LEADERSHIP THEORIES: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW BASED ON BIBLIOMETRIC AND CONTENT ANALYSIS METHODS

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A B S T R A C T

In this article, we investigated the existing knowledge of Leadership theories aiming at mapping the evolution of the main theories up to 120 years through collaborative networks. N = 3,968 publication records were extracted from Google Scholar through keyword searching, resulting in approximately one million citations. Based on these records, the study performed bibliometric analysis, including text network, citation, trend and content analysis, revealing themes in the field. The findings are helpful to scholars, students, leaders, and other practitioners, to gain a deeper understanding of the timeline, geographical spread, and development of theories. A careful literature review revealed that the scholarly research revolves mostly around (i) Transformational Leadership; (ii) Contingency, and (iii) Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theories. Furthermore, the number of citations on leadership more than tripled in the last two decades and might double in the coming decades. This study also suggests recommendations for future studies.

K E Y W O R D S

Leadership, content analysis, citation analysis, Literature review, network text analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is vital in fostering a positive work environment, employee engagement, and organizational commitment across various sectors, including private and public services. Enhanced emotional intelligence and cultural awareness contribute to leaders' effectiveness in motivating subordinates toward higher performance (Bass, 1990, 2008). Leadership is one of the most prominent research topics investigated over the past century. Despite its relevance, there are still some relevant aspects to be clarified. Therefore, this article aims to answer the following questions: RQ1: How has leadership been cited over the last 120 years? RQ2: What supporting theories are the most prominent and cited? RQ3: What are the leading Publications in the field? RQ4: What is the geographical spread and development of theories?

Leadership theories have attracted the attention of scholars over the past decades (Bass, 1990; Fiedler and Garcia, 1987; Fiedler, 1964; Murphy, 1941; Jacobs, 1970; Jennings, 1960; Newell and Simon, 1972; Argyris, 1964; Hollander, 1958; Hallinger and Murphy, 1985; Homans, 1950; Stogdill, 1959; House, 1971; Dansereau, Graen, and Haga, 1975; Homans, 1950; Bass and Valenzi, 1974; Burns, 1934; Bogardus, 1918; Yukl, 1971; House, 1977; Hersey and Blanchard, 1969; Hodgkinson, 1978; House, 1971; Yukl, 1971; Sims, 1977; Hayes, 1995; House, 1971; Pfeffer, 1977; Stogdill and Shartle, 1948; Wolman, 1971; Vroom and Yetton, 1974; Bass, 1960; Stogdill, 1959; Hersey and Blanchard, 1977; Hallinger, 1992; Kerr and Jermier, 1978; Osborn and Hunt, 1975; Smith and Krueger, 1933; Burns, 1978; Giddens, 1984; Venkatesh et al., 2003, Sanderson and Nafe, 1929; Chapin, 1924; Bartlett, 1926; Weber, 1947; House and Adidas, 1995; Jennings, 1960; Morrow and Stern, 1988; Lippitt, 1999; Maccoby, 1979; Pigors, 1936; Cattel and Stice, 1954; Bales and Slater, 1955; Benne and Sheats, 1948; Levine,1949; Clark, 1951; Getzels and Guba, 1957; Oliverson, 1976; Lieberman, Yalom and Miles, 1973; Redl, 1948; Conway, 1915; Spaulding, 1934; Harding, 1949; Zaccaro and Bader, 2003; Calder, 1977), to name a few.

Finally, this work intends to improve the understanding of the relevance of Leadership to the research area by investigating the global scientific research on Leadership theories, identifying influential research studies based on Citation networks, and text network analysis to provide emerging trends on the subject. To achieve these results, we addressed the research questions through multiple methods approach, combining literature review with content, citation, and text network analysis, outlined in the following section.

2. METHODOLOGY

In this study, we adopted a qualitative, multiple-method approach to achieve the findings, including a literature review on Leadership, content, citation, and text network analysis. This study has employed a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology to ensure the transparent and comprehensive coverage of the literature (Denyer and Tranfield 2009). The selection was based on its widespread acceptance in bibliometric evaluations. (Cheng et al. 2018; Prashar et al. 2020; Singh and Walia 2020). The subsequent subsections describe the methodological procedure in detail.

2.1. Review Objectives

We followed Goyal & Kumar (2020) to set the review objectives, aiming primarily at mapping global scientific research on Leadership. We also followed Zahoor &Talba (2020) organizing the research objectives into sub objectives including (i) mapping the Leading Publications on the subjects; (ii) identifying influential research studies based on Citation network and text network

analysis to provide emerging trends on the subject. Finally, the review objectives are summarized in Table 2.

2.2. Research Strategy

The systematic literature review covered 4,000 publications, unfolding nearly one million citations. We also employed the software Publish or Perish (Harzing, 2007) to investigate the research coverage from 1900 to date. The search parameters included only words in the English Language. Then, the academic dataset selected was the Google Scholar, which is unrestricted, instead of Web of Science or Scopus, which require a signature. Publish or Perish (Harzing, 2007) allows 1,000 results per consultation session. After the first round, a text network analysis was performed to identify the most relevant emerging themes. Next, the emerging themes were used as keyword entries in a new iterative round. Then, the data were content, citation, and text network analyzed. The emerging trends were also analyzed geographically, through Google My Maps® (see Figure 4).

2.3. Screening and Selection

Firstly, we investigated the keyword "leadership," setting the software above to include publications and exclude patents as a search default. Thus, the total search involved 4,000 articles, with 32 exclusions due to duplications, totaling 3,968 articles investigated, and 987,673 citations, distributed among LMX, Contingency, Transformative Leadership, and Other Theories, as illustrated in Table 1.

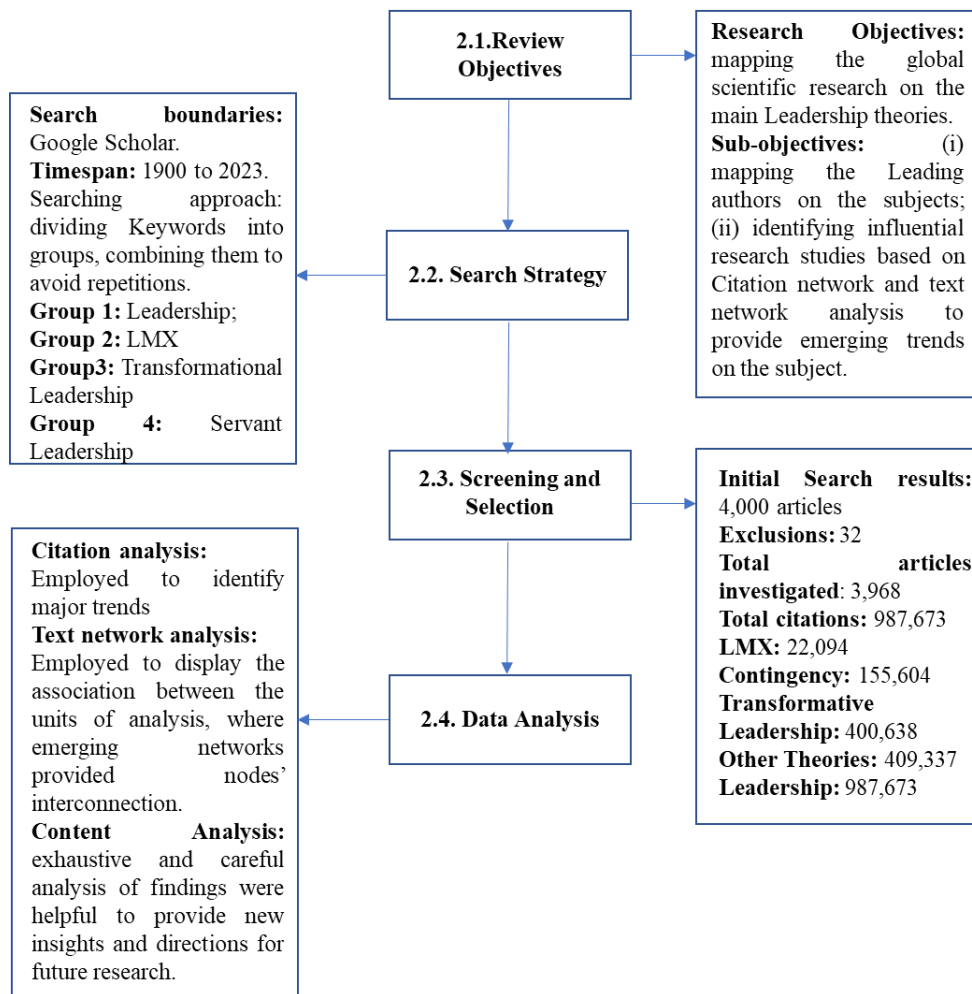**Table 1** *Number of citations per theme (group)*

Theory	LMX	Contingency	Transformational Leadership	Other	Total
Total	**22.094**	**155.604**	**400.638**	**409.337**	**987.673**

2.4. Data Analysis

Three themes were revealed, and an iterative process led to four sessions to accomplish the research findings. The themes were organized into groups, and subgroups, divided according to relevance, such as Group 1: Leadership; Subgroup A: LMX; Subgroup B: Transformational Leadership, and Subgroup C: Contingency Theory, as illustrated in Figure

Each group (theme) served, in turn, as keyword entries from 1900 to 2023. Then, the findings were organized into decades, according to their occurrence, because different aspects influenced leadership theories throughout the period investigated. For instance, according to Dias et al., 2022, the first half of the twentieth century was focused on personal attributes, abilities, psychological traits, and values. Next, leadership styles, and Contingency Theory became research topics in the 1960s. Situations and leadership styles were researched from the 1960s to the 1980s. Motivational and transformational theories emerged in the 1990s (Bass, 2008). In the 2000s, information technology and advanced communication (Zaccaro&Badaro, 2003) or remote leadership styles influenced leadership theories. Finally, Table 2 summarizes the research design as follows:

Table 2 *Research Design*

2.1.Review Objectives	**Research Objectives:** mapping the global scientific research on the main Leadership theories. **Sub-objectives:** (i) mapping the Leading authors on the subjects; (ii) identifying influential research studies based on Citation network and text network analysis to provide emerging trends on the subject.

Search boundaries: Google Scholar.
Timespan: 1900 to 2023.
Searching approach: dividing Keywords into groups, combining them to avoid repetitions.
Group 1: Leadership;
Group 2: LMX
Group3: Transformational Leadership
Group 4: Servant Leadership

2.2. Search Strategy

2.3. Screening and Selection

Initial Search results: 4,000 articles
Exclusions: 32
Total articles investigated: 3,968
Total citations: 987,673
LMX: 22,094
Contingency: 155,604
Transformative Leadership: 400,638
Other Theories: 409,337
Leadership: 987,673

Citation analysis: Employed to identify major trends
Text network analysis: Employed to display the association between the units of analysis, where emerging networks provided nodes' interconnection.
Content Analysis: exhaustive and careful analysis of findings were helpful to provide new insights and directions for future research.

2.4. Data Analysis

3.BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS
3.1. Trend Analysis

Figure 1 indicates a yearly number of publications in the fields of business, administration, covering the subject "Leadership." The study into this domain is uneven between 1900 and 2023.
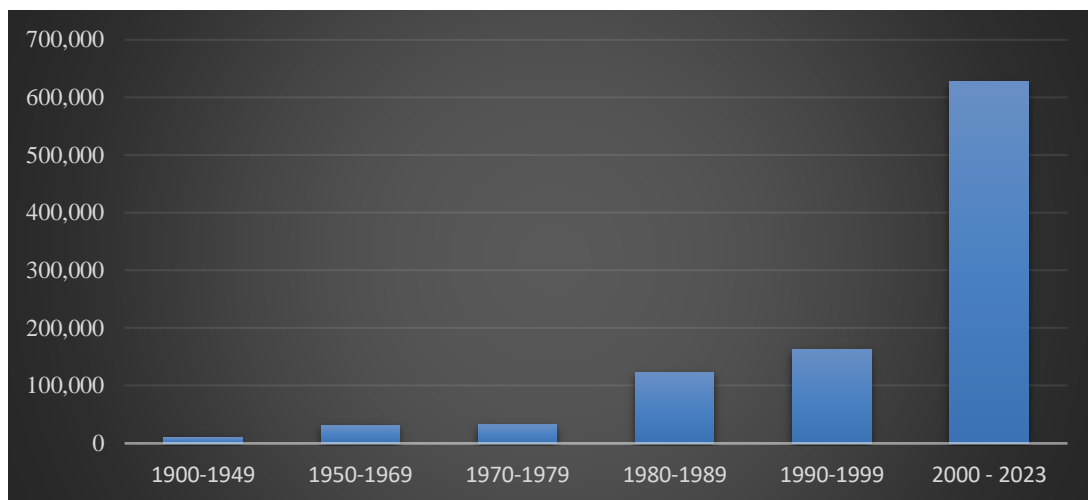

Figure 1 Publishing trend in the field of Leadership

Figure 2 shows the final trend analysis findings on the text network, content, and citation analysis:
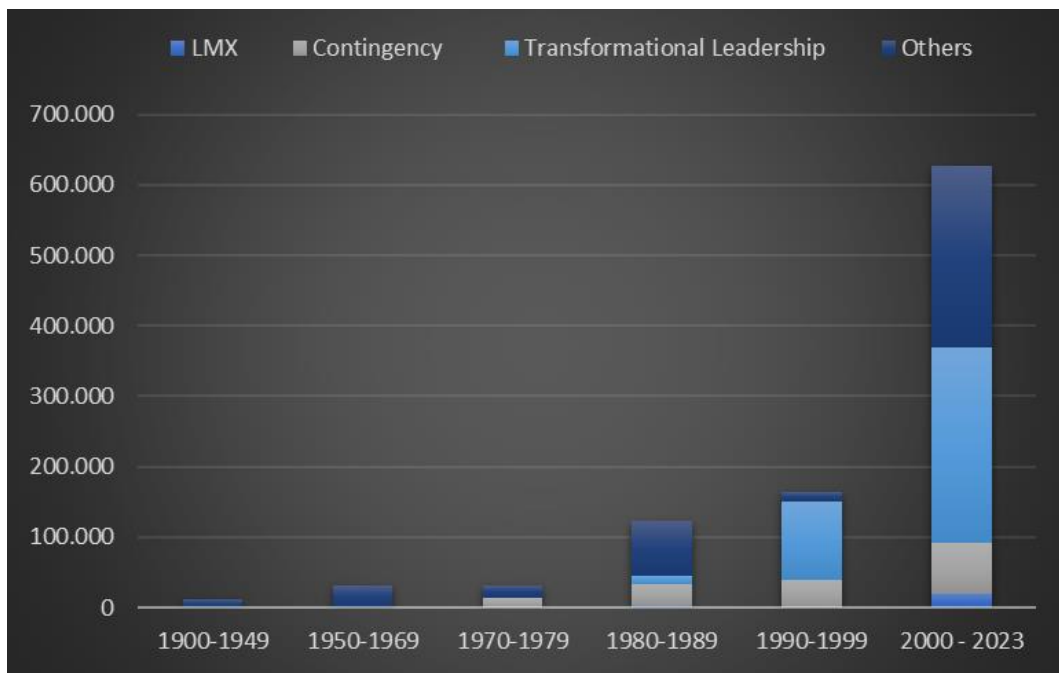

Figure 2 Publishing trend in the field of Leadership: themes distribution

Observe that Transformational Leadership is the topic most cited over the past two decades, with 41 percent of the entire citations, as illustrated in the following Figure 3:
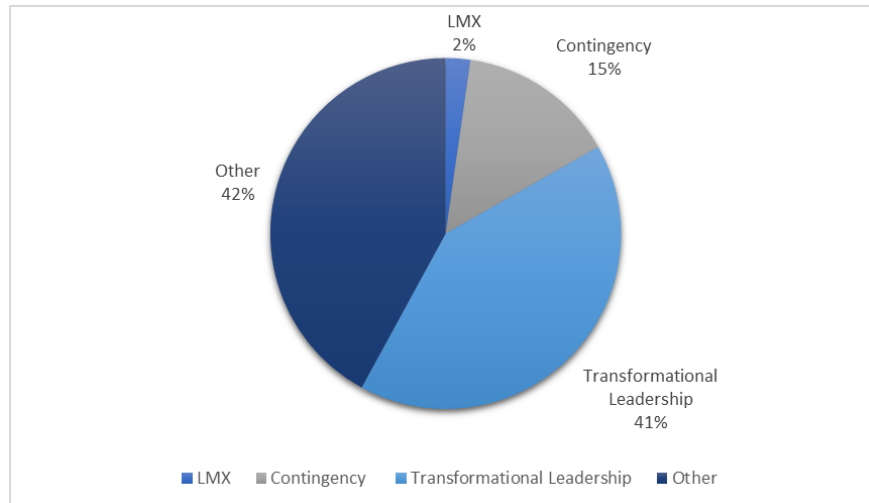

Figure 3 Publishing in the field of Leadership: topic distribution (1900-2023)

Figure 3 shows the citation distribution from 1900 to 2023 from the data gathered in Google Scholar. Contingency Theory is the second most cited topic (15 percent), almost one-third from Transformational Leadership, and seven times LMX (2 percent). Figures 2 and 3 provide a specific dimension of the references from papers and books, especially in this scholarly work.

In addition, the total results of the screening process are illustrated in Table 3, showing that leadership theories were mainly focused on personal attributes, abilities, values, and characteristics from 1900 to 1949. From 1950 to 1969, personal leadership styles became research prominent

research topics. Situations and leadership styles were researched from the 1970s to the 1980s. Motivational and transformational theories emerged in the 1990s (Bass, 2008). In the 2000s, information technology and enhanced communication have also influenced leadership theories (Zaccaro&Badaro, 2003). Table 3 also shows that LMX, Contingency Theory, and Transformational Leadership, amongst others, are the most cited from 1900 to 2023, organized into periods.

Table 3 Screening results: number of citations per theme

Timeline	LMX	Contingency	Transformational Leadership	Other	**Total**
1900-1949				11.034	**11.034**
1950-1969		14		31.213	**31.227**
1970-1979	72	14.229		17.803	**32.104**
1980-1989	1.973	31.231	11.132	78.329	**122.665**
1990-1999	938	38.380	110.903	13.347	**163.568**
2000 - 2023	19.111	71.750	278.603	257.611	**627.075**
Total	**22.094**	**155.604**	**400.638**	**409.337**	**987.673**

Next, we gathered Publications' affiliations from the .csv file saved from Publish or Perish (Harzing, 2007). Using https://www.google.com/intl/pt-BR/maps/about/mymaps/ (Google My Maps), the geographical distribution of the leading publishers is illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4 Geographical location of all contributing organizations.

3.2. Author influence

The most influential contributors to the field of Leadership are introduced in Tables 4 to 7, which depict the most influential researchers divided into themes as follows:

Table 4 *Leadership: top 10 Publications*

Rank	Citations	Author(s)	Year
1	69.579	EH Schein	2010
2	39.091	G Yukl	1981
3	38.592	JMG Burns	2012
4	33.952	BBass, Bass Bernard	1985
5	29.734	PG Northouse	2021
6	21.682	JKouzes, BZ Posner	2006
7	17.844	LG Bolman, TE Deal	2017
8	16.840	BBass, RE Riggio	2006
9	14.427	Selznick	2011
10	13.740	FE Fiedler	1967

Table 5 *Contingency Theory: top 10 Publications*

Rank	Citations	Author(s)	Year
1	13.763	Fiedler, F.	1967
2	5.481	RH Chenhall	2003
3	4.487	L Donaldson	2001
4	3.305	R Drazin, AH Van de Ven	1985
5	3047	Fiedler, F.	1964
6	2.910	DT Otley	1980
7	2.743	DJ Hickson, CR Hinings, CA Lee, RE Schneck…	1971
8	2.711	MA Hitt, RD Ireland, SM Camp…	2001
9	2.698	RG Lord, CL De Vader, GM Alliger	1986
10	1.933	DC Feldman	1976

Table 6 *LMX: top 10 Publications*

Rank	Citations	Author(s)	Year
1	1.434	S Mohammed, BC Dumville	2001
2	1.319	TM Moe	1988
3	1.305	J Chhokar, F Brodbeck, R House	2007
4	856	J Kuoppala, A Lamminpää, J Liira, H Vainio	2008
5	814	W Kok	2009
6	786	N Li, J Liang, JM Crant	2010
7	510	FR Dwyer, S Oh	1988
8	487	EH Al Khajeh	2018
9	436	NS Contractor, LA DeChurch, J Carson…	2012
10	422	M Tremblay, J Cloutier, G Simard…	2010

Table 7 *Transformational Leadership top 10 Publications*

Rank	Citations	Author(s)	Year
1	16.854	BM Bass, RE Riggio	2006
2	10.870	BM Bass, BJ Avolio	1994
3	10.689	BM Bass	1990
4	9.434	PM Podsakoff, SB MacKenzie, RH Moorman…	1990
5	6.362	BM Bass	1999
6	5.657	BM Bass, P Steidlmeier	1999
7	4.992	NM Tichy, MA Devanna	1986
8	4.773	BM Bass	1997
9	4.338	JM Howell, BJ Avolio	1993
10	3.750	BM Bass, BJ Avolio	1993

It is worth praising the remarkable work of Bernard Bass (1925-2007), illustrated in Table 7. In his "Handbook of Leadership" (Bass, 1990, 2008), he gathered one of the most objective and influential systematic approaches to Leadership. Unfortunately, Bass passed away before his fourth edition was ready[1]and could not appreciate the new paradigms and challenges that leaders faced worldwide, particularly after the coronavirus pandemic (Dias et al., 2022).

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[1]Work completed in 2008 by his wife, Ruth Bass.

3.3. Network text analysis

Based on the assumption that keywords clustered together may indicate related topics, a network map of the keywords, titles, and abstracts was used to locate the thematic clusters.Figure 5 illustrates the network text analysis, in which a density-based spacing clustering, and normalization algorithms were employed. Using www.infrandus.com, we visualized the text-based data as a network graph, revealing insights and patterns base on the network properties, mostly involving the words "Leadership," and "Transformational." Note that each color represents a cluster. Therefore, the current themes and evolving trends in the field were identified by extensively examining research papers in each cluster.
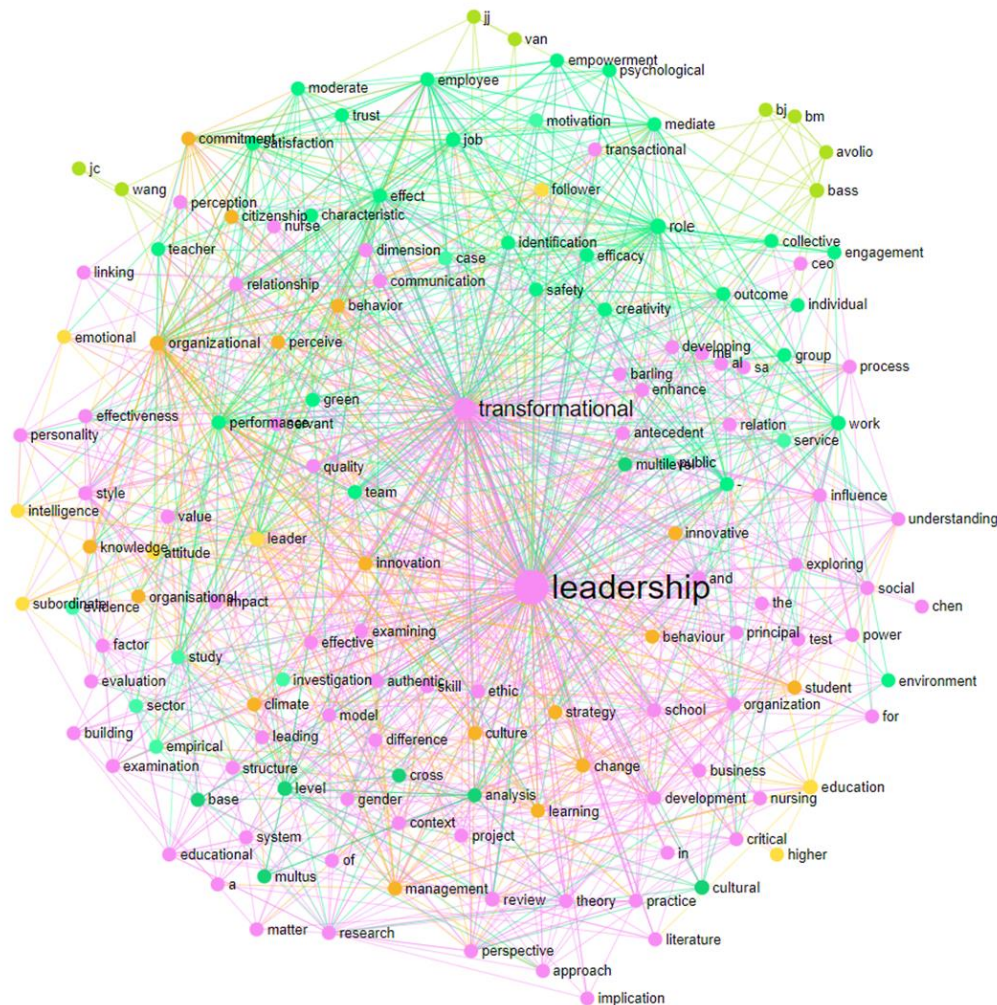
Figure 5 Network text analysis. Source: InfraNodus

4. Content Analysis

Note that the academic community overwhelmingly cited Transformational Leadership, with 400,638 citations, mostly from the 1980s to date (see Table 3). Contingency Theory, similarly, became also cited from the 1980s. Conversely, LMX is cited from the 1970s to date, in the proportions mentioned in Figure 3. Content analysis also indicated that previous research mainly focused on the "Great Man" theories, relying in personal traits and personal styles. The themes investigated are summarized in the following subsections.

4.1. Transformational Leadership

The most cited topic, transformational leadership, is a management philosophy that motivates staff and inspires followers. Burns (1978) revealed initially transformative and transactional leadership, describing transactional leadership as a relationship in which followers work with the leader in return for praise, resources, and prizes while avoiding sanctions. Still, according to Burns (1978), transformative leadership was described as a process of influence where leaders and followers engage in a positive interchange of ideas to make the required changes in social structures. Later, Bass (1985) enhanced the study of transformative leadership, adopting Transformational Leadership instead. Finally, according to Bass (1985), transformational leadership may lead to long-term effort, productivity, and innovation, whereas transactional leadership can provide satisfactory outcomes in the short term.

4.2. Contingency

In the 1960s, Austrian psychologist Fred Fiedler also created the Contingency Theory (see Table 1). He concluded that changing one's leadership style is complicated, even if possible (Fiedler, 1964). He maintained that leadership style (a dispositional variable) and situational compliance (a situational variable) were necessary for leaders to succeed. A leader could perform well in one circumstance but poorly in another. Fiedler (1964) emphasized the significance of external influences in his Contingency Theory. Leaders should choose various actions depending on the situation.

4.3. Leader-Member Exchange (LMX)

In order to explore the leader-member exchange (LMX), theories of role-playing and social exchanges were used (Liden &Maslyn, 1998; Graen&Uhl-Bien, 1995). As a result, the definition of leadership was expanded to include the interplay of mutual influence between individuals. The effectiveness of the innovator-fan connection as a moderator and performance negotiator has been the subject of recent investigation.

4. DISCUSSION

The present research attempts to throw more light to the Leadership literature providing an overview on the themes Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Contingency, and Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theories, the most cited in this study. The systematic review extracted relevant information on the existing literature, and keeping in mind the evidence gathered in the present research, we share some observations and discuss implications for future studies. Firstly, the answer to the research questions RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4 is introduced.

RQ1: How has leadership been cited over the last 120 years?

The answer to RQ1 is depicted in Figure 2. Over the past century, Leadership is a topic that has been widely studied in the past century, with emphasis on Transformative Leadership, for the last 40 years. Evidence is shown in Table 3, whereas Leadership performed in this research 987,673 citations from only one database, Google Scholar. It is naturally expected that all databases summed up perform more significant citation numbers.

RQ2: What supporting theories are the most prominent and cited?

The answer to RQ2 is depicted in Table 3. Evidence suggests three supporting theories that are most prominent and cited: Transformational Leadership (409,337 citations), Contingency Theory (155,604), and LMX Theory (22,094). We also point to "Other" (409,337 citations), by which less cited theories or duplicated theories scattered findings since some authors publish more than one topic per article

(some literature reviews, for instance). The exhaustive process, however, is far from being definitive and error-free.

RQ3: What are the leading Publications in the field?

The 40 leading publications in the field can be seen in Tables 4 to 7. However, evidence suggests that Bernard Bass "Handbook of Leadership" (Bass, 1990) is the most cited reference in the field.

RQ4: What is the geographical spread and development of theories?

The answer to RQ4 is depicted in Figure 4. The geographic distribution mainly covers North America and Europe, extending to other continents. Evidence suggests that the United States is the leading country in many citations. However, only articles in English were investigated. Therefore, further studies are necessary to investigate the global contribution of other languages on Leadership.

5. Implications and Research limitations

In this study, we came to a common understanding of the most cited leadership theories throughout the last 120 years. However, the scope of this research is restricted to leadership theories. Other topics, such as leadership styles, personality, attributes, and ethicsare beyond the scope of the current study and need to be looked into independently. This research has implications and ramifications for many areas of study, including for instance: (i) business negotiations (Dias et al., 2022; Dias, M., 2020; Dias, M, Leitão, R., Batista, R., Medeiros, D. 2022; Cunha&Dias, M., 2021; Dias, M., 2020b); (ii) teleworking (Schimtz& Dias, M., 2023); (iii) banking (Dias, Pereira, and Vieira, 2022); (iv) Remote leadership (Dias, Pereira, Vieira, and Pan, 2022); (v) information security and leadership (Vieira & Dias, 2022); (vi) virtual teaching (Dias and Lopes, 2020; Dias, Lopes and Teles, 2020); (vii) retail business (Dias &Falconi, 2018). Finally, this work is helpful to scholars, leaders, decision-makers, policy makers, and other practitioners.

6. Conclusion and Future research

The themes that emerged from the literature review are based on careful consideration of previous conceptualizations, arguments, and theories presented by past researchers in the field, along with corresponding citations. The systematic literature review pointed out an ever-increasing number of citations in Leadership, suggesting that leadership might double the number of citations in the next two decades.

It is feasible to lessen the uncertainty that has tainted leadership studies for more than a century by comprehending leadership theories via systematic literature reviews, opening the door for future research. Additionally, as practitioners and analysts collaborate on shared views on these complex topics, examination, and practice will be improved. In addition, this article will advance investigation into frequently ignored areas and strengthen the theoretical foundation for future interventions and estimations. We conclude that transformational leadership theory has become prominent over the past four decades and that scholars' contributions to the field are spread all over the globe. In addition, future research is encouraged in other research fields, including other languages and databases.

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