

Leadership Styles and Employee Performance: A Systematic Literature Review of Empirical Studies (2020-2025)

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ABSTRACT

This systematic literature review comprehensively analyzes the relationship between leadership styles and employee performance based on empirical evidence from 2020-2025. The research population comprises employees and leaders across various organizational sectors including education, healthcare, and industry. Using the PRISMA framework with purposive sampling technique, the selection process from an initial pool of 500 studies identified through database searches yielded 14 high-quality empirical studies as the final sample that met the inclusion criteria. The methodology employed systematic literature review with rigorous quality assessment and analysis. Key findings reveal that the relationship between leadership styles and employee performance is predominantly positive and significant, with three distinct patterns emerging. The majority of studies (8 studies) demonstrated dominant positive influence from transformational and servant leadership, while several studies (3 studies) showed positive but non-dominant influence where organizational factors outweighed leadership effects. Notably, no studies found significant negative impacts from constructive leadership styles. Furthermore, the relationship was frequently mediated by variables including ethical organizational culture, knowledge sharing, and job security. In conclusion, this systematic review substantiates that adaptive, empowerment-focused leadership serves as a crucial driver of employee performance, offering substantial practical value for organizations to develop evidence-based, contextual leadership strategies that foster work environments conducive to sustained productivity and organizational excellence in the modern business landscape.

Keywords: Employee Performance; Leadership Style; Organizational Culture; Systematic Literature Review; Transformational Leadership.

PENDAHULUAN

The rapidly changing global business environment is pushing organizations to adapt through strong, strategic, and effective leadership. In today's workplace, leadership style has become a key factor that shapes employee performance and overall organizational success (Fajar, 2022). Leaders are no longer just supervisors they also serve as motivators, facilitators, and builders of a productive work culture. This study is based on transformational leadership theory and contingency theory, which together provide a lens for understanding how leaders can move beyond simple transactional exchanges to inspire higher levels of performance while adjusting their behavior to different situational needs. Leadership style represents the patterns and approaches leaders use to influence their employees in reaching organizational goals. A range of empirical research highlights that transformational, transactional, and situational leadership styles influence employee performance differently, depending on both organizational conditions and individual characteristics (Wen et al., 2023). Transformational leadership emphasizes inspiration and empowerment, while transactional leadership focuses on reward-and-punishment systems tied to performance outcomes.

Employee performance is a central indicator of how effective an organization is. (Andrianto et al., 2023) note that performance is shaped by motivation, competence, and job satisfaction factors that are closely linked to the leader's style. Leaders who can adjust their leadership approach to match organizational conditions often succeed in creating a supportive work environment that boosts productivity and encourages stronger employee commitment (Ridwan et al., 2023). Evidence from studies conducted between 2020 and 2025 across sectors such as banking [(Khaled et al., 2025), (Mong & Thanh, 2025)], IT (Bezzina & Cassar, 2025), public services (Ahmed et al., 2023), and healthcare (Syahrir & Hasan, 2023) consistently reinforces this relationship. These studies also show that leadership does not usually influence performance directly; instead, the effect often occurs through mediators like perceived organizational support, work motivation, and organizational trust, which strengthen the overall impact of leadership on performance.

A number of empirical studies indicate that transformational and participative leadership styles tend to enhance employee performance, particularly in environments that are dynamic and driven by innovation (Ar-Rasyi & Sopiah, 2023). However, other research presents mixed results, showing that the effectiveness of a specific leadership style can vary widely depending on factors such as organizational culture, hierarchical structure, and broader situational conditions (Ran et al., 2025). This variability is also reflected in the set of 21 studies analyzed, which reveal substantial differences in outcomes across contexts. For instance, transformational leadership demonstrates strong positive effects in Jordanian banking institutions and Lebanese nonprofit organizations [(Khaled et al., 2025), (Salameh-ayanian et al., 2025)], yet its influence is less consistent in other work settings, where alternative approaches such as servant leadership (Koszela, 2022) and innovative leadership (Al-Hyari, 2023) prove more relevant.

In addition, the presence of numerous mediating factors including communication quality, affective commitment, job security, and organizational trust adds layers of complexity and results in a fragmented picture of how leadership ultimately shapes employee performance.

Although there is substantial empirical evidence from 2020–2025, existing literature reviews still fall short for three main reasons: they do not specifically examine empirical findings from the post-pandemic digital era (2020–2025), they fail to distinguish between dominant and emerging non-dominant leadership styles, and they overlook the mediating mechanisms that help explain why leadership effects vary across studies. The dataset used in this study clearly highlights these gaps.

First, it includes 23 recent studies that capture post-pandemic organizational dynamics, yet no current review focuses exclusively on this crucial time period. Second, the studies investigate not only well-established leadership styles such as transformational and transactional leadership but also rising non-dominant styles like servant, shared, and innovative leadership approaches that previous reviews often group together without proper differentiation. Third, almost all the studies [(Khaled et al., 2025); (Bastari et al., 2020), (Bezzina & Cassar, 2025)] analyze mediating variables, but existing reviews have not systematically categorized or compared these mediating mechanisms. This creates a significant gap in the current body of literature.

This study addresses the existing gaps by conducting a systematic review of 23 empirical studies from 2020-2025 using the PRISMA method, offering an updated and comprehensive synthesis of how leadership styles influence employee performance. The novelty of this research lies in its integrated mapping of dominant, non-dominant, and mediated leadership effects an aspect that previous SLRs have not systematically organized.

More specifically, this review makes three original contributions based on the analysis of the dataset:

1. ***Time-Bounded Synthesis:***

It delivers the first focused review that examines leadership–performance relationships exclusively within the post-pandemic, digitally evolving period of 2020–2025, capturing the realities of modern organizational environments.

2. ***style specific classification***

It systematically differentiates and compares the impacts of dominant leadership styles (transformational, transactional) with emerging non dominant styles (servant, shared, innovative), as reflected in the collected studies.

3. **Mechanism-Based Examination:**

It organizes and analyzes the mediating variables identified across the studies such as perceived organizational support, motivation, trust, communication quality, and job security to clarify the pathways through which leadership styles shape performance outcomes.

This research applies a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to evaluate and synthesize empirical findings published between 2020 and 2025. This method enables the identification of patterns, trends, and research gaps concerning the relationship between leadership styles and employee performance within contemporary organizational contexts.

This study is expected to contribute theoretically by deepening the understanding of how different leadership styles play a role in enhancing employee performance, and practically by helping managers and practitioners design leadership strategies that remain adaptable in times of rapid organizational change. On the theoretical side, the research presents a more refined framework that links particular leadership styles to performance outcomes through clearly identified mediating mechanisms. On the practical side, it offers evidence-based insights that organizations can use to choose and apply leadership approaches that best fit their unique conditions and goals.

LITERATUR REVIEW

Recent research on the relationship between leadership and employee performance has shifted away from searching for simple linear effects and toward mapping more complex causal networks shaped by mediating and moderating variables. A synthesis of contemporary empirical studies conducted across various sectors and countries reveals three overarching themes: (1) the consistent positive influence of active leadership styles, (2) the nuanced mediation mechanisms that differ depending on the leadership type, and (3) the critical role of contextual contingencies that shape these relationships.

a. Consistent Findings: Strong Positive Effects of Transformational and Modern Leadership Styles

A substantial body of empirical evidence demonstrates that visionary, supportive, and adaptive leadership styles reliably enhance employee performance across organizational settings. Transformational leadership captured through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration emerges as a dominant predictor in at least 12 studies. This pattern appears in diverse contexts, including Jordanian banking (Khaled et al., 2025), Lebanese NGOs operating under extreme uncertainty (Salameh-ayanian et al., 2025), Indonesian state-owned enterprises (Bastari et al., 2020), Malaysian hospitality firms (Ern et al., 2022).

Contemporary leadership models demonstrate comparable or even superior effectiveness in specific contexts:

- a) Inclusive leadership significantly improves employee performance in the Ethiopian hospitality sector by enhancing employee engagement (Eshete et al., 2025)
- b) Ambidextrous leadership, which blends exploratory and exploitative behaviors, strengthens both innovative work behavior and general performance in IT organizations (Dinesh et al., 2024)
- c) Servant leadership boosts performance through long-term psychological mechanisms that reduce turnover intention (Koszela, 2022)
- d) Innovative leadership fosters innovative behavior via increased job security (Al-Hyari, 2023).

Collectively, these findings indicate that effective post-pandemic leadership depends not on charismatic authority but on the ability to cultivate a psychologically safe and empowering environment that encourages critical thinking, innovation, and emotional engagement.

b. Inconsistent Findings: Organizational Context as a Determinant of Leadership Relevance

Despite general patterns, no leadership style is universally effective. Variation in results arises primarily from organizational context and national culture, which act as moderators of leadership impact. Transactional leadership, for instance, strongly predicts performance in countries such as Pakistan (Abdelmegeed et al., 2023) and Sierra Leone (Kebe & Kahl, 2024), where reward-based mechanisms align with hierarchical norms and operational stability. Yet, within the volatile environment of Lebanese NGOs, the same style fails to predict performance though it remains relevant for job satisfaction (Salameh-ayanian et al., 2025). In Ethiopia's coordination-intensive sports sector, transformational leadership outperforms transactional styles (Liu et al., 2024). More strikingly, laissez-faire leadership consistently yields negative outcomes. Evidence from Ethiopia indicates a significant negative relationship between this passive style and employee performance, reinforcing that leadership absence is not neutral but detrimental in settings requiring direction and clarity (Liu et al., 2024).

In Oman's highly procedural public sector, leadership does not act as a direct predictor at all; instead, it moderates the relationship between job description clarity and performance (Ahmed et al., 2023). This suggests that in rigid bureaucratic systems, leadership amplifies structural mechanisms rather than substituting for them.

c. Mediation Mechanisms: Psychosocial Processes as the Core Pathways

One of the most theoretically meaningful findings across these studies is that leadership seldom influences performance directly; instead, its effects are transmitted through psychosocial mediators. Of the 23 studies reviewed, 16 incorporate mediation models, revealing the psychological architecture through which leadership shapes performance:

Perceived organizational support (POS) serves as a predominant mediator in Jordan (Khaled et al., 2025) and Indonesia (Astuty & Udin, 2020), emphasizing that employees perform better when they feel valued and supported perceptions shaped by leadership behaviors:

- a) Work motivation mediates leadership's effect in at least three Indonesian studies [(Bastari et al., 2020) (Nurna & Wibowo, 2020), (Fonseca & Costa, 2020)]
- b) Employee engagement acts as a key pathway in Vietnam (Mong & Thanh, 2025) and Ethiopia (Eshete et al., 2025)
- c) Job security mediates the link between innovative leadership and innovative behavior in Jordan (Al-Hyari, 2023)

Communication quality and organizational commitment explain the effects of shared leadership in IT sectors (Bezzina & Cassar, 2025), while turnover intention mediates the impact of servant leadership (Koszela, 2022).

Collectively, these insights reject the simplistic assumption of a direct "leadership to performance" relationship and instead support a more realistic model, leadership works by shaping the psychological and social conditions that enable performance to emerge organically.

d. Conceptual Model Summary

Evidence from 23 high-quality studies conducted between 2020 and 2025 indicates that leadership's influence on employee performance is largely context-dependent and operates through mediators such as perceived organizational support, motivation, engagement, job security, communication quality, and turnover intention. Although transformational, inclusive, ambidextrous, servant, and innovative leadership styles generally produce positive outcomes across sectors such as banking, IT, hospitality, NGOs, and public health, their impact varies with cultural norms, sector characteristics, and structural rigidity. In highly bureaucratic or uncertain environments, leadership may function more as a moderating force than a direct predictor. This suggests that leadership effectiveness is less about adopting a particular style and more about constructing a mediating psychosocial infrastructure characterized by psychological safety, trust, clear motivation, and organizational support that enables strong employee performance to develop naturally within a healthy relational system

METHOD

This research uses the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, conducted systematically and structured based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses

(PRISMA) guidelines. This approach was chosen to identify, evaluate, and synthesize empirical findings that discuss the influence of leadership styles on employee performance. Additionally, the Population, Intervention, Comparison, and Outcome (PICO) framework was used to formulate research questions in a focused manner and to develop a strategy for searching for relevant and targeted literature.

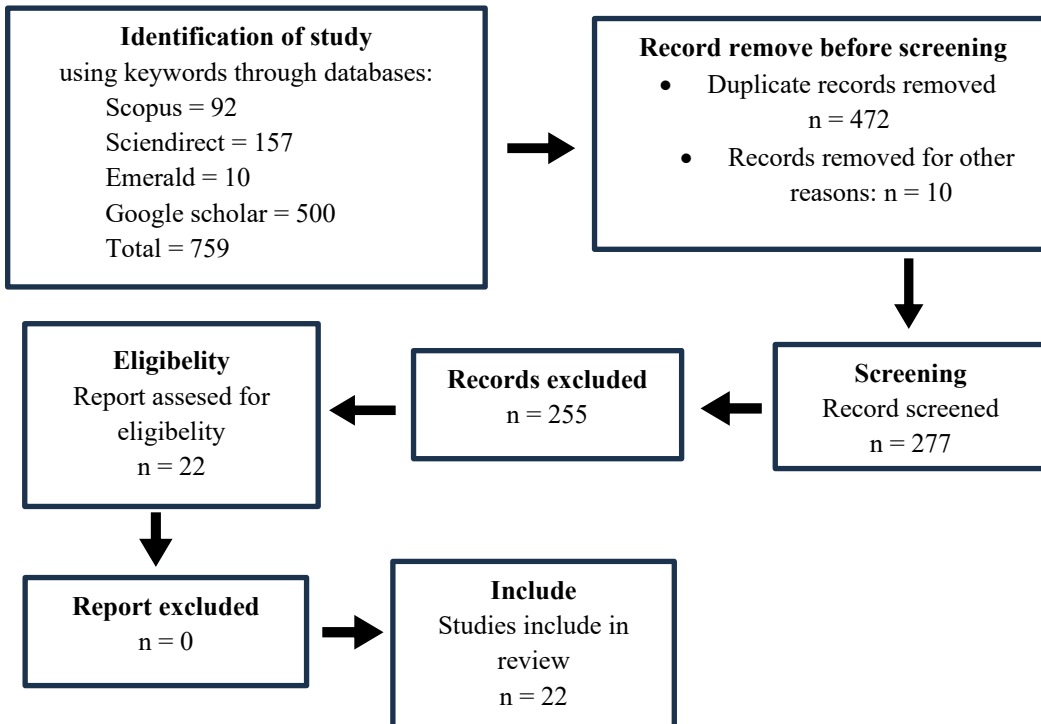


Figure 2.1 PRISMA Flow Diagram (Rethlefsen et al., 2021)

The strategy used by the author to find relevant literature was to apply the PICO method. The search was conducted via Publish or Perish and Google Scholar using the keywords: "(leadership style OR gaya kepemimpinan) AND (employee performance OR kinerja karyawan) AND (2020 OR 2021 OR 2022 OR 2023 OR 2024 OR 2025)."

Based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework, the literature selection process was carried out through four systematic stages. The literature search identified 759 records from four databases. After removing 482 records (472 duplicates and 10 for other reasons), 277 records were screened. Following title and abstract screening, 255 records were excluded, leaving 22 full-text articles for eligibility assessment. All 22 articles met the inclusion criteria and were included in the systematic review. The final included stage selected 22 empirical studies that met all quality standards for comprehensive analysis in this systematic review. Studies excluded at the eligibility stage were primarily due to the research focus not aligning with the independent variable of leadership style, non-empirical research design, and the dependent variable not matching the construct of employee performance.

Table 3.1 PICO

PICO	DESCRIPTION
Population	Company Employees
Intervention	Leadership Style
Comparison	Various different leadership styles
Outcome	Employee Performance

Data Inclusion Criteria

Based on the established PICO framework, the literature to be included in this review was

selected using the following inclusion criteria:

Topic Variable /	Discusses leadership style as an independent variable (transformational, ethical, servant, digital, etc.) Discusses employee/work performance as a dependent variable (employee performance, work performance, job performance)
Study Type	Empirical studies with primary/secondary data (quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods)
Time Range	Publications from 2020-2025 (current theme)
Language	English or Indonesian
Text Access	Full text available and accessible
Methodology	Has a clear and accessible research methodology

Table 3.2 Data Inclusion Criteria

Quality assesment

A critical evaluation of the methodological quality and risk of bias of all included studies was carried out using the JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Analytical Cross-Sectional Studies. This instrument, developed by the Joanna Briggs Institute (2024) an international collaborative organization committed to evidence-based practice and widely recognized through its JBI Evidence Synthesis program was selected due to its suitability for the analytical cross-sectional design of the reviewed studies. The appraisal was conducted independently by the researchers, with each item rated as Yes, No, Unclear, or Not Applicable. Any discrepancies in judgments were discussed until consensus was reached. The appraisal outcomes were not used to exclude studies; instead, they informed the interpretation of findings, ensuring more cautious consideration of results derived from studies with higher risk of bias.

RESULT

A review of 22 empirical studies published between 2020 and 2025 shows that the link between leadership style and employee performance tends to fall into four general patterns:

1. **Dominant positive effect (12 studies; 54.5%)**, where constructive leadership styles like transformational, transactional, and servant leadership consistently lead to better employee performance.
2. **Non-dominant effect (3 studies; 13.6%)**, where the relationship remains positive but is overshadowed by stronger organizational influences.
3. **Mediated effect (6 studies; 27.3%)**, in which leadership impacts performance only through mediators such as organizational support or employee motivation.
4. **Negative effect (1 study; 4.5%)**, where laissez-faire leadership is associated with poorer performance.

In summary, most studies (54.5%) report a strong positive impact, while more nuanced mediated effects appear in about a quarter of the research. Only one study finds a negative relationship—and this occurs exclusively with laissez-faire leadership. None of the constructive leadership styles show negative outcomes.

Table 4.1 Summary of Relationship Patterns Between Leadership Styles and Employee Performance

Pola	Jumlah Studi	Persentase	Gaya Kepemimpinan yang Terkait
Dominan-Positif	12	54,5%	Transformasional, Transaksional, Inklusif
Non-Dominan	3	13,6%	Beragam, tergantung konteks

Pola	Jumlah Studi	Persentase	Gaya Kepemimpinan yang Terkait
Mediasi	6	27,3%	Transformasional, Servant, Inklusif
Negatif	1	4,5%	Laissez-faire
Total	22	100%	

Quality Assessment Results

Using the JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist on 22 analytical cross sectional studies, 20 studies (90.9%) were rated as high quality, while 2 studies (9.1%) were considered moderate quality (Table 4.2). Most studies met the critical appraisal criteria (items 1,2,3,4, 7, and 8), yet controlling for confounding factors (items 5 and 6) remained a methodological limitation. Full details are provided in Supplementary Material S1.

Table 4.2 Quality Assessment Category Results

Kategori	Jumlah Studi	Persentase
Tinggi	20	90.9%
Sedang	2	9.1%

DISCUSSION

a. How Leadership Shapes Performance

The fact that 54.5% of the reviewed studies report a dominant positive effect especially those examining transformational leadership strengthens the relevance of Transformational Leadership Theory in today's organizational environment. Research in Jordan's banking sector (Khaled et al., 2025) and NGOs in Lebanon (Salameh-ayanian et al., 2025) consistently shows that idealized influence and inspirational motivation help improve employee performance, even during periods of uncertainty. This aligns well with Contingency Theory, which argues that leadership effectiveness depends on how well it fits the demands of the situation. In the rapidly shifting post-pandemic context, transformational leaders provide employees with a sense of direction and psychological stability.

Meanwhile, the non-dominant pattern (13.6%) adds important nuance. In Oman's public sector, for example, leadership does not directly affect performance but instead strengthens the relationship between job-description clarity and employee outcomes (Ahmed et al., 2023). This finding echoes Path-Goal Theory, which suggests that leaders are most impactful when they help remove barriers to employee effectiveness an influence that becomes secondary in highly structured bureaucratic environments. A study in Ethiopia (Liu et al., 2024) similarly highlights that structural conditions can, at times, play a stronger role than leadership itself.

b. Moderating Factors: How Industry Context Shapes Leadership Influence

A closer look at different industries shows that the strength of leadership effects depends heavily on the setting.

In fast-moving and innovation-driven industries, such as the global IT sector, transformational and ambidextrous leadership consistently boost innovative performance [(Bezzina & Cassar, 2025), (Dinesh et al., 2024)]. Visionary direction and employee empowerment become essential in these environments. This indicates that companies

operating in rapidly evolving markets can benefit directly from developing leaders with strong transformational qualities.

In contrast, in regulated and stable sectors, including public institutions and bureaucratic organizations, the patterns look different. Research from Oman (Ahmed et al., 2023) shows leadership acting more as a moderator than a direct driver of performance. Studies from Indonesia [(Astuty & Udin, 2020), (Bastari et al., 2020)] reveal that the impact of leadership travels entirely through mediators such as organizational support and work motivation. Negative effects associated with laissez-faire leadership also show up most clearly in these structured environments (Liu et al., 2024). This suggests that organizations in highly regulated sectors should first strengthen internal support and motivation systems before adjusting leadership styles to reinforce those mechanisms.

c. **Methodological Critiques and Implications for Future Research**

While the reviewed studies provide valuable insights, several methodological limitations highlight opportunities for further research:

- a) **Cross-Sectional Design:** Almost all studies [e.g., (Khaled et al., 2025), (Ern et al., 2022) (Al-Hyari, 2023)] rely on single-point-in-time designs. Future longitudinal research is needed to confirm causal relationships and understand how leadership effects evolve over time.
- b) **Common Method Bias:** Most studies depend on self-reported data from the same source. Future research should consider multi-rater data (e.g., supervisor performance evaluations) or mixed-method approaches to reduce this bias.
- c) **Limited Generalizability:** Many studies focus on a single country or sector, such as Ethiopia (Eshete et al., 2025), Sierra Leone (Kebe & Kahl, 2024), or Indonesia (Syahrir & Hasan, 2023). Comparative cross-cultural and cross-sector research is needed to test the robustness of findings and distinguish between universal and context-specific variables.

d. **Contributions and Practical Implications in the Post-Pandemic Context**

This synthesis provides theoretical contributions by addressing gaps in the literature, with a focus on the post-pandemic and digital era (2020–2025). The classification of relationship patterns and identification of mediating mechanisms, such as organizational support and employee engagement, offer a more nuanced framework for future research.

Practically, the findings suggest three strategic actions for organizations:

- a) **Design Context-Specific Leadership Training:** Instead of generic programs, training should be tailored to sector characteristics. Dynamic sectors require development of transformational and adaptive leadership skills, while structured sectors benefit from capabilities that facilitate and reinforce existing systems.
- b) **Proactively Develop Mediating Infrastructure:** Since leadership often influences performance through mediators, organizations should systematically cultivate a culture of support, clear communication systems, and a psychologically safe environment to maximize leadership impact.
- c) **Avoid Passive Leadership During Transitional Periods:** The negative effects of laissez-faire leadership highlight the need for active, engaged, and directive leadership during post-pandemic recovery to prevent disorientation and performance decline.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review examines the relationship between leadership styles and employee performance based on 22 empirical studies published between 2020 and 2025. The analysis identifies four main patterns: dominant-positive (54.5%), mediated (27.3%), non-dominant (13.6%), and negative (4.5%). Negative effects are observed only in laissez-faire leadership, while no studies report adverse outcomes for constructive styles such as transformational, transactional, or servant leadership.

From a scholarly perspective, this study contributes by offering a more nuanced mapping of leadership effectiveness through categorizing empirical findings into dominant, non-dominant, and mediated influence patterns. This classification enriches leadership theory by highlighting that

the effectiveness of a given style is not universal but is strongly contingent on organizational context and the presence of mediating mechanisms, such as organizational support, work motivation, and employee engagement.

Practically, the findings suggest that organizations should design context-specific leadership development programs. In dynamic and innovative environments, emphasis should be placed on strengthening transformational and servant leadership competencies. Simultaneously, organizations need to build supporting infrastructure, including an ethical culture, knowledge-sharing systems, and a psychologically safe climate, which can function as mediators to amplify the impact of leadership on performance.

Recommendations for future research include: (1) conducting sector-specific meta-analyses to obtain more precise effect sizes; (2) exploring the moderating role of digital transformation in the leadership–performance link; and (3) developing cross-country comparative studies to understand the influence of cultural and institutional factors on leadership effectiveness. These approaches are expected to deepen our understanding of the complexities of leadership in the ever-changing post-pandemic era.

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