, and at the same time link their actions with purposes and values that remain in tune with their organizational cultures. In other words, such leaders will have to foster company culture while letting their teams free to operate and flourish, in an adaptive, open minded environment. They will have to be visionnaires, rather than commanders, and coach team players who will be able to plan and execute decisions in rapid changing environments. Such changes should be embraced as an opportunity to reinvent the future, and not as impediment deriving from restrictions, and it is with this spirit that leaders of the future should build, motivate and support functional teams with vision and innovation (De Smet et al., 2020).

Ultimately, it is clear that the crisis generated by the COVID-19 Pandemic presented the world with new challenges. What emerges from literature is that the new types of leaders who will be better equipped or better able to acquire fast enough the additional set of skills required, will be able to sail more effectively through uncertainty and take the opportunity to grow and develop (Sharma & Singh, 2020). Remote working, delocalization and restructuring of organizations will accompany changes that will invest also the private sphere, as people and employees started to give higher value to a better balance (WLB) between work and private life (Vyas, 2022).

Globalization showed that most leadership models of the last century have been designed to accommodate traditional hierarchical structures (Uhl-Bien et al. 2007) and already 15 years ago theories emerged of complexity leadership’s development (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2008). One of the core propositions of this theory is that leadership transcends the act of a single person and is the result of “*a complex interplay of numerous interacting forces*” (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Porras & Hoffer (1986) evidenced that cultural values, trends and organizational rules, all contribute to shape unique leadership styles. Schein (1990) supported the idea that leaders must respect the cultural elements, while trying to promote an appropriate, strategically suitable culture. He claimed that leaders are shaping culture in the starting phases of business creation, but as this grows and develops, culture that starts to shape the characteristics of leadership.

Schwartz (2013) created the *theoretical model of relations*, according to which all individuals relate to others navigating through ten unique values including security, power, hedonism, self-direction, tradition and *benevolence*. Apparently, the leader who bears values of benevolence, is more inclined to take care of the needs of his followers and is able to support them in reaching their goals, confirming the importance of emotional intelligence and empathy (Goleman, 2017).

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Given the academic purpose of this work, we approached our target group by offering them the added value of addressing an interesting discussion on leadership topics, in exchange for the time taken to conduct the survey. Our selection included academic profiles, senior professionals in the field of consulting, banking, engineering, gastronomy, hi-tech and financial business. After involving a number of leading figures, we generated data from 24 candidates and conducted later in person interviews with approximately a third of them, based on availability and distance.

Much of the research we have read and referenced in this work, has been based on qualitative analysis and most studies we have read that recurred to quantitative analysis either aimed at validating specific hypotheses or investigated larger data sets to find patterns and correlations. In our case, given the focus, we were interested exclusively in gathering personal feedback from our selection of candidates, and share their experience in the area of leadership. For the release of his new book on leadership (*“Discover your True North”*) that expanded the original 2007 edition, Bill George gathered information from 47 leaders in 7 years (2015). Similarly, we felt comfortable with addressing the question of this research in a qualitative way, keeping in mind two important aspects of such approach:

- 1) Personal Judgement must be clearly unbiased and carefully assessed to avoid ruling out information that is essential and to reduce the risk of influencing the outcome of the research or the opinion of the interviewed candidates.
- 2) The research must be conducted building *objectivity, generalizability and replicability* where possible, as suggested by Karin Klenke in her book *“Qualitative Research in the study of leadership”* (2008).

Several authors (Bryman, et al., 1996; Conger 1998), argue that qualitative studies can play a more effective role in management or leadership studies because the *“multidisciplinary nature of these topics makes them more open to paradigmatic assumptions and methodological or ideological preferences”*. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), this type of research is context related and requires contextual information to re-equilibrate the imbalance that may occur in terms of applicability and generalizability, so we always took in consideration the background of each candidate and the context of work (gastronomy, financial business, medical sector, etc).

3.2 Sampling Method & Analysis

According to Dudovskiy (2022), research design can be divided in two groups, exploratory and conclusive. For our type of qualitative research we could not provide a final and definitive answer, but we actually remained open to fine tune the direction of our study and perhaps debate interpretations of existing theories based on our findings. Given our small sample and flexible process of data collection (not all candidates answered open questions exhaustively, with some talking longer than others), the results of our data were non quantitative and open to intuitive judgement. It is also true that a *conclusive* research provides a way to verify and quantify the findings from an *exploratory* research, and our research definitively features a descriptive part which eventually explains and validates the research findings.

Descriptive studies are closely associated with observational studies and, like in our case, use surveys as a popular method to collect data that can be later used to describe the findings. Typical examples of descriptive research start with the question “what”, and this is where our research question could be rephrased as: “*What are the emerging skills and traits of leaders in the post-Covid era*”. Our survey offered the opportunity to introduce the phenomenon of study to our sample population and present a first set of questions to the selected candidates.

In our candidate selection, we recurred to *Expert Sampling*, a type of *Purposive Sampling* that aims at targeting a population with specific skills (Ray & Thapa, 2015). Our candidates were senior professionals with proven track record and leading skills in their field. From 24 of them, who worked in banking, consultancy, finance, aviation, gastronomy, start-up, medical and pharmaceutical sectors, we selected eight to further discuss our topic of research.

The interviews were carried out in a short time between each other, to maximize any given momentum of the research and limit personal bias, like changing for instance the focus of our questions between the first and last interview. Prior to these interviews, however, we focused on the pilot test to develop and improve the questionnaire later reported in *Appendix 1*. This helped prepare the candidates for the interview and provide us with a useful feedback.

After the questionnaire was approved internally, we ran a pilot test and fine-tuned it, in order to make it more intuitive and practical for candidates to navigate effectively. After applying minor changes, we selected a representative group based on seniority, interest in the topics discussed and background, and availability was also a key element. The answers we obtained revealed some patterns to start with, and a deeper analysis based on the open questions we shared, allowed us to identify the first findings on our topics of interest. At this point we ran a manual *thematic analysis* of the concepts and key words that emerged from the interviews, establishing patterns, dividing the discussed questions in macro-areas and summarizing our findings. Assuming an impartial approach and relatively low *evaluation bias*, we relied on our personal judgement to achieve the research objectives and identify new future directions.

3.3 Common Method Bias (CMB)

One possible drawback of our method is the insurgence of *Common Method Bias* (CMB). The presence of errors in measurement or different types of bias (*fig. 3.2*), easily leads to potential contamination of answers. To reduce this risk, we adopted *Likert* scales and multiple choice questions with balanced framing in wording, to avoid negative interpretations and create an interesting study for candidates, facilitating the separation of measures (Podsakoff et al, 2003).

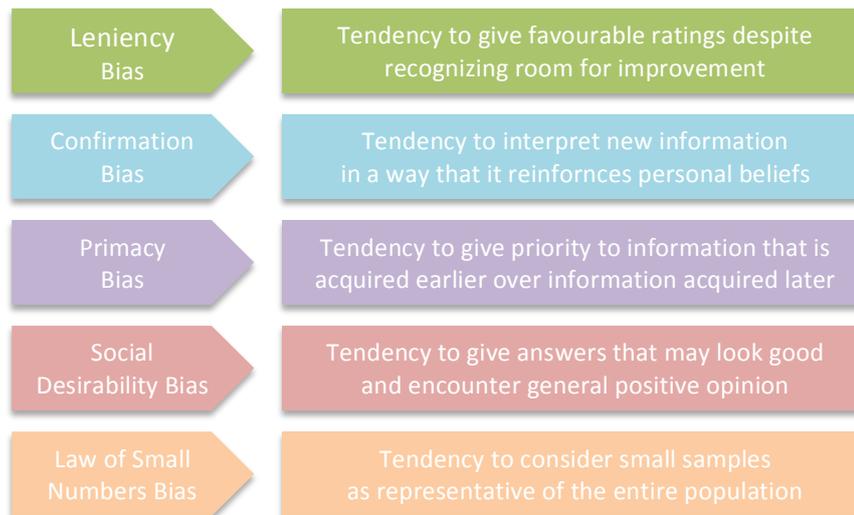


Fig. 3.2 - A selection of common biases that could most possibly affect our research

We may argue that quantitative methods focus on the effects of causes, while qualitative methods focus on the causes of effects (Zimmerman, 2022). Such methods try to understand how the outcome of a particular series of events came to be, and therefore are based on *small N* qualitative research, of which interviews are a classical example. Given the vastity and large amount of theory backing up the topic of leadership, we decided to go for a *semi-structured* type of interview, that enabled us to explore the conversation more freely, within the confines of the research questions (Clipperton, 2022). Our sample was selected among professionals with proven track record in positions of leadership and management of teams and organizations, and we included two academic experts who contributed as *key informants* of our sample, by approaching the research as external observers, and at the same time participating to it.

The main advantage of this method is that it allows to gain valuable information from a small sample, thus giving room to unheard stories, direct experience and personal feedback, and value to contexts and events that could otherwise be ignored or misunderstood. Disadvantage is that having a limited sample, we cannot be sure that this is representative in absolute terms of the entire population and it makes it more difficult to extend the findings at a general level although we may guarantee objectivity and replicability in the process. The quality of analysis depends however on the skill, integrity and vision of the researcher (Pope, 2000) and this is why we worked at all times to keep our vision unbiased and impartial and our process replicable.

3.4 Approach and Contribution

Our sample was accomanated by high competence and literacy, education and position. Our original aim was to reach a representative population of professionals and academics, and investigate their leadership experience. Open questions were most useful for our purpose, but may have been too hard to answer in a self-assessed questionnaire, so we made sure that candidates would experience an acceptable level of cognitive burden, by shaping a relatively intuitive set of guided questions. Despite the difficulty in avoiding entirely any form of bias, we worked to reduce to a minimum the use of wording that might have influenced choices, and provided useful suggestions to keep candidates motivated to take part to the second part of the research with a short interview. We left few open questions to the end and re-designed the questionnaire with yes and no choices where possible, or offered a clear set of options when asking to provide examples. We then selected specific sets of key words and concepts from theory that would help candidates discuss the topics clearly and share their experience.

We used this primary data to find patterns based on specific, reliable answers connected to our research question. What we looked for were similarities in wording, perception and experience that could help better frame the concept of leadership from the angle of leaders who, at one point in their career, had also been followers. We wanted to understand how leadership was experienced in the workplaces we addressed, and how it could, perhaps, improve.

Contributions of this study could help improve communication, evidence missing links between management and staff and compare expectations in relation to existing values and processes present within each organization. Guba & Lincoln (1985), argue that there is no way to point out in advance the instrument that should be used because only the *“human instrument has the characteristics necessary to cope with an indeterminate situation”*. Merriam (1998) added that researchers are responsible for the context by adapting techniques to the circumstances.

Being interviews social interactions, conducting interviews and analyzing data is a subjective process and should take into account how conversations are produced (Klenke, 2008). This is how we proceeded, making sure during the process that the data collected from our interviews would be interpreted with little bias and judgement. We guided the interviews according to each candidate’s experience, defining a common space of interaction prior to addressing the conversation with our questions, but then gave each candidate the freedom to talk about his or her personal experience in connection with the topics discussed.

3.5 Development of Questionnaire

The questionnaire developed over three modules, as seen in *fig. 3.3*. Open questions in Part I and II were hard to answer without theoretical back-up. Part III was too extensive, and would have placed a high cognitive burden on candidates. So we decided to reduce the number of open questions and provided examples for each answer. Ultimately, we added theoretical background and key adjectives in the introduction to inspire candidates prior to starting.



Fig. 3.3 - Original questions planned for each of the three modules

This original layout served the purpose to outline a more effective structure. In the first layout modification, we introduced a series of basic questions after the introduction, to define age group, working status and type of company. Then we expanded PART I to evidence trends in working environments and individual professional experience and PART II to investigate more closely the candidates relationship with the concept of leadership and personal development.

3.6 Pilot Test

The goal of our questionnaire was to point out trends and patterns evidenced in the answers, and then generate enough information to back-up existing leadership theories with empirical data. The backbone of our questionnaire developed from the questions seen in *fig. 3.4*.



Fig. 3.4 - Original questions that represented the backbone of our questionnaire

Our focus has been on avoiding leading, misleading and inconsistent questions. We aimed at avoiding a technically complex set of questions, and at providing a rather meaningful road map to help us identify what traits and trends emerged prominently. For this analysis to be effective, we relied on the experience of recognized professionals in leading positions and on our judgement to be as unbiased as possible, guiding our research without pre-conceptions. We referred from the beginning to existing studies but explored our findings open mindedly.

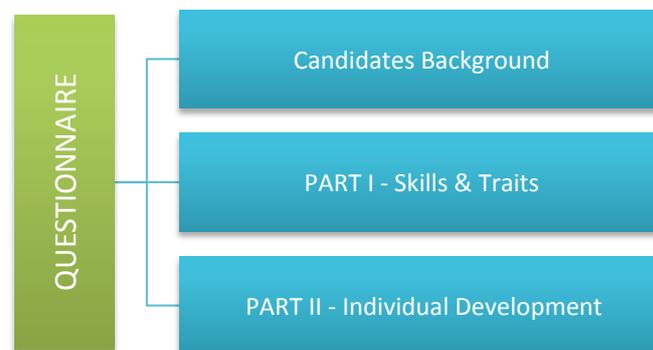


Fig. 3.5 - Final structure of Questionnaire

Originally, we planned three modules: PART I for introduction, PART II for leadership type observation and PART III for general open questions, used to frame individual responses. As we carried out our pilot test with candidates having communication and research background, we simplified the questionnaire by removing almost all open questions, by adapting the set of guided questions and writing a new introduction that helped candidates frame the topics at the start. The structure developed as in *fig. 3.5*, and this fine-tuning process eventually led to a more effective analytical tool. A transcript of the questionnaire can be found in *Appendix 1*.

3.7 Limitations of Research Method

After the first tests, we realized that going through the questions with candidates was a very effective way to produce good quality interviews and discuss the topics in detail. We decided to make the interviews not by asking specific questions that would summarize the arguments introduced in the questionnaire, but actually by using the questionnaire itself to discuss the topics in more detail, and evidence case by case the arguments of broader interest.



Fig. 3.6 - Limitations of Survey Model Used

One limitation that emerged is that the survey relied on candidates self-assessing their role as leaders and their leadership experience. On one side there is no proof of what candidates did report: how many years they had covered a leadership role, the size of their teams and the nature of their leadership position itself. On the other, the scope of this research is to highlight potential patterns emerging from questions on the theme of leadership, posed to selected candidates with proven track record, and it was responsibility of us researchers to select a representative population sample, pose the right questions and avoid misinterpretations.

Another limitation of this research is the lack of sufficient data to make a comparison between candidates of different gender. Despite having a number of female candidates, these were not enough to analyze differences in the selected sample. It is important to note that the choice of candidates was namely related to position and experience, and not to their gender, so we can argue that there was no need to connect the type of response to the gender of the candidate interviewed. Future research may however address comparable populations of both genders, evaluate if different traits emerge and what impact these have on each areas of study noted.

In the same way as discussed for gender, another limitation of this study is in having selected a limited sample that is not indicative of a specific country, working sector or culture. We did not focus our research on managers from SMEs, doctors in the medical field, bankers or educators, neither worked with candidates from a specific country or culture. Our findings can however be compared with other research present in the existing literature, and used to support or dismiss potential patterns and trends, that started emerging during COVID-19 (Kaftan et al., 2023).

3.8 Thematic Analysis and Codebook

When trying to find out connections or most recurring concepts about people's views, opinions, experiences and values, a good approach is recurring to *Thematic Analysis*. This is based on a close examination of the data to identify themes, topics and patterns of meaning. This allows to sort the data in broad themes and to interpret it with more flexibility, especially in comparison with quantitative methods. As mentioned earlier, risks of this approach are in the subjectivity of the researcher's judgement, and how this may impact our choices and interpretations.

Codes	Themes
Trust Crisis Language Education	1. Authority and Leadership
Skill vs. Trait Plan & Coordinate Inspire & Motivate Control & Direct	2. Management and Leadership
Remote Working Work Life Balance (WLB) Company Culture Set of Rules	3. Individualism and Organizational Culture
Human-centrism Sustainability Integration Development	4. Post-Humanism and Leadership
Adaptability & Flexibility Empathy & Emotional Competence Communication & Clarity Innovation & Creativity Resilience & Responsiveness Remote Management & Technological Acumen	5. Core Values of Effective Leadership

TABLE 3-1 - CODEBOOK DEVELOPED FOR THE ANALYSIS OF OUR INTERVIEWS

Given the strong theoretical framework we analysed at the start, we utilized a *deductive* approach to structure the survey at first. We used theory and previous research to introduce words and concepts that candidates could relate to, then we asked them to elaborate on their personal experience and highlight topics that specifically pertained their work. From this data analysis, we determined new themes that could later contribute to theory (*inductive approach*).

Once we familiarized with the data, we coded it manually using the method advanced by Braun & Clarke (2006). Going through the notes from each interview, we identified more keywords and reorganized the main themes. After evaluating recurring concepts manually, we rationalized the findings and summarized the five main themes as in *table 3.1*. The Survey provided data that we will discuss in the next chapters, but themes will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.

3.9 Key Data Collection

Our first data analysis consisted in setting up comparison tables to highlight common trends and traits that emerged from the survey. The questionnaire, divided in two parts, was handed to professionals working in different environments, and we highlighted potential differences and similarities that emerged from the different working realities. For the purpose of avoiding bias, age and gender were not used to make comparisons, as we decided to evidence mainly the professional seniority or leading experience, when analyzing the answers. Our candidates mostly ranged in the 35-54 age categories (*chart 3.1*). Almost one third was self-employed, half worked for corporate companies and the rest in Universities, Medical Practices or SMEs (*chart 3.2*).

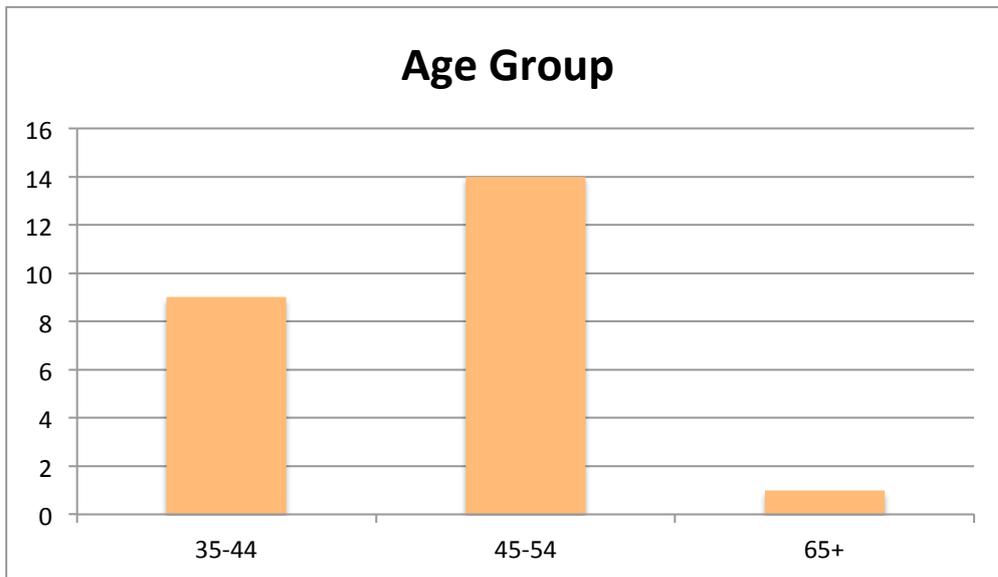


Chart 3.1 - Age Group division from our selected sample population

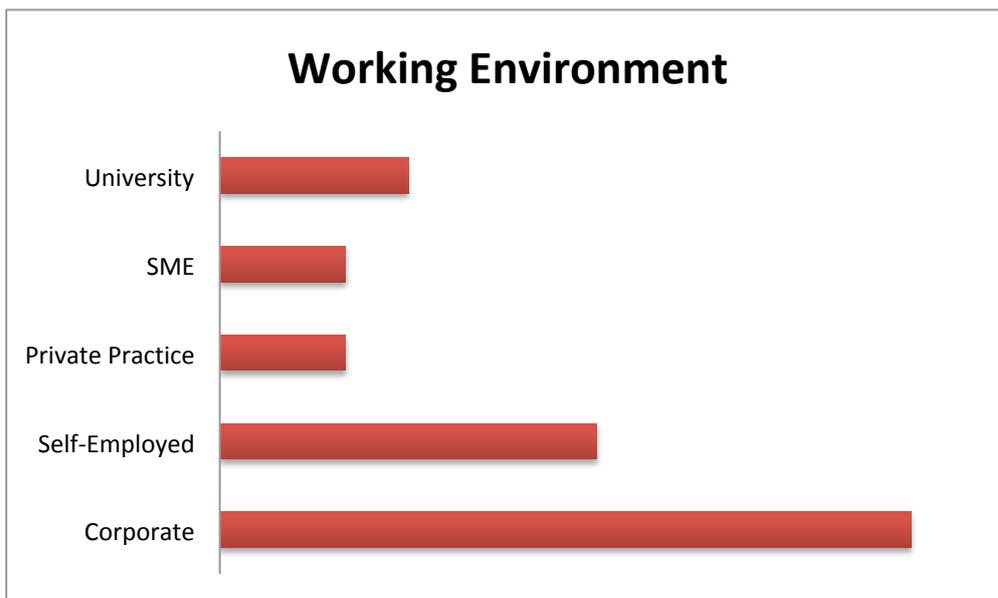


Chart 3.2 - Working Environment Background in our Sample Population

3.10 Characteristics of Selected Sample

In this chapter we present the introductory data of our sample population with tables and charts that help us visualize trends and patterns observed in our sample. We eventually closed the survey at 24 candidates. These have been distributed between Austria and abroad (almost equally). Approximately one third was self-employed (29,2%), almost a half worked for corporate companies (45.8%), with the remainder working either for universities (12.5%), small to medium sized enterprises (8.3%) or in medical practices (8.3%). Little less than 10% were going to be promoted soon to the position of team leader, while a third had 1-5 years experience (33.3%), and almost half (45.8%) more than 10 years experience. One third lead teams of 1-5 people (33.3%), while the rest was more or less equally distributed between 6-10 and 11-50 people teams, with one leader in 8 coordinated more than 50 people (*chart 3.3*).

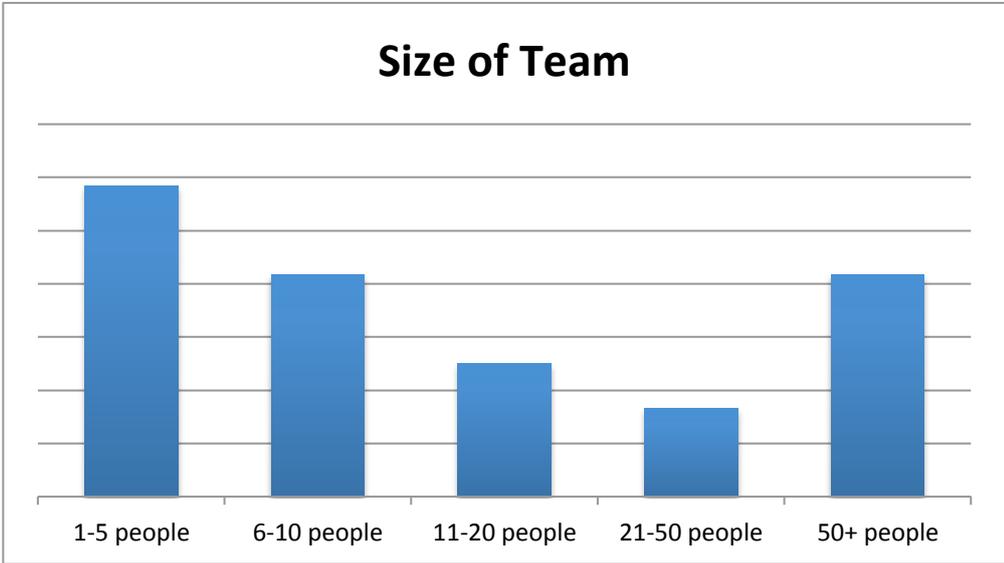


Chart 3.3 - Size of Teams lead by Selected Candidates

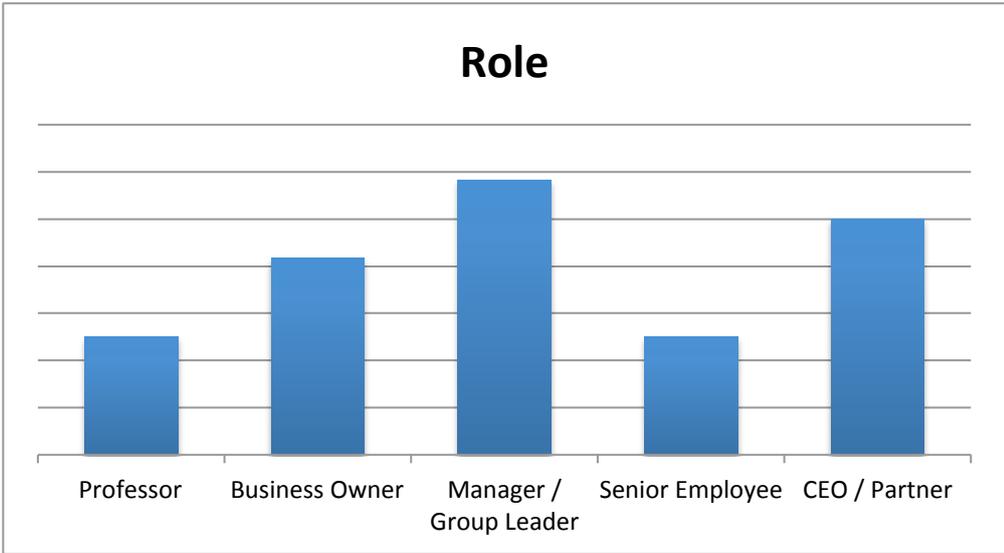


Chart 3.4 - Role of Selected Candidates

In the tables that follow we classify our sample population by origin (from inside or outside Austria) and age group, working background, seniority, size of team lead and role. We decided not to diversify the samples in terms of gender, suggesting the possibility to have an additional analysis in the future. Our sample population was mixed, and included both females and males.

Table 3.2 evidences that more than 95% of our candidates were in the age groups between 35 and 54, thus embracing a relatively young but still experienced sample. No selected member was under the age of 34 or close to retirement age. All candidates were in the most productive years of their careers, with the exception of one candidate who had a long term experience in advisory boards after working many years as consultant with diverse teams and organizations.

<i>Age group of selected population</i>		Response Rate (%)	Located in Austria	Located Abroad
25-34 Years	0	0,0%	-	-
35-44 Years	9	37,5%	5	4
45-54 Years	14	58,3%	7	7
55-65 Years	0	0,0%	-	-
65+ years	1	4,2%	1	-
Total:	24	100%	13	11

TABLE 3.2 - AGE GROUP OF SELECTED CANDIDATES

Table 3.3, shows that more than 45% of our sample population is affiliated to corporate companies, exactly one quarter is self-employed, while the rest is divided between the medical sector, SMEs and universities. Little more than half was based in Austria, with the rest located abroad (specifically in Italy, Portugal, UK, Switzerland, South Africa and Abu Dhabi). This did not impact our analysis or findings, as we worked to have as many candidates abroad interviewed as the ones in Austria, and reduce any bias connected to our access to information.

<i>What is your working environment?</i>		Response Rate (%)	Located in Austria	Located Abroad
Corporate Company	11	45,8%	5	6
Self-Employed	6	25,0%	5	1
Hospital / Medical Practice	2	8,3%	1	1
Small-Medium Sized Enterprise	2	8,3%	2	-
University or Cultural Institution	3	12,5%	-	3
Total:	24	100%	13	11

TABLE 3.3 - WORKING ENVIRONMENT AMONG SELECTED CANDIDATES

Table 3.4 shows clear percentages and location divisions of the data as already shown in chart 3.4, revealing that approximately one third occupies managing or team leader positions, one quarter is CEO or head of company, and one fifth business owner. While most roles were more or less equally distributed between Austria and abroad, all professor candidates came from outside Austria, while all business owners were located in Austria, but this was aleatory. Table 3.5 evidenced that one third had leading experience for 1-5 years, and almost half for more than 10 years, while in table 3.6 we see that almost 50% managed 1-5 or 6-10 people teams.

<i>What is your role?</i>		Response Rate (%)	Located in Austria	Located Abroad
Professor	3	12,5%	-	3
Business Owner / Entrepreneur	5	20,8%	5	-
Manager / Group Leader	7	29,2%	5	2
Senior Employee	3	12,5%	1	2
CEO / Partner	6	25,0%	2	4
Total:	24	100%	13	11

TABLE 3.4 - ROLE DIVISION AMONG SELECTED CANDIDATES

<i>How long have you been in a working leading role?</i>		Response Rate (%)	Located in Austria	Located Abroad
Not yet	2	8,3%	-	2
1-5 years	8	33,3%	3	5
6-10 years	3	12,5%	2	1
10+ years	11	45,8%	8	3
Total:	24	100%	13	11

TABLE 3.5 - AVERAGE LEADING EXPERIENCE OF SELECTED CANDIDATES

<i>How many people do you manage in your team?</i>		Response Rate (%)	Located in Austria	Located Abroad
None	2	8,3%	-	2
1-5 people	7	29,2%	6	1
6-10 people	5	20,8%	4	1
11-20 people	3	12,5%	-	3
21-50 people	2	8,3%	2	-
50+ people	5	20,8%	1	4
Total:	24	100%	13	11

TABLE 3.6 - AVERAGE TEAM SIZE LEAD BY SELECTED CANDIDATES

3.11 Data from Part I of Questionnaire

These findings are specific of our selected population and are not indicative of general trends of existing leadership positions but confirm our candidates' experience and quality of sample. Of major interest, are the survey's qualitative results, in connection with the leadership styles that our candidates related to and their personal feedback. These will be described at the end.

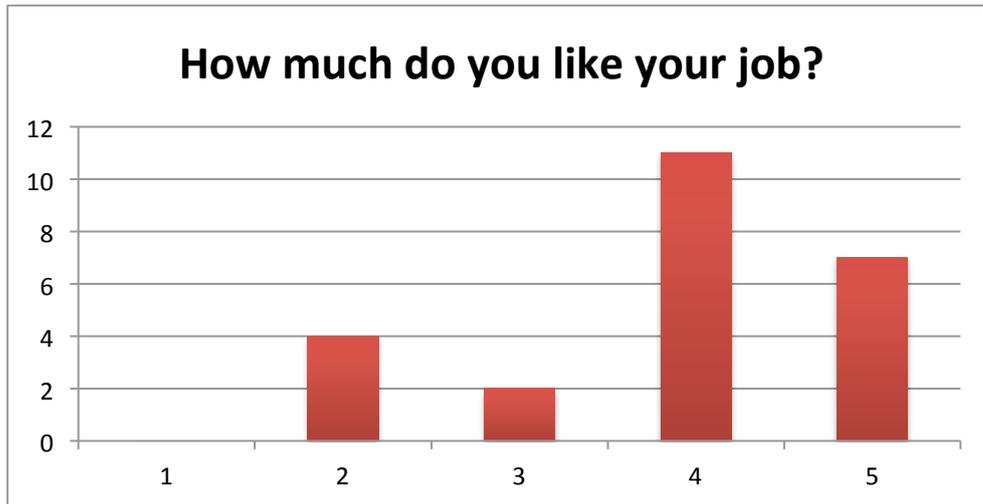


Chart 3.5 - On a scale from 1-5, how well do candidates relate to their job?

In part 1 of the questionnaire, we asked the candidates to rate on a Likert scale from 1-5 how much they liked their job, and exactly three quarters rated their job either 4 or 5 (chart 3.5). We then investigated if any of the other questions evidenced a reason why few candidates did not like their job (when choosing less than 3), but none of them seemed to offer a direct correlation.

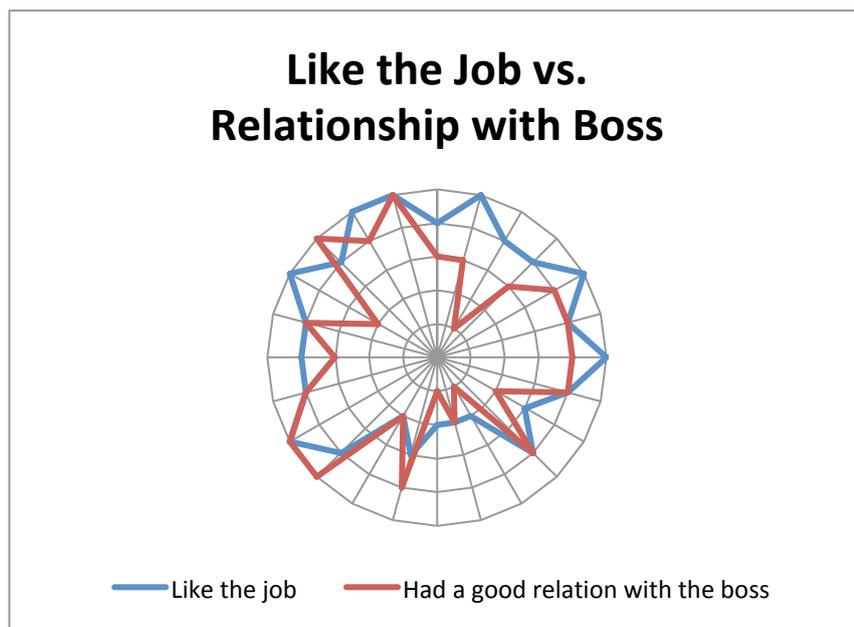


Chart 3.6 - Potential correlation between job appreciation and relationship with boss (not found).



Chart 3.7 - What qualities may help improve your relationship with the team?

Throughout the questionnaire, we asked questions connected to leadership skills and traits and how these related to working teams from private experience. *Chart 3.7* highlights the most popular qualities chosen by candidates that “would help improve their existing relationship with their working team”. Transparency, clarity of intention, availability and humble behaviour were most popular. It’s interesting to see that honesty, integrity, empathy, accountability and trust scored relatively low. In *chart 3.8*, we see what the same candidates define, according to their experience, as the most interesting traits a leader should have. Accountability, empathy and team building here scored the highest. “Other” included: being yourself, lead by example, being visionary, inspiring, supportive of employee development, courageous and decisive.

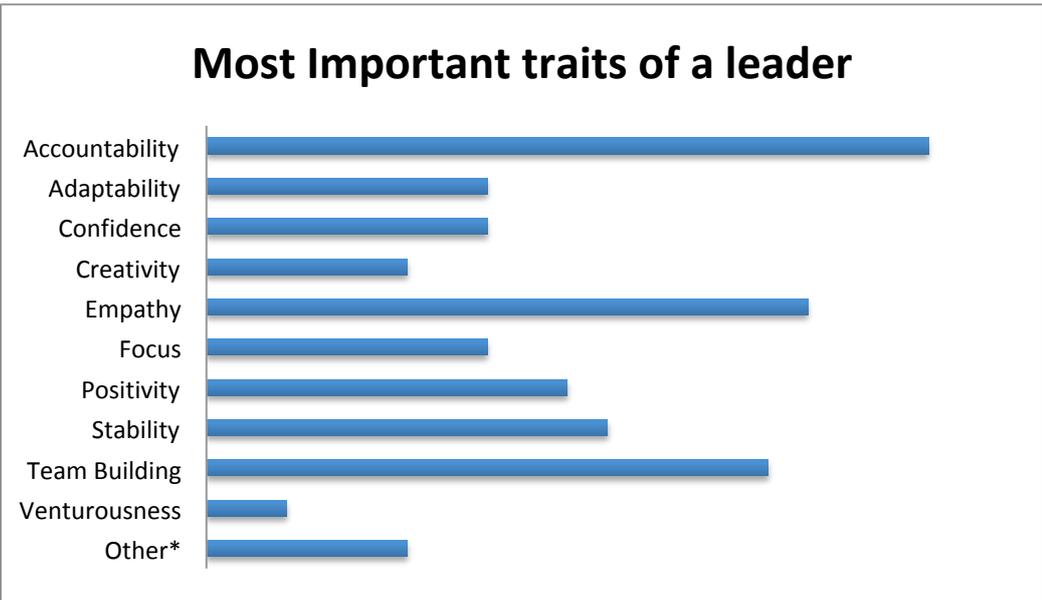


Chart 3.8 - What are in your opinion the most important traits a leader should have?



Chart 3.9 - What are in your opinion the most important skills to lead teams successfully?

Chart 3.9 shows the skills that according to our selected population, most effectively define successful leaders. Here the ability to communicate scored the highest, while creativity, despite being present, scored the lowest. Everything else more or less scored the same, with slightly more advantage for reliability and relationship building. “Other” here included highly developed emotional intelligence, problem solving, respect, authenticity and ability to listen. In the next charts (3.10 to 3.12), three interesting questions are answered: *what type of leader you have been until now, what would you like to become, and what type your team thinks you are*. Most candidates saw themselves as authentic and *empathic, adaptive and motivating* (chart 3.10).



Chart 3.10 - What type of leader you have been until now?

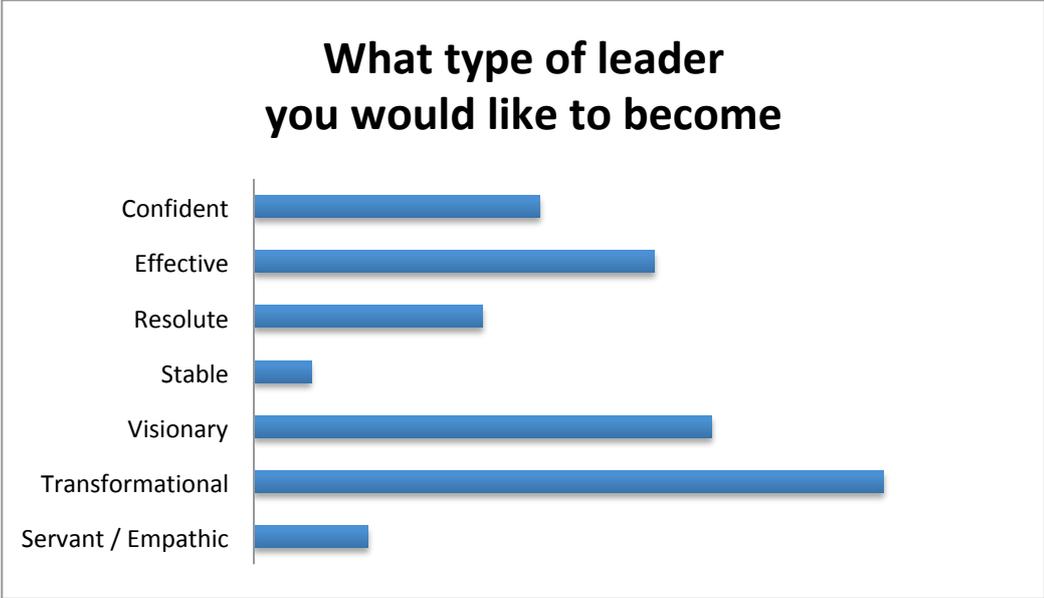


Chart 3.11 - What type of leader would you like to be come?

When asked about what type of leader most candidates looked up to, and wished to become (chart 3.11) transformational, visionary and effective were the three most quoted answers. Very few placed attention on servant and empathic or stable, interestingly enough. When asked what type of leader they believed their teams and followers might want them to be (chart 3.12), the most quoted answers were tolerant, calm and accountable. Responsible and firm classified last, but only one person mentioned supportive. From these answers we started to observe the difference between theoretical recognized values and practical implications.

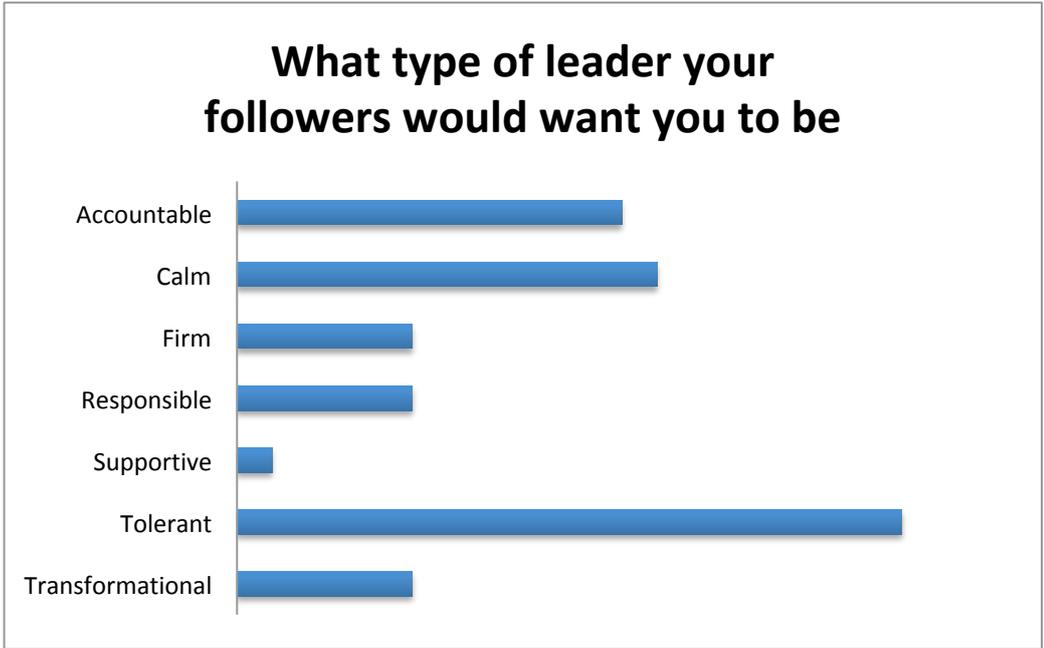


Chart 3.12 - What type of leader your followers would like you to be?

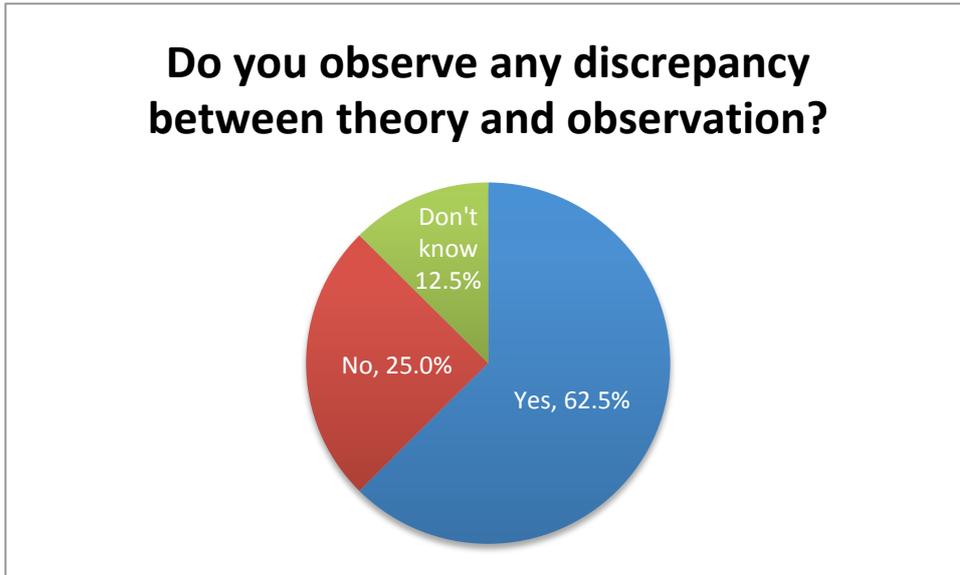


Chart 3.13 - Did the candidates observe any discrepancy between the leadership styles introduced and personal observation of their working environment?

In *chart 3.13*, we see that the majority of the candidates observed some differences between theory and practical experience. About 13% were not in position to say or didn't know, but more than 60% agreed that their practical experience was somehow different from the theory described at the beginning. According to this, the next question asked what type of leader would in their view better serve the upcoming challenges of the future that the COVID-19 pandemic perhaps introduced (*chart 3.14*). The majority of candidates agreed that *adaptive, authentic, visionary* and *empathic* leaders would best serve the future of our society, mentioning that "closing the gap between theoretical concepts of modern leadership and the trap of the highly structured, patriarchal leadership that still dominates" would be necessary.

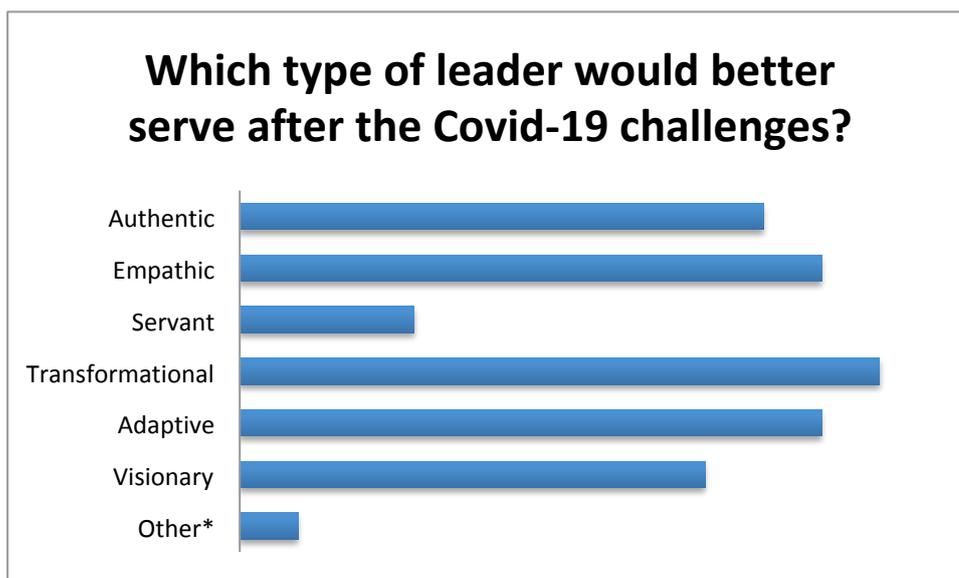


Chart 3.14 - What kind of leader do they believe would better serve the upcoming years after the challenges presented by COVID-19?

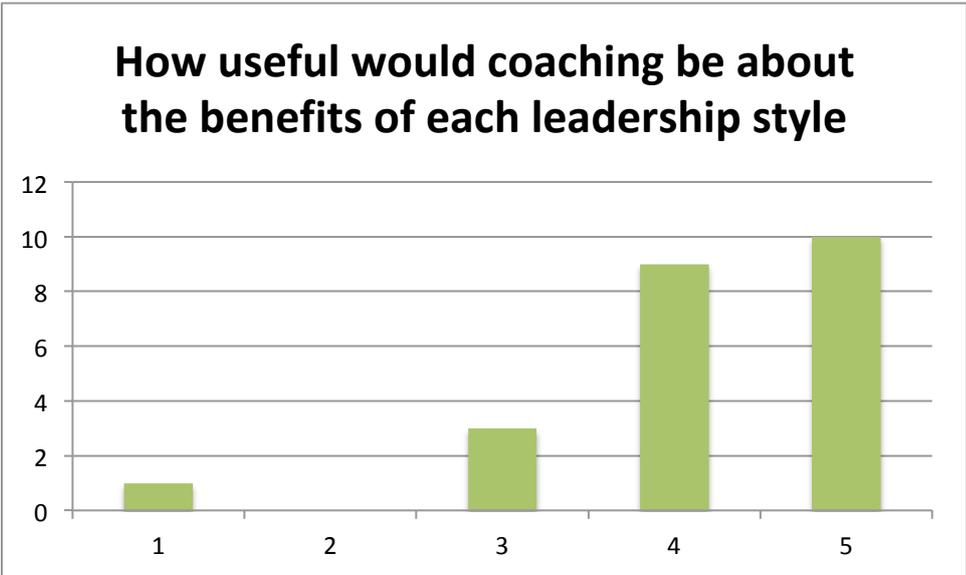


Chart 3.15 - How candidates rate coaching about the benefits of each leadership style

In *chart 3.15*, we see how our candidates responded to the concept of coaching. The majority confirmed that coaching about different types of leadership styles and their benefit could be beneficial for the management of their working teams. In *chart 3.16*, we also see how they responded towards the idea of incentivizing productivity, well-being and personal growth in their working environment. Here the response was more sparse, going from not so convinced (approximately a third) to relatively happy (about half). Although not indicative of the quality of the survey, we investigated specifically the reason for this low response. It turned out that candidates who voted in the low range, did not have necessarily productivity issues in their workplace or enough experience to correlate personal growth and well-being to productivity.



Chart 3.16 - How do you feel about incentivizing productivity, well being and personal growth?

3.12 Data from Part II of Questionnaire

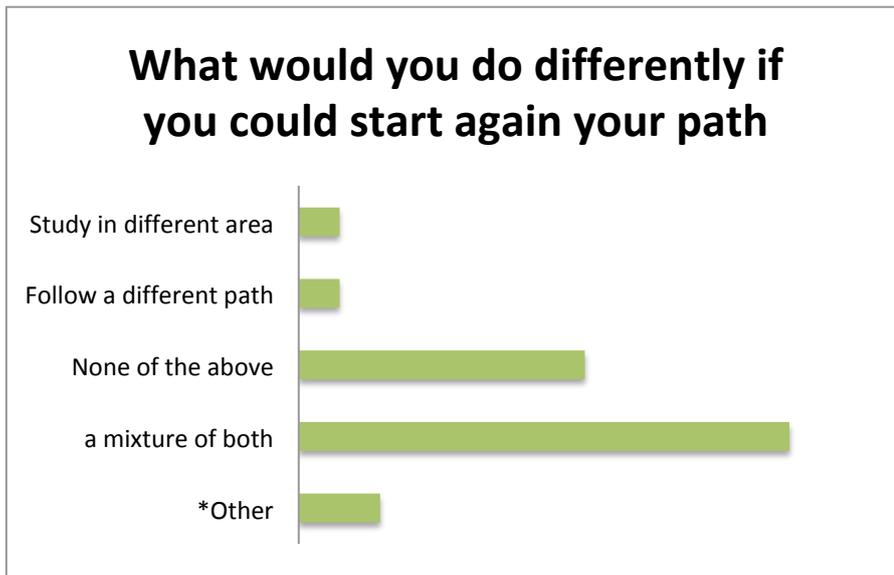


Chart 3.17 - What would you do differently if you could start from the last year of school?

Part two of our questionnaire started with questions that closely investigated the relationship between leadership and personal orientation, how leadership may differ from management or be authority, and how we may distinguish it from trait or process. *Chart 3.17* shows that most candidates would be open to study in a different area or follow a different path, if given the opportunity. A minority would have liked to stick more to the university core values and change mindset, focusing rather on the studies than on quick traction in the corporate world. If asked to accomplish more, the same people would like to be brave and expand beyond their comfort zone, build their own business and reach a higher position (*chart 3.18*).



Chart 3.18 - What accomplishments candidates still wish for?



Chart 3.19 - What areas could improve to bring your organization closer to your ideal?

When asked which areas could still improve to bring their organization closer to their ideal (chart 3.19), the most quoted answers mentioned *internal communication*, *human resources* *process development* and *team organization*. A minority mentioned Sales & Marketing, 4-day week and commitment from co-workers, while the rest addressed *customer management*. Chart 3.20, shows what would bring the performance of their teams closer to their vision, with *communication*, *trust* and *empowerment* being the most popular, followed by *empathy*. Others mentioned *authority*, *mutual support* and *healthy competition* for long-term *engagement*.



Chart 3.20 - What would bring the performance of your team closer to your vision?



Chart 3.21 - Is leadership comparable, connected or disconnected from authority?

When asked if leadership in their experience was connected to authority, comparable or not, more than half the candidates admitted that it was connected, but equal portions proved of the opposite opinion, either considering it comparable or not connected at all (chart 3.21). When asked, on the other hand, almost 80% agreed that management was different from leadership, while the rest basically considered it comparable but not equal.

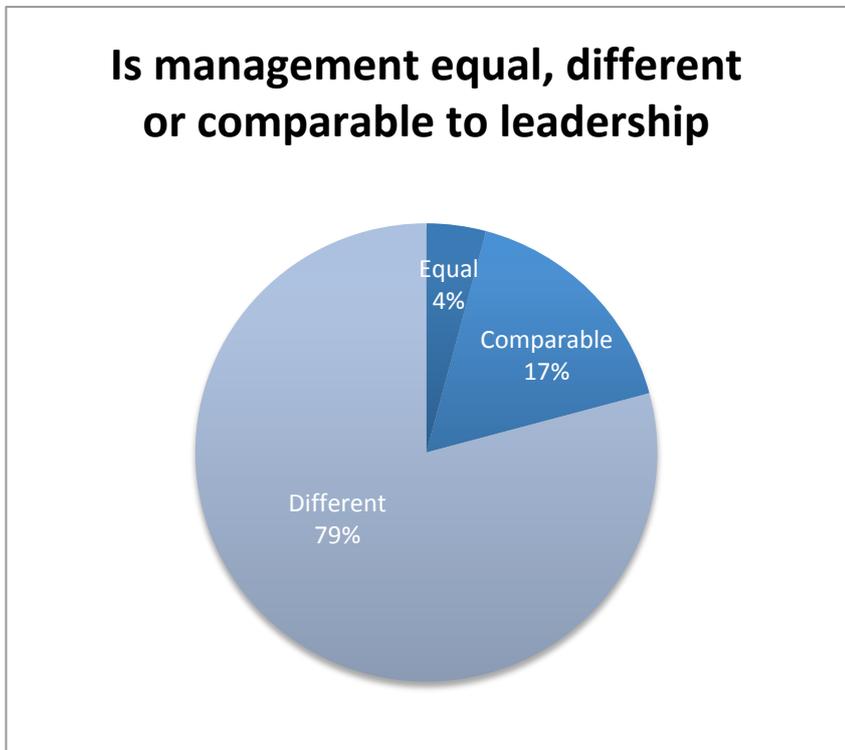


Chart 3.22 - Is management equal, different or comparable to leadership?



Chart 3.23 - What other techniques may help you develop into a better leader?

The last charts answer two questions, what techniques would help the candidates develop into better leaders (*chart 3.23*) and what would contribute to create a better working environment (*chart 3.24*). *Personal coaching* and *physical activity* won over MBSR and Meditation practices, while others mentioned having more time for oneself, self-reflection, learning and reading or analysis. *Flexible working times and locations, team activities* in and out of the workplace and *reduced working hours* (or 4-day week) were seen as the major contributors to create a better working environment in the future, and some mentioned that all of these would be beneficial. Ultimately we asked the question if leadership was to be considered a trait or a process.

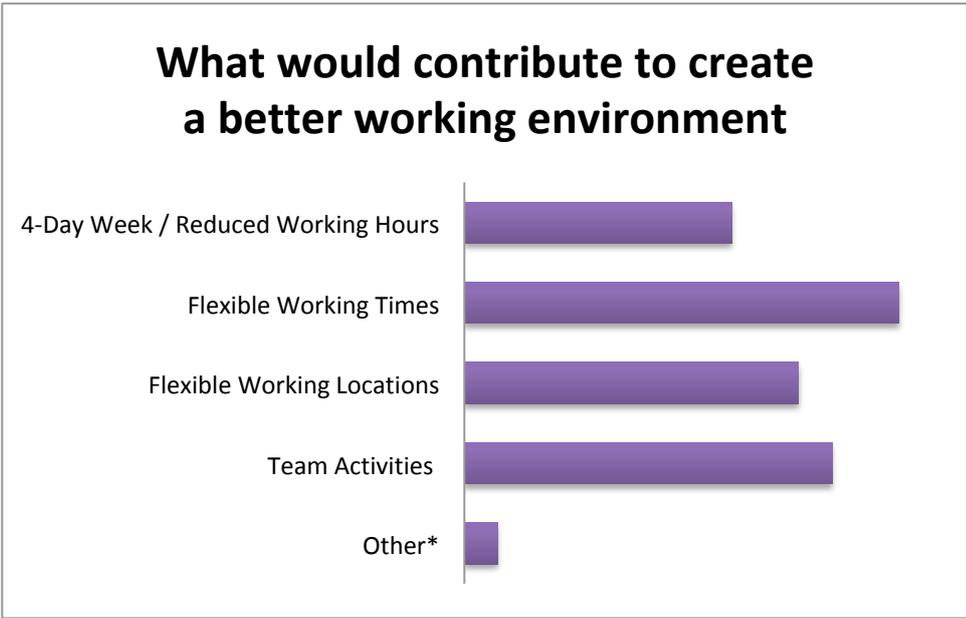


Chart 3.24 - What would contribute to create a better working environment?

The last two open questions showed that candidates have more difficulty expressing a final opinion, when it becomes more difficult to categorize. What emerged is that the majority does not consider leadership to be a trait, but rather a *“mindset that evolves in years”*, something too *“unique”* to define, *“a qualitative characteristic that requires continuous investment”*, *“a profession or skillset in its right”* or *“a trait that may be improved through specific processes”*.

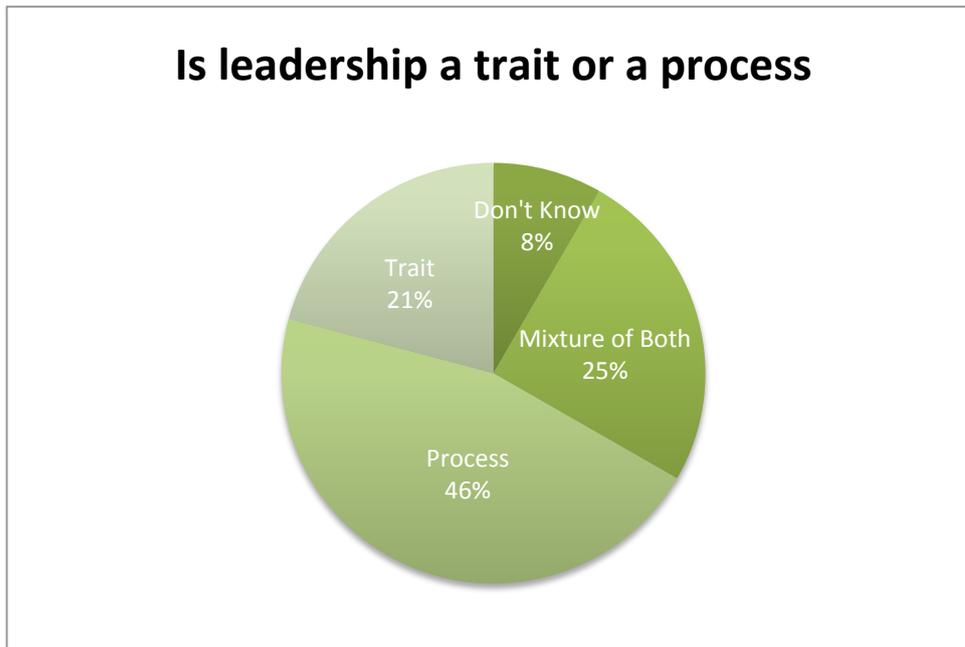


Chart 3.25 - According to your experience is leadership, eventually, a trait or a process?

Final notes refer to the role of authority in leadership, as the second may require authoritative decisions in times of crisis or during important decision making, however authority is imposed while leadership is generally recognized spontaneously. This happens when a manager or boss reveals an ability to lead that naturally attracts followers and supporters and it is not strictly necessary to be authoritative, as the community may follow willingly. Some also mentioned that leadership styles change according to working environments and goals of an organization.

The medical field and social sector, for example, have goals and priorities that privilege above all the well-being of patients and clients, and within an organization like a hospital, hierarchies vary greatly. Doctors may not operate without paramedics but while the first may still compete for internal promotions, paramedics have different tasks and goals and yet need group leaders to operate collectively and efficiently. Similarly, Universities have other targets, are funded by the state and do not have internal departments competing or talking to each other, as they represent different subjects and sometimes different direction. All changes when we enter the private sector: here both clinics or academic Institutions have financial goals with the purpose to serve clients and patients who can afford them, and leadership style changes accordingly.

3.13 Conclusions from Chapter 3

In this chapter we introduced our method of analysis between a self-assessed questionnaire and related follow-up interviews. The first gathered data from 24 professionals selected with *expert sampling* among an open choice of candidates with proven track record in the leadership field. This gathered enough data to produce a semi-quantitative analysis based on small numbers, which allowed us to compare age groups, professional background, geographical origin and working environment, prior to evidencing the most recurring keywords and responses with regards to the questions asked about leadership perception, styles and techniques applied.

The majority of candidates recognized the difference between management and leadership and the role that authority may or may not have on leadership, and evidenced the most frequent sets of traits and skills that shape how effective their leadership style is in the work place. Skills like Empathy, Accountability, Team Building, Communication and Clarity were chosen to well blend with the recognized need to be also adaptive, authentic, motivational and visionary, on a path to generate transformation and innovation. Communication and Team Organization were the areas that most leaders considered mandatory for improving their organization, while two of the most important traits chosen that future leaders must have were authenticity and empathy. Giving a look at the near future, the vast majority supported the idea of flexible working hours, flexible locations and motivational team activities, and most considered leadership as a skill that needs mastery through exercise, but also a mindset and attitude that comes with the individual.

The follow-up interviews were carried out on a limited selection of our candidates, based both on the response of the questionnaire in terms of seniority and team size lead, and on availability as not all candidates were easy to reach because of geographical differences or busy schedules. The interviews were carried out partially on the phone and partially in person, and key notes were transcribed for further thematic analysis that took place afterwards. The outcome of this analysis allowed us to divide the findings in 5 macro areas, as outlined in *table 3.1*, and will be described in further detail in chapter 4. Limitations of this method were mainly connected to the potential insurgence of *Common Method Bias* (CMB) that could contaminate answers (*leniency bias, confirmation bias, primacy bias, social desirability bias and law of small number bias*). Risks were however two-fold, both on the researcher's side (lack of representative population, good questions and a correct interpretation of answers) and on the interviewees' side (lack of objectivity and honesty in answering, misunderstanding or overlooking some questions). The findings from the pilot test helped us fine-tune the questionnaire, so that use of Likert Scales, balanced framing in wording and unbiased judgment from the researcher's side could reduce errors and additional sources of contamination during the interpretation of the answers.

Chapter 4 offers a deeper insight in the final findings from the interviews, connects them with literature and suggests further improvements to fine-tune our research tool.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

Leadership theories often focus on what most successful leaders do or how this is successfully implemented, rather than on *who* they are and *why* they act in a specific style. According to Sinek (2009), “*leadership requires a vision of the world that does not yet exist, and the ability to communicate it*”. Without this ability, no great idea can turn into action, neither any visionary intuition come to life. Most leaders are neither called to have the best ideas nor to materialize them, but have a vital role in selecting, supporting and protecting those that can contribute to making such ideas come to life by *inspiring* them. Still according to Sinek, a clear sense of why supports the ability to keep motivations always in focus. This is what defines successful course of action and good management of people, resources and organizations, and the moment this becomes inspirational and motivational, it turns into natural leadership.

Now, can we break down these steps into theory? Can we draw a clear, scientific line between intuition, good timing and pure luck? Dobelli (2013) argues how many success stories that we take as examples and raw models, so very often derive from a natural outcome of selection, rather than extraordinary vision. Among all athletes starting a marathon, there will always be only one who comes first. This can be expanded to finance, sport, academia, politics and any other environments where few individuals will always stand out among the crowd. Will this be enough to define them as a leaders? And what are the elements of distinction or sets of skills and traits that may anticipate who will become a good leader from the others?

When we asked a group of selected professionals in influential positions what makes a good leader and what traits will define good leadership in the future, their feedback recognized the need for an attitude of authenticity, honesty, integrity, clarity, consistency and adaptability, and the ability to provide respectful, transparent communication, accountable behaviour, empathy, inspiring vision and transformation. This chapter shows the findings from our interviews and the analysis done by comparing all data, investigating the answers from the survey at a deeper level, hand-coding the notes that derived from the interviews according to the scheme evidenced in *table 3.1*, and making connections between questionnaire, interviews and existing theory. More than half of our candidates defined leadership as a continuous development process and the majority attributed high priority to accountability, humility, communication and transparency, in leading effectively.

4.2 Authority and Leadership

The first theme that emerged from our set of interviews is the difference between *authority* and *leadership* and, more specifically, between leadership within organizations where people are responsible for profit or loss, as opposed to those who have other goals other than financial ones (educational, cultural, athletic, social, legal, medical, etc.). Managers in companies with financial objectives have different targets. Different priorities punctuate the life of a leading professor as opposed to the head of a cultural institution, of a school teacher or project leader in a start-up, of a bank director or executive partner in a consulting firm and so on. Managing conflicts and at the same time securing financial and competitive goals, boils down to authority but we should be careful about the correct interpretation of the word: authority is not given by formal positions, necessarily, but rather by a *recognised status*.

In the interviews, one of our candidates expressed that *“irrespective of position, leaders become authoritative when exhibiting traits that people feel attracted to, and thus are willing to follow”*.

According to Munduate and Medina (2004), authority is *“The institutionalized power between a superior and a subordinate that ensures compliance with the superior’s wishes because he or she is the boss”* while the concept of leadership denotes a relationship of power between leaders and followers in which the first exercises great influence over the others to achieve objectives for the organization. A leader needs authority, but this is reflected in the trust that followers give when they recognise their leaders’ decisions also in time of crisis.

Recognized leaders gain authority mainly through the elements of trust and respect they are naturally able to inspire. During COVID-19, leaders were asked to maintain resilience as they led teams and organizations through a period of unpredictable change. This proved challenging, as events could take their control away, but also reinforced an authentic sense of purpose and the very same reason why they had taken up a leading position in first place.

Heifetz (1994) makes a great example of leadership without authority, when he recalls Martin Luther King Jr who had moral, charismatic and informal authority over thousands of people across the US, who shared the same values and gave him authorization to champion their cause. These were not his target audience neither the people he wanted to lead. The people he truly wanted to lead were those who did not care about civil rights, whom he wanted to rethink their values and priorities and looked for engaged citizens who would provide leadership in their own communities. He was one of the first modern leaders to realize that the main role of a leader is to create other leaders, inspire and motivate through vision.

4.3 Management and Leadership

The second theme encountered regards the role of management, which can rather be seen as a skill that good leaders should have. Interviews discussed how vital it is to have good managers in a hierarchy who would be able to take care of everything, but this is unlikely. So, given that just being a good manager is not enough to reach the status of a trusted leader, a leader must have sound management skills, and be able to understand what his team is capable of doing. As one candidate mentioned during one of the interviews, evidencing his responsibilities over his team, “A leader can only influence structure, process and decide who is working in what position”.

For Weathersby (1999), effective leaders should manage rapid changes driven by technology, recruit and motivate employees, innovate with passion and utilize emotional intelligence to adopt a culture of dynamic change. Weathersby envisioned the need for future leaders to focus on teams and processes, provide attention to individual capabilities, facilitate change and foster progress in organizations. Algahtani (2014) adds that, although management and leadership do share similar duties which consist of working with people and influencing others to achieve goals, management skills are used to plan, build and direct teams towards a specific outcome, while leadership skills are used to generate change, establish direction, motivate and inspire.

For Tohidi & Jabbari (2012), leadership and management go hand in hand, they are linked and complementary but while a manager’s job is to plan and coordinate, a leader must inspire and motivate. *Fig. 4.2* shows a simplified scheme of how management and leadership may overlap. Bennis (1989) summarizes the core differences, as managers privilege control over trust, short versus long-term view, order, systems and structure rather than people and change (*fig. 4.3*).

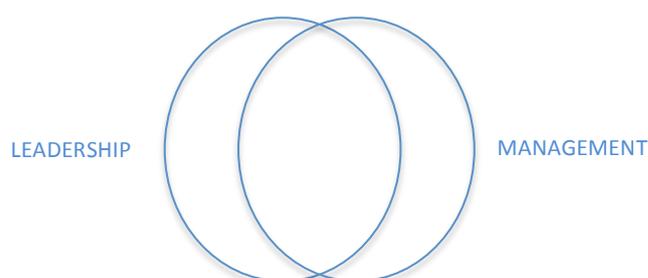


Fig. 4.2 - Overlapping realms of leadership & management according to Tohidi & Jabbari (2012)

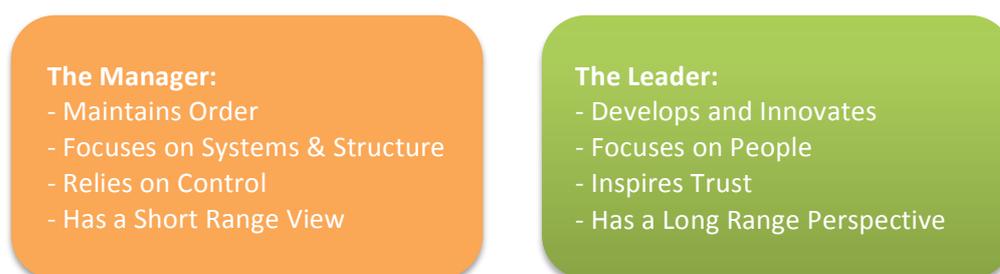


Fig. 4.3 - Differences between Managers and Leaders according to Bennis (1989)

4.4 Individualism vs. Organizational Culture

The third theme that emerged from interviews is connected to the importance of preserving the valuable aspects of organizational culture despite the ongoing changes, keeping a healthy work life balance (Vyas, 2022). Disregarding entirely organizational mindset, may not be beneficial at all in the future, should a culture of individualism develop further. Structured organizations offer a backbone where individuals can thrive (Chatman & O'Reilly, 2016) and future studies should address the *norms* and *dimensions* of organizational culture in the post-Covid era and if this basic principles will still remain mutually interconnected with leadership after the crisis.

Some researchers gave emphasis to the importance of leaders on cultural development itself. Brooks (1996) claimed that leaders use their knowledge of organizational culture to influence change, while Chodkowski (1999) concluded that leaders' behaviour influences the perception of organizational culture among followers.

One other aspect of this topic is that we have come across the necessity to identify any form of success with clearly measurable indicators. There's a thin yet remarkable line that distinguishes success from personal fulfillment (Robbins, 2012). Fulfillment is what brings each individual to quantify his or her own sense of accomplishment with regards to a specific endeavour.

Keeping balance between the original motivations why people choose to bring a project to life, and the personal needs that make every individual unique, is essential to manage companies successfully and accomplish objectives in any field (George, 2017). What emerged from our research, is the need in the future to protect also community aspects at organizational level, not to shift in post-pandemic times towards hyper-individual societies. The risk is to minimize the importance of organizational but we need to keep supporting its values, from governments to corporations and from cultural institutions to small to medium-sized start-ups. Now more than ever, as an increasing number of people has been turning towards individualism in both work and private, facilitated by technology, on a digital shift that will require attention in the future.

According to the study on the *blue* and *red-worlds* (PWC, 2018b, 2018c), companies in the future may either belong to the group of giants (like Google or Microsoft), leading markets and influencing customer behaviour on a global scale, or be part of a myriad of tinier, growing start-ups and firms made by individuals with outstanding potential and skills. Some of these will develop their own technology to compete globally, but may not run their businesses, perhaps, without access to existing technology developed by the tech giants. There are already examples like Passion.io for example, a platform developed to design and launch training Apps that released over 7.000 Apps in two years that reached already more than 700.000 people (2022).

Both worlds are somehow integrated already, due to the growing multitude of users who are becoming customers and providers, employees and competitors at the same time (see their role in content creation on social media). In such world, what emerges is the need for new kind of leaders who will be able to manage highly skilled teams with innovative ideas and a long-term vision. These leaders should be able to keep a strong sense of direction, endure authority and assertiveness through difficult times and at the same time hold on to a strong inner compass and inner sense of why (Sinek, 2009). Leaders in the Blue World, may summarize qualities in macro-areas which relate mostly to a purpose-driven culture as can be seen in *fig. 4.4*.

- 1) Strong **self-motivation**
- 2) Inclination to accept corporate culture and **collectivism**
- 3) Comfort in managing highly **skilled** teams
- 4) Ease to engage with colleagues on a **global** level
- 5) Flexibility and resilience to withstand any **challenge**
- 6) Ability to **integrate** A.I. in daily working systems
- 7) Acceptance of medical **enhancements** to improve efficiency and focus
- 8) Highly **competitive** attitude towards ascending levels of target goals
- 9) Acceptance of definitive digitalization and continuous **performance**
- 10) Capacity to prioritize work while balancing other aspects of private life

Fig. 4.4 - Characteristics of the Blue World Economies according to PWC Study (2018b)

These leaders will not accept compromise and select only the best talents and skills at work for the sake of achieving high-oriented results, even if this may become ethically questionable. On the other hand, we have also “Red World” leaders, distinguished by diverse core elements that include the kind of values, skills and traits we discussed in our survey (PWC, 2008c) - see *fig. 4.5*.

- 1) Honesty, authenticity and integrity
- 2) Active Listening
- 3) Emotional Empathy
- 4) Communication Ability
- 5) Flexibility and Imagination
- 6) Ability to lead teams in unexplored territories
- 7) Devotion and commitment to a personal, passionate vision
- 8) Respect of people’s values and openness to innovation
- 9) Long-term vision through short term rewards
- 10) Consistency in achieving the wanted goals

Fig. 4.5 - Characteristics of the Red World Economies according to PWC Study (2018c)

4.5 Post-Humanism and Leadership

The fourth theme was connected to the growing impact of technology and remote working for example. Reducing office spaces as well as creating a digital identity for both individuals and businesses, took a firm direction towards the integration of a healthier *Work-Life Balance (WLB)*. Vyas (2022), suggests that these trends can be classified in three separate categories: those that were *accelerated* by the pandemic, those that *normalized* what was considered just before to be *avant-garde*, and those that *remodelled* what were set-ups of the pre-pandemic era.

Zizek suggests (2019) that post-humanism and capitalism are blending through a technological revolution that might bring us to a new level of humanistic development in the future. Our choices have the power to turn the future into a world of opportunities and embrace change. The leaders of tomorrow will have the responsibility to impact the world positively on a mission to create and protect a sustainable, human-centric future, while still supporting innovation.



Fig. 4.6 - Main Skills that future leaders will need to master (Seehra, 2021)

Mental health and emotional stress are becoming a source of major concern in the post pandemic era (Vadivel et al., 2021), so as the growing impact of the *Digital Divide* (Alvarez, 2021). Clarity, honesty and transparency will be vital in the the future, in terms of bilateral communication between leaders and stakeholders and in managing the WLB requirements of people (Vyas, 2022). Showing resilience under pressure, adaptability to rapidly changing events and an innovative attitude, will create new opportunities for success, and the new generation of leaders will have to develop a more sophisticated leading style altogether.

4.6 Effective Leadership and Emotional Intelligence

The fifth theme expanded to effective leadership and the role of emotional intelligence. We came across the interpretation of what *effective* actually means, as this can be based on the point of view of followers (Meindl, 1995). Effective leaders in the post-Covid era will have to embrace a set of skills and traits that will enable them to adapt to the many challenges of the present and at the same time anticipate or be ready for the uncertainties of the future. Like confidence or mastery, we may argue that leadership is a skill that can be improved with time, through the use of tools and exercises, independently of background, path or experience. In connection with the inner states of any individual, this requires personal work (Goleman, 1995), and a good leader will need a firm inner compass (George, 2017).

In his book, *“Discover your True North”* (2015), George expands on his 2007 publication, by introducing new ideas about *Post-Traumatic Growth* (PTG) and a deeper understanding of the role of emotional intelligence and self-awareness and how these qualities can be developed. George talks about the journey from *“I to We”* and the establishment of what he calls a Global Intelligence (GQ), as well as the need for corporations to become active stakeholders in their societies. From the charismatic, sometimes *“imposter”* approach of the 90s, it is recognized by now that authenticity has become the *gold standard for leadership* (Bhattacharyya, 2020) and that hierarchical styles have also lost effectiveness, while inspiration and collaboration are the new standards. It is the Millennials and XGen who are now paving the road of the future. They expect leaders that will solve problems and present innovation, not just stay at the top.

George (2017) believes that each individual is born with a set of traits or gifts that are unique, but these require constant development in order to reach *self-awareness*, a sense of purpose and the capacity to empower others. He also recognizes the integrity and self-belief of political leaders like Barack Obama, but observed that by doing less, and learning to delegate and build collaborative relationships, he would have been able to achieve even higher results.

Another consideration from our interviews was the evaluation that political leaders differ from business leaders, due to their function and path. In our survey, we addressed professionals and consultants who advised or coached leaders in the course of their careers with diverse backgrounds and working history. Some proved to be exceptional and have an impressive track record, however one element that emerged from some group trainings was common to many organizations. None had the opportunity prior to the Pandemic, to get to know colleagues and team members really in depth. This is something that the COVID-19 crisis helped reshape, as it placed individuals in a different context: team members suddenly faced critical conditions in a situation of emergency and were allowed, in a way that had never been possible, to reveal aspects of their life and skills that built *rapport* and generated new synergies. This confirms that creating a working space in which teams and individuals may experience inclusiveness and feel recognized, will be vital for organizations to exploit their full potential (Hutchinson, 2018).

4.7 Final Remarks

An interesting concept that also emerged during the interviews, supported by the study of Jouillié et al. (2021), is the role that *language* has in establishing relationship between leaders and followers and specifically how noble, higher educated language, allows leaders to develop their status as this facilitates the process of authorization through which power is obtained. All together, findings suggest that leadership traits and abilities matter significantly, however “*it is not who leads us but how those in leadership positions behave, adapt to different situations, and create positive relationships with followers that matters*” (Kelloway & Gilbert, 2017).

McCall (2010) defined a set of five leadership demands that serve as the basis for evaluating leadership competence. Assessing a leader based on how well he or she meets these demands allows to embrace different leading styles and attune to different personalities, provided that specific competencies are developed during the leading path and according to the task given. These will require setting and communicating direction, vision and purpose, making sure that people and teams will understand the mission and be aligned, showing the confidence and necessary abilities to cope effectively with a leadership role, setting clear standards and values and living up to them, as well as taking the necessary steps to support growth and learning.

As discussed, a leader can influence *structures* and *processes*, but what will make the difference is the choice of who will be working in what position (*roles*). This sensitivity and attention to others will be key in the future towards achieving successful goals. What we learned, ultimately, is that internal balance is vital to inspire others and that good decision-making can only come from a place of stability (George, 2017). In the uncertain, complex challenges of the future, the skills and qualities so far mentioned will provide guidance, support a balanced WLB for oneself and one’s team (Vyas, 2022), enough strength and vision, to navigate safely through any storm.

This parallel recalls Plato’s comparison between leaders and sailors, seen as commanders who *navigate the state* of civil society through times of uncertainty. What emerged later, is the role of people in society: a key aspect in steering together towards a sustainable future, is to realize that societies and organizations are made of individuals with different sense of self, set of skills, needs and requirements that will need to be taken care of, today as in the past (Scott, 2018).

It is with this clarity of purpose, awareness and sense of self that the leaders of tomorrow may tackle the unprecedented challenges of a complex, volatile world. And competences, as well as management skills, are characteristics that will need continuous training, time and practice, to transform into effective leadership. Organizational cultures should be conserved, and leaders will have to take care of normalizing and remodelling the *new normal* that accelerated after COVID-19. Our findings contribute to supporting the theories presented, but additional research may further study the impact on different working sectors and in diverse cultural locations.

4.8 Improvement of Survey

Our survey overall worked satisfactorily, but it started to show some signs of weariness as we moved in the last stages of research. Common opinion was that some questions might have been slightly repetitive, and that the closed options given could have been structured even more efficiently. The overall results of the survey were clearly indicative of patterns in action, as the large majority of candidates selected similar answers or avoided specific choices mentioned. The first part works well, but we suggested to simplify some questions, and the use of language.

In *Appendix 1*, an improved version of the questionnaire is reported. Here, the questions have been reduced to 20, any redundancy eliminated, and options at most times limited to four, with possibility to include a personal addition under the term “other”. Previous options that perhaps had been open to interpretation were corrected. For example, in the original questionnaire, we asked what ideal traits or skills, leaders of the future should have. We included integrity, positivity and reliability among the skills, but these are qualities, rather traits and not skills, and we also included team building among the traits, while this is in fact rather a skill.

We simplified language where possible, and erased the option of interpreting questions both from a leadership and followers perspective, as the main target of our survey was to address only professionals in positions of influence anyway. We removed questions about authority and management, as the differences with leadership have already been addressed in literature. We kept our question on coaching, anyway, and future improvements may include exploring in more depth the potential influence offered by personalized coaching and its meaning.

Appendix 2 shows a self-assessment questionnaire on crisis leadership, inspired by the one developed at the Centre for Creative Leadership (2020) to evaluate potential crisis management attitude in leaders. This shows an easy example of how self-assessed questionnaires could help measure leadership qualities in future research. By rating their performance on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, leaders can evaluate how ready they are to face unexpected scenarios. This helps reflecting upon each leader’s journey and evidences areas of potential improvement regarding the main qualities necessary for future leaders: focus, innovation, empathy, creativity, communication, adaptability, resilience and remote management (Bawany, 2018).

Self-Assessed Questionnaire on Crisis-Leadership						
Rate your leadership tendencies from 1 (being very low) to 5 (being very high):						
1.	I can communicate effectively	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I take initiative proactively	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I think clearly under pressure	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I keep calm and maintain self-control at all times	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I remain optimistic despite ongoing challenges	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I am flexible and adaptable	1	2	3	4	5

Fig. 4.7 - Extract from Self-Assessed Questionnaire on Crisis Leadership (CCL, 2020)

4.9 Conclusions from Chapter 4

In this chapter we discussed the findings from our interviews that we divided in 5 macro areas through a thematic analysis as outlined in the codebook *in table 3.1*. These themes were the connection between authority and leadership according to the different types of workplace, the difference between management and leadership, the importance of keeping organizational culture alive in contrast with individualism, the influence of post-humanism on leadership and the role of emotional intelligence and empathy in achieving a true, effective leadership.

These findings were supported by existing studies found in the literature we referenced. We discussed how a leader can influence structure and processes and decide who will do what in a team or organization, and mentioned the positive influence that educated language can have in establishing relationship between leaders and followers. We discussed what effective leadership means and how emotional intelligence may have a positive impact through practices of self-awareness, as well as the importance of a healthy work life balance (WLB) both for leaders and followers, after the changes that Covid-19 either accelerated, normalized or re-modelled.

We summarized the six key skills of future leaders in being Adaptability, Empathy, Innovation, Communication, Resilience and Virtual Management, and recalled the challenges of the so called VUCA world (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) that future leaders will face.

We discussed how these characteristics will need continuous training, time and practice, to transform into effective leadership, and used the momentum of these findings to describe what changes could be applied to improve our research tool, perhaps introducing a self-assessment questionnaire based on Likert scales with a point system to evaluate leadership tendencies in situations of crisis. Throughout the chapter we used examples from literature to connect with the topics discussed, mentioning the raw model exemplified by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who was one of the first modern leaders to realize that the main role of a leader is to create other leaders, inspiring and motivating through his vision even those he did not necessarily consider his followers, and provoking them to change their mindsets.

From our discussions we also mentioned Plato, whose concept of leaders being experienced sailors that navigate our society through a time of crisis, well blends with the necessity for future leaders to develop skills that will allow them to navigate teams and organizations through the uncertainties of our times. Eventually, we also mentioned the importance of realizing that what makes societies and organizations are people, and these people are individuals with different sense of self, skills, needs and requirements that need to be taken care of, today as in the past.

Chapter 5 will summarize the main takeaways of our study, highlight its validity and limitations, evidence its contributions to this area of study and how it could be expanded or improved in the future to add pertinent knowledge for its stakeholders.

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 Contribution to knowledge

The findings of this research contribute to the theoretical framework connected to the VUCA vision of the future, a world which in the last three decades became all the more complex, ambiguous, volatile and uncertain. The fast advancements in technology, the advent of AI and the effects that COVID-19 or other crises are leaving behind, either accelerated, normalized or re-modelled ongoing changes that became the *new normal* (Peifer et al., 2022). The candidates who participated to our survey confirmed that in a fast-changing scenario where future leaders will be called to guide organizations and societies through many kinds of uncertainty, new values and sets of skills will be required to master unprecedented challenges and practice a true and authentic, effective leadership.

Our research confirmed the importance that leaders with proven track record associate to being able to adapt to fast changing circumstances, to communicate with clarity, innovate, be resilient under pressure and plan a healthy work-life balance (WLB) both for themselves and their teams, in order to inspire their people to achieve a common purpose and lead them effectively.

Given the vastity of the subject and how leadership theories have evolved since the advent of the transformational concept of leadership, we believe that this research may contribute to the existing literature by providing a proof of concept within the realms of study that thinkers like George (2003), Goleman (2017), Sinek (2022) and Dobelli (2013) have extensively discussed in recent times, in their books on emotional intelligence, empathy and human reasoning applied to effective leadership and their vision of the future.

In chapter 2 we approached the existing literature, in chapter 3 we explained the methodology applied to our research and the potential errors or biases of a qualitative research that is open to both misunderstandings in answering questions and mistakes in interpreting the answers. Chapter 4 evidenced our findings, divided in five main themes, and in this chapter we discuss our contribution to knowledge and the potential implications for relevant stakeholders.

Our research served the purpose to produce a tool that can be fine tuned and tailored to diverse working realities, to self-assess leadership practices and evaluate areas that may be improved in an organization. The process recognized the limits of a qualitative approach, revealing potential biases that could alter the outcome of the investigation, and suggesting improvements needed to pinpoint key elements which can better portray our *expert sample*. In the future, this tool can be developed further by expanding the representative sample, divide it by age group, perhaps gender, and compare their practices in different working cultures. Given the role of governing bodies in managing crises, we would suggest a specific study on political representatives.

5.2 Implications for relevant stakeholders

Given the scale of the ongoing global changes, the vast implications that the introduction of AI will cause and the effects that pandemic, social and financial crises are leaving as a heritage to our society, it has become increasingly clear how a profound shift in social, political and working cultures is needed. Finding a healthy work-life balance has gradually evolved into a necessary requirement to preserve mental health and productivity, thus investing all levels of society and involving a growing number of participants, especially after the exceptional hard times imposed by the COVID-19 crisis and all related outcomes. In such evolving scenarios, the role of leaders acquires a major standing as they will be called to guide not only teams and organizations, but also societies and nations towards a sustainable future which will have to take in consideration people's needs. 80 years after Maslow's theory on the hierarchy of human needs (1943), the world clearly requires self-actualization, but is for the first time since the end of WWII also afraid for its own safety, and is thus struggling between the primary need of security and the ultimate need of prosperity on a higher, spiritual level. It is inevitable that this contrasting dualism places on the leaders of tomorrow the responsibility of being able to impact the world positively on a mission to create and protect a human-centric future. But for this to happen, all stakeholders, from political institutions to organizations, will require to evolve and allow sustainable change.

5.3 Future Research

As mentioned earlier on, this research served mainly the purpose to create a tool that could effectively assess leadership styles across a number of fields in the post-Covid era. One of the suggestions for future research is to address this question by comparing gender and age groups, within specific working cultures and backgrounds. How for example younger leaders behave and relate to the discussed topics, compared to the previous generation who developed leading skills prior to the last decade of complex changes, and specifically how this impacts the choices made within governmental organizations that take on the responsibility to lead societies. It would be rather interesting, in our opinion, to evaluate how the generation that just retired judges the new leading generation, and how the new generation of leaders interprets this era's requirements, the advent of AI, the role of mental health, sustainability and inclusion.

We clearly evidenced that future leaders will have to be resilient, adaptable, tech-savvy, versatile and not only emotionally intelligent, but also emotionally competent. In other words, they will need to embrace a set of skills and values that will allow them to activate a clear, honest two-way communication with all stakeholders - teams and followers on one side, but also external partners, third party providers and bosses on the other side. But how will governments bridge the gap between societies and organizations? How will a healthy work-life balance be supported at all levels of society, and will the leaders of tomorrow be able to implement these principles? Given the urgency, a point of this study was also to inspire towards such considerations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Questionnaire used for our Survey

Since the “Great Man Theory”, leadership theories have evolved, evidencing how teams and individuals need today an **authentic, disruptive** type of leadership to support **innovation** and foster real **growth** in organizations. In the post-pandemic era, as new trends emerge, what common traits do we identify in present leaders and those of tomorrow? And how could these impact the future of our society?

Many leadership theories still focus on **what** successful leaders do and **how** this is successfully implemented, rather than on **who** they are and **why** they act in a specific way. We would like to investigate, according to your experience, if leadership is an innate **skill** that can be derived from an acquired trait, or a gradual, constant **process** of relation, collaboration and mutual growth. Please fill in this questionnaire as an introduction to our upcoming interview, which will be conducted as part of the research I am preparing for **Modul Private University** Vienna.

For any question, please write to:
office@comealive-film.com

1. *What is your age group?*

- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55+

2. *What is your working environment?*

- *Corporate Company*
- *Small to Mid-Sized Enterprise*
- *I am self employed*
- *Medical Practice or Hospital*
- *University or Cultural Institution*

3. *What is your role?*

- *Head of Company*
- *Manager or Group Leader*
- *Business Owner*
- *Professor*
- *Other*

QUESTIONNAIRE (PART I)

Which of the following statements apply to you.

Feel free to answer spontaneously - no answer will be used judgementally, and all answers will be anonymous. The scope of this survey is to evidence trends in working environments and share professional experience from real case studies that may either support or re-interpret theories more accurately.

1. *If you occupy a leadership position how long have you been working in such role?*

- *1-5 years*
- *6-10 years*
- *10-20 years*
- *20+ years*

2. *How many people do you manage in your team?*

- *1-5 people*
- *6-20 people*
- *21-50 people*
- *50+ people*

3. *On a scale from 1-5, how would you rate the relationship with your team? Were you able to build a constructive, mutually rewarding relationship?*

1 2 3 4 5

1. *absolutely in need of improvement* ----- 5. *absolutely fulfilling and mutually rewarding*

4. *What would help you improve your relationship with your team?*

- *Clarity of Intention*
- *Communication*
- *Empathy*
- *Humility*
- *Other*

5. *What would you consider to be the most important **qualities** of a leader?*

- *Accountability*
- *Emotional Intelligence*
- *Integrity*
- *Vision*
- *Other*

QUESTIONNAIRE (PART I) - continued

6. Which **skills** did you need the most, to lead your team up until now?

- *Communication*
- *Creativity*
- *Problem Solving*
- *Team Building*
- *Other*

7. What type of leader do you think you have been until now?

- *Authentic*
- *Empathic*
- *Motivational*
- *Servant*
- *Other*

8. What type of leader would you like to become?

- *Adaptive*
- *Disruptive*
- *Efficient*
- *Transformational*
- *Other*

9. What type of leader do you think your team would like you to be?

- *Accountable*
- *Empathic*
- *Responsible*
- *Supportive*
- *Other*

10. Which kind of leader would better serve our upcoming future after Covid-19?

- *Authentic*
- *Adaptive*
- *Empathic*
- *Transformational*
- *Other*

11. How effective would coaching be for you about the benefits of each leading style?

1 2 3 4 5

1. Would not impact the daily result ----- 5. Would be absolutely mandatory

QUESTIONNAIRE (PART II)

This is the final part of the questionnaire. This part covers some areas that investigate more closely your relationship with the concept of leadership and personal development.

1. *What areas could improve to bring your own organization, or business, closer to your ideal?*

- *Internal Communication*
- *Human Resources*
- *Operations & Processes*
- *Customer Management*
- *Other*

2. *What would improve the performance of your team, and bring them closer to your vision?*

- *Communication*
- *Empathy*
- *Incentivation*
- *Other*

3. *Ultimately, would you define leadership as a trait or a process?*

- *Trait*
- *Process*
- *A Mixture of Both*
- *Other*

4. *What alternative techniques could support your work as a leader?*

- *Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction*
- *Physical Activity (Yoga, Tai Chi, Boxing, etc.)*
- *Reading, Learning*
- *Other*

5. *What would improve your working environment?*

- *Flexible Locations (home office, remote working, etc.)*
- *Reduced Working Times (4-day week, 6-hour days, etc.)*
- *Less meetings and more engaging team activities*
- *Other*

6. *After taking this questionnaire, on a scale from 1 to 5, how do you feel about incentivising productivity, personal growth and well-being in your working environment?*

1 2 3 4 5

1. *No more than before*

5. *Absolutely more than ever!*

Appendix 2: Self-Assessment Questionnaire

Inspired by the questionnaire developed by the Centre for Creative Leadership (2020), here we report a similar *crisis leadership self-assessment* questionnaire, for leaders to determine how well they would perform under pressure or during a crisis. By rating their performance on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, leaders can evaluate how ready they are to face unexpected scenarios. This helps reflecting upon each leader's journey, and addresses areas of improvement relative to the main qualities we attribute to future leaders: focus, innovation, empathy, creativity, communication, adaptability, resilience and remote management (Bawany, 2018).

Rate your leadership tendencies from 1 (being very low) to 5 (being very high):

1. I can communicate effectively	1	2	3	4	5
2. I take initiative proactively	1	2	3	4	5
3. I think clearly under pressure	1	2	3	4	5
4. I keep calm and maintain self-control at all times	1	2	3	4	5
5. I remain optimistic despite ongoing challenges	1	2	3	4	5
6. I am flexible and adaptable	1	2	3	4	5
7. I am resilient and do not give up easily	1	2	3	4	5
8. I act decisively and in a timely manner	1	2	3	4	5
9. I establish goals with clear vision and direction	1	2	3	4	5
10. I am able to develop caring relationships	1	2	3	4	5
11. I share successes and reward my teams or employees	1	2	3	4	5
12. I take responsibility during times of crisis	1	2	3	4	5

From 48-60

Congratulations! You seem to have all the qualities necessary to lead your team through a time of crisis or change. Keep investing in yourself, fine-tuning your abilities and nourish your desire to grow and find personal gratification through good leadership in good and bad times.

From 36-47

You are on the right path, you have strong skills but may want to strengthen those areas where you scored three or less. Note them and work towards continuous improvement, as you certainly have what it takes to lead through crisis and still have good margins of growth.

From 25-35

You possess good leadership qualities, but there is room for improvement. You may find new inspiration in exploring new tools of communication, crisis management and personal growth.

Under 25

Dealing with crisis and unexpected events is the new norm for the leader of today. Focus on improving your crisis leadership qualities and you will be soon experiencing true change!

Appendix 3: A Chat with Open AI

Towards the end of 2022, the open AI platform presenting Chat GPT, quickly gained favour among the general public, presenting a basic, yet quite advanced Artificial Intelligence system able to discuss any topic of interest with the interviewer. As a test, in virtue of the work done on this thesis, we asked Chat GPT some questions about leadership in the post COVID-19 era. A transcript of the chat is reported here below, with an entertaining surprise at the end.

Q1. What most important traits would you associate to the role of leadership in the post COVID era?

In the post COVID era, some important traits for leadership may include adaptability, resilience, empathy, and the ability to communicate effectively and transparently.

Adaptability is important because the COVID-19 pandemic has created a rapidly changing and uncertain environment, and leaders will need to be able to quickly and effectively respond to new challenges and opportunities as they arise.

Resilience is also important because leaders will need to be able to bounce back from setbacks and continue to lead and inspire their teams even in the face of adversity.

Empathy is important because the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on people's mental health and well-being, and leaders will need to be able to understand and respond to the needs and concerns of their team members in a compassionate and understanding way.

Effective communication and transparency are also important because in times of uncertainty, people look to their leaders for guidance and direction. Leaders will need to be able to clearly and openly communicate their plans and actions to their team, stakeholders, and the public.

Q2. What kind of challenges and opportunities do you think wil most impact society in the near future?

Some of the most significant challenges and opportunities that could potentially impact society in the near future are:

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the efforts to contain and mitigate its impacts, as well as the development and distribution of vaccines and treatments.

Climate change and the need for increased efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect the environment.

The growing impact of technology on society, including the increasing use of artificial intelligence, automation, and the Internet of Things.

The global economic recovery from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the potential for rising inequality and the need for inclusive economic growth.

Political and social issues, such as immigration, racial and social justice, and the role of governments and other institutions in addressing these issues.

The impact of demographic changes, including an aging population and the potential for declining birth rates in some countries.

Overall, these challenges and opportunities will likely require significant leadership, collaboration, and innovation to address effectively.

Q3. What are the top 5 characteristics of effective leadership?

There are many characteristics that can contribute to effective leadership, and the specific characteristics that are most important may vary depending on the situation and the needs of the organization. However, some common characteristics of effective leaders include:

Vision: Effective leaders have a clear vision for the future of their organization and are able to inspire and motivate others to work towards achieving that vision.

Communication: Effective leaders are able to clearly and effectively communicate their vision, goals, and expectations to their team, stakeholders, and other key audiences.

Integrity: Effective leaders are honest, ethical, and transparent in their actions and decisions.

Adaptability: Effective leaders are able to adapt to changing circumstances and are open to new ideas and approaches.

Emotional intelligence: Effective leaders are able to understand and manage their own emotions and the emotions of others, which helps them to build strong relationships, resolve conflicts, and make better decisions.

Q4. Please express effective leadership in the form of a Limerick?

*An effective leader, with vision and wit
Inspired their team to never quit
They communicated clear
And were always sincere
Adaptable as they were,
No challenge they'd omit!*

Q5. Please explain leadership in surfer dude language?

*Leadership is like riding a big ol' wave
You gotta stay focused, be brave
Set a clear direction
Keep your team in perfection
Adapt to the changing waters,
And don't cave*

*It's all about inspiring and guiding
Towards a common goal, that's abiding
With integrity and heart
You'll lead to a new start
So grab your board
And let's go riding!*

Appendix 4: Quotations

As an end to this research, we report some official quotations, made explicitly by our candidates during the questionnaire completion or later in the interviews. We kept them anonymous as legitimately agreed during the interviews, and they evidence the main themes of discussion and our candidates' points of view on the topics. When asked about the difference about skills and traits, and what leadership meant to each candidate, here are the most indicative short answers we received.

- *“Leadership is a mindset, which evolves during the years”.*
- *“Leadership is a profession or skillset in its own right, for which there is very little education.”*
- *“In leadership some things come naturally, other things have to be acquired and learned.”*
- *“A leader should select a target and style according to the needs and reach it step by step.”*
- *“A leader can only influence structure, process and decide who is working in what position”.*
- *“Leaders should be brave enough to change, and change again, independently of where they stand today, expanding constantly beyond their comfort zone”.*
- *“Per se I don't believe leadership is connected to authority (...) however, irrespective of position, leaders become authoritative when exhibiting traits that people feel attracted to, and thus are willing to follow”.*

Finally, these are inspiring quotes from known personalities with their takeaways on leadership:

1. *“The function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not followers.”*

- Ralf Nader

2. *“The supreme quality of leadership is integrity.”*

- Dwight D. Eisenhower

3. *“Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality.”*

- Warren G. Bennis

4. *“The pessimist complains about the wind. The optimist expects it to change. The leader adjusts the sails.”*

- John C. Maxwell

5. *“A successful person finds the right place for himself. A successful leader finds the right place for others.”*

- John C. Maxwell

“Skills can and do expire. Organizations need people who can continually learn and adapt.”

McKinsey Accelerate

