Section 1.1. Leadership in Contemporary Leadership Studies and Management Discourse

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Abstract. *Leadership research has evolved into an interdisciplinary domain integrating management, organizational behavior, psychology, sociology, public administration, and educational studies. This evolution shifts attention from individual traits and formal authority toward leadership as a context-dependent process of influence embedded in relationships, routines, and institutional constraints, which is especially salient for schools and universities where expertise is distributed and accountability is multi-layered across actors and governance levels. The chapter explains why leadership retains persistent definitional plurality and proposes an integrative lens for analysing leadership in educational organizations without collapsing it into a single paradigm. A structured conceptual synthesis is conducted across major leadership traditions and education-oriented research, complemented by mechanism mapping that aligns approaches by unit of analysis, assumed sources of influence (authority, expertise, values, networks), and expected organizational effects. The synthesis identifies a stable minimal core of leadership as purposeful influence oriented toward shared goals and enacted through relational and collective dynamics. Definitional diversity follows systematic theoretical choices about level (individual, dyad, group, system) and mechanism, including legitimation, sensemaking, distribution of practice, instructional focus, and adaptive coordination under complexity. For education, pathways to outcomes tend to operate via instructional quality, teacher collaboration, professional learning, and trust-based coordination. It differentiates leadership from management and clarifies implications for capacity building and accountability. Plurality of definitions is analytically informative because it reveals distinct levers for improvement and different risks of reductionism. Educational governance benefits from conceptualizing leadership as a configurable set of socio-organizational relations that complements, but is not identical to, managerial administration and formal control. Future studies should test leadership configurations using multi-level mixed methods, connect relational and distributed measures to student learning and staff well-being, and examine how digitalization, inequality, and crisis conditions reshape legitimacy, responsibility, and the boundaries of leadership practice.*

Keywords: *educational leadership; definitional plurality; interdisciplinary leadership studies; mechanism mapping; legitimacy; accountability; instructional leadership; distributed leadership; relational leadership; complexity leadership; e-leadership; governance design.*

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1. Leadership as an Interdisciplinary and Evolving Research Field. Leadership research has gradually consolidated into an interdisciplinary field that draws on management, organizational behavior, psychology, sociology, political science, education, and public administration, while also borrowing methods and concepts from systems thinking and complexity science. A central reason for this convergence is that leadership is not a single variable but a family of influence processes that unfold across levels, from individual cognition and emotion to dyadic relations, teams, institutions, and broader social systems (Garrick, 2006; Avolio et al., 2009; Dinh et al., 2014; Peng et al., 2024). Accordingly, contemporary scholarship increasingly treats leadership as an emergent, context dependent pattern of interaction, rather than a stable personal property that can be fully explained by traits or formal authority alone. This theoretical shift also reflects a methodological evolution: research has moved from primarily descriptive typologies toward integrative reviews and multi-level empirical designs that connect leader behaviors and social mechanisms to intermediate outcomes such as trust, commitment, and organizational climate, and then to distal performance outcomes. As a result, leadership studies now operate as a "bridge" domain that translates psychological micro-foundations of influence into meso-level organizational processes and macro-level governance consequences, which makes the field simultaneously explanatory and normative. This dual role explains why core handbooks increasingly juxtapose theory building with applied concerns such as ethics, legitimacy, and organizational harm, particularly in contexts where leadership failures can produce systemic costs for communities and public services (Day et al., 2014; Hardy & Cherrey, 2023).

A prominent theme in this evolution is the rebalancing of attention from "the leader" toward leadership as a collective accomplishment that is sustained by relationships, routines, and shared sensemaking. Reviews of the leadership literature highlight the rise of approaches that explicitly analyze shared, collective, and distributed forms of influence, as well as "new-genre" theories that emphasize identity, authenticity, moral framing, and the social construction of meaning (Day et al., 2014; Dinh et al., 2014; Hardy & Cherrey, 2023). Complexity perspectives further strengthen this reorientation by modeling organizations as adaptive systems in which leadership is partly about enabling conditions for learning, innovation, and coordination under uncertainty, rather than only directing behavior through hierarchy (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). In practical terms, this means that leadership effectiveness is increasingly evaluated by the quality of adaptive capacity, resilience, and ethical robustness, not only by short-term output

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indicators. The expansion of technology-mediated work has also pushed leadership scholars to examine how digital infrastructures reshape communication, control, and influence, leading to dedicated research on e-leadership and the co-evolution of technology, structure, and leadership processes. Importantly, these developments do not "replace" classical theories; instead, they typically reframe them by embedding traits and behaviors within relational systems and situational constraints, which helps explain variability in outcomes observed across sectors and cultures (Dinh et al., 2014; Hardy & Cherrey, 2023).

For educational organizations, the interdisciplinary expansion of leadership studies is not merely an academic trend but a necessary response to the structural realities of schooling and higher education. Schools and universities often function as knowledge-intensive and professionally pluralistic systems, where expertise is distributed and influence frequently emerges through informal roles, professional communities, and institutional routines rather than only through formal authority (Spillane, 2006). This helps explain the sustained relevance of instructional leadership and the parallel growth of distributed leadership frameworks in education, especially under accountability pressures that link leadership to learning outcomes and organizational improvement (Hallinger, 2005; Spillane, 2006).

Meta-analytic evidence also supports the argument that leadership effects in education are differentiated by type and mechanism, with stronger links typically observed where leadership is directly connected to the core work of teaching and learning (Robinson et al., 2008). Consequently, contemporary educational leadership discourse increasingly combines process-oriented theories with governance and performance considerations, including capacity building, equitable participation, and integrity safeguards, because educational leadership must remain legitimate to multiple stakeholder groups while sustaining improvement over time.

Within educational leadership, the transition from distributed leadership (early 2000s) to shared leadership (mid-2000s - 2010s) to collaborative leadership 2010s - today) represents an incremental but conceptually meaningful deepening of how scholars understand collective influence and organizational learning. Distributed leadership, largely shaped by Spillane (2006), positioned leadership as a practice stretched across people, tools, and routines. In schools, where expertise is inherently dispersed, this perspective helped illuminate how instructional improvement often emerges through interactions among teachers, coordinators, and administrators rather than from the principal alone. Distributed leadership thus reframed schools as sociocultural systems in which everyday decision-

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making is embedded in organizational routines and mediated by artifacts such as curricula, assessment tools, and professional norms.

Building on this foundation, shared leadership (Wassenaar et al., 2025) shifted emphasis toward the dynamic, reciprocal influence among team members who jointly enact leadership functions. Whereas distributed leadership explains how leadership is stretched across roles and routines, shared leadership focuses on how people actively co-influence one another within teams. Research demonstrates that shared leadership strengthens psychological safety, instructional coherence, and collective responsibility for student learning, especially in professional learning communities, grade-level teams, or innovation groups. In this sense, shared leadership provides the behavioral and relational mechanisms through which distributed leadership structures translate into improved instructional practice.

The most recent conceptual step, collaborative leadership (Ang'ana & Ongeti, 2023) expands the analytical lens beyond teams to include cross-boundary partnerships, multi-stakeholder problem solving, and co-creation processes. In education, this involves coordinated work among teachers, administrators, parents, students, community organizations, and policy actors. Collaborative leadership foregrounds dialogue, mutual accountability, and the joint stewardship of shared public goods such as equity, well-being, and learning opportunities. It reflects the growing complexity of educational systems, where solutions increasingly require inter-organizational cooperation and distributed expertise that extends beyond the school walls.

Taken together, distributed, shared, and collaborative leadership constitute an evolutionary trajectory rather than interchangeable concepts. Distributed leadership provides the structural and cognitive grounding; shared leadership articulates the interpersonal dynamics through which influence circulates; and collaborative leadership situates these processes within broader networks of actors who co-produce educational value. This lineage aligns with the broader disciplinary movement toward relational, systemic, and multi-level models of leadership and offers a robust conceptual lens for institutions seeking to build collective capacity, enhance instructional quality, and strengthen democratic governance in education.

In sum, leadership research has evolved toward a more integrated and realistic understanding of how influence is produced, constrained, and legitimized in complex organizations. The most significant shift is the move from individual-centric explanations toward multi-level, relational, and context-sensitive models, supported by synthetic reviews and empirically grounded frameworks that can be adapted to sector-specific realities.

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Thus, distributed, shared, and collaborative leadership belong to the common field of collective leadership approaches. They exhibit conceptual intersections yet remain distinct theoretical models. In the subsequent sections, we will focus on a retrospective analysis of distributed leadership, which has emerged as one of the key sources for the development of contemporary collective leadership approaches.

For education in particular, this evolution implies that leadership should be conceptualized as both a governance capacity and a distributed practice, anchored in instructional improvement, ethical legitimacy, and the organizational conditions that enable learning, trust, and innovation.

2. Cross Disciplinary Conceptualizations of Leadership. Contemporary leadership scholarship is best read as a family of partially overlapping conversations rather than as a single unified theory. Large-scale reviews demonstrate that the field has expanded through successive "waves" of emphasis, for example from traits and behaviors to contingency, relational, identity-based, and complexity-informed approaches, with increasing attention to context and multi-level processes (Alharbi, 2021; Avolio et al., 2009; Dinh et al., 2014;). This pluralism is not merely terminological: different disciplines foreground different causal mechanisms, treat "effectiveness" differently, and privilege distinct units of analysis, ranging from individual dispositions to emergent properties of collective interaction (Uhl-Bien, 2006). For research on educational organizations, the cross-disciplinary lens has particular value because schools and universities operate simultaneously as bureaucratic systems, professional communities, cultural sites, and moral projects. Hence, disciplinary traditions can be used as complementary "analytical lenses" that clarify what leadership does, for whom, through which mechanisms, and under what constraints.

A key implication of this perspective is that leadership cannot be reduced to a single variable such as formal authority or charismatic influence. Political and philosophical accounts typically stress legitimacy, authority, and the normative justification of power, which makes them crucial for understanding governance, accountability, and ethical constraints in education (Weber, 1922). Sociological accounts shift attention to coordination, role relations, institutional order, and the patterned distribution of influence within groups and networks, which is essential for understanding how leadership is enacted beyond personal qualities.

Psychological accounts emphasize influence, motivation, identity, and interpersonal processes that shape followership and performance, thus offering micro-foundations for how leadership effects arise.

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Table 1.1. Disciplinary lenses on leadership: mechanisms, focal constructs, and implications for educational organizations

Disciplinary lens	Core mechanism emphasized	Typical focal constructs	Representative framing (APA)	Implications for educational organizations
Philosophy and political theory	Legitimacy and normative justification of authority	Authority, legitimacy, responsibility, moral purpose	Authority as legitimate domination through ideal types, traditional, charismatic, rational-legal (Weber, 1922)	Clarifies governance ethics, legitimacy of decisions, and the limits of "managerial" power in academic settings
Sociology and institutional analysis	Coordination and social ordering in groups and institutions	Roles, norms, networks, institutional logics, collective action	Leadership as patterned influence embedded in social structures and routines	Highlights informal leadership, network effects, and cultural reproduction in universities and schools
Psychology and social influence	Influence processes shaping attitudes, motivation, identity, behavior	Power bases, motivation, leader-follower relations, identity, emotions	Power bases as resources for influence (French & Raven, 1959); leadership as relational social process (Uhl-Bien, 2006)	Explains how trust, commitment, and identity alignment translate leadership action into results
Management and organization studies	Goal attainment, decision-making, implementation, and performance	Strategy, change, competence, leadership behaviors	Leadership as influencing understanding and agreement on what to do and facilitating collective effort (Yukl, 2012)	Links leadership to planning, execution, and measurable outcomes, useful for quality assurance and change management
Public administration	Accountability, public value, governance under constraints	Accountability, ethics, collaborative governance	Syntheses of leadership theories for public-sector constraints and stakeholder complexity (Van Wart, 2013)	Frames educational leadership as stewardship under legal, social, and reputational constraints
Educational leadership research	Teaching and learning improvement, organizational learning	Instructional leadership, distributed leadership, professional community	Instructional leadership and accountability dynamics (Hallinger, 2005); distributed leadership in practice (Spillane, 2006); effects on student outcomes (Robinson et al., 2008), innovative leadership (Alharbi, 2021)	Targets "core work" of education, clarifies how leadership influences learning conditions and results

Source: developed by the author

Management and public administration approaches foreground decision-making under constraints, change implementation, performance,

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and accountability to stakeholders, providing an applied vocabulary for organizational design and managerial practice (Van Wart, 2013; Yukl, 2012). Finally, education research integrates instructional, developmental, and organizational learning goals, and increasingly conceptualizes leadership as distributed across routines and interactions rather than concentrated in a single role (Cantor, 2023; Hallinger, 2005; Spillane, 2006).

The cross-disciplinary comparison shows that leadership is rarely "one thing" even when the same word is used. Normative frameworks explain why authority is accepted or resisted, sociological frameworks explain how influence is patterned through structures and routines, psychological frameworks explain how influence becomes motivation and behavior, and management and public administration translate leadership into decisions, implementation, and accountability (French & Raven, 1959; Van Wart, 2013; Weber, 1922; Yukl, 2012;). For educational organizations specifically, the table supports a multi-level interpretation: leadership effects should be examined through legitimacy, relationships, routines, and learning outcomes simultaneously (Hallinger, 2005; Robinson et al., 2008; Spillane, 2006; Peng et al., 2024).

Across disciplines, a notable convergence appears around the idea that leadership is a process rather than a trait or a title, even though disciplines disagree about which processes matter most (Avolio et al., 2009; Dinh et al., 2014). This convergence underpins modern relational and practice perspectives that treat leadership as something enacted in interaction, including how issues are framed, how identities are mobilized, and how coordination is secured (Uhl-Bien, 2006). From the perspective of authority theory, the key question is whether influence is perceived as legitimate, stable, and appropriately bounded, particularly in professional bureaucracies like universities, where expertise and collegial norms constrain hierarchical control (Weber, 1922). From the perspective of social influence, the question becomes which bases of power are used and how they affect compliance, commitment, and internalization, for example whether influence relies on expert and referent power versus coercive or purely legitimate power (French & Raven, 1959). In organizational and public-sector leadership, the central problem often becomes how to make decisions and implement change when constraints are high, multiple stakeholders must be reconciled, and legitimacy must be sustained over time (Van Wart, 2013).

In education research, these strands are often integrated by anchoring leadership in the instructional core while recognizing that influence is distributed across professional roles, routines, and informal expertise (Hallinger, 2005; Spillane, 2006; Harris et al., 2021). Empirical syntheses

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show that leadership effects on student outcomes vary by leadership type and by the degree to which leadership practices connect to teaching and learning conditions, which reinforces the importance of specifying mechanisms rather than assuming generic "leadership impact" (Robinson et al., 2008). This point matters for leadership development: training focused only on personal style or charisma is likely insufficient unless it also develops competencies in building shared meaning, enabling professional learning, and sustaining legitimate, ethical governance.

Table 1.2. Cross-disciplinary mechanisms: what leadership "does" and how outcomes are produced

Mechanism cluster	What leadership does (core function)	Dominant literatures	Typical outcomes in educational organizations
Legitimation	Justifies decisions and secures voluntary acceptance	Political theory, philosophy, institutional analysis (Weber, 1922)	Trust in governance, compliance with reforms, stability of rules and procedures
Influence resources	Mobilizes power bases to shape attitudes and behavior	Social psychology (French & Raven, 1959)	Staff commitment, motivation, reduced resistance, higher coordination quality
Relational construction	Produces leadership through interaction, sensemaking, and relationships	Relational leadership theory (Uhl-Bien, 2006)	Psychological safety, collaboration, shared meaning, adaptive coordination
Practice and distribution	Allocates leadership work across people and routines	Distributed leadership in schools (Spillane, 2006)	Sustainable leadership capacity, resilience to turnover, improved implementation fidelity
Instructional focus	Connects leadership action to teaching and learning conditions	Instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2005); effects syntheses (Robinson et al., 2008)	Improved instructional quality, stronger learning culture, measurable student outcomes
Governance and accountability	Balances performance, ethics, and stakeholder demands	Public administration syntheses (Van Wart, 2013)	Transparent decision-making, legitimacy under scrutiny, robust risk and compliance practices
Adaptation in complexity	Enables emergence, learning, and innovation under uncertainty	Complexity leadership theory (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007)	Innovation capacity, faster learning cycles, better response to crises and uncertainty

Source: developed by the author

The mechanism map clarifies that different leadership theories can be treated as complementary if their causal claims apply to different parts of the leadership problem. For example, instructional leadership targets the educational core, distributed leadership targets capacity and sustainability, relational leadership targets interactional processes, and complexity leadership targets adaptation and emergence in uncertain environments

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(Hallinger, 2005; Robinson et al., 2008; Spillane, 2006; Uhl-Bien, 2006; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). This mapping also suggests a practical design principle for educational leadership: governance legitimacy and accountability should be treated as enabling conditions rather than as "administrative overhead," because they shape whether influence and change efforts are trusted and thus effective (Van Wart, 2013; Weber, 1922).

First, cross-disciplinary scholarship indicates that leadership in educational organizations should be conceptualized as a multi-level process that links legitimacy, influence resources, relational dynamics, and practice-based distribution of leadership work. Second, the comparison shows why "one-size-fits-all" definitions are analytically weak: disciplines emphasize different mechanisms, and educational leadership requires their integration due to the sector's dual nature as both a bureaucratic system and a professional community (Weber, 1922; Yukl, 2012). Third, evidence-oriented education research reinforces the need to connect leadership practices to the instructional core and to specify how leadership affects learning conditions rather than relying on generic performance claims (Hallinger, 2005; Robinson et al., 2008). Fourth, relational and complexity perspectives expand the explanatory range of leadership theory in contexts characterized by uncertainty, rapid change, and the need for innovation, which are increasingly typical conditions for contemporary educational organizations (Uhl-Bien, 2006; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Finally, for subsequent sections of the chapter, this cross-disciplinary framing provides a coherent basis for comparing leadership models: models can be evaluated by their dominant mechanism, unit of analysis, and the organizational outcomes they plausibly influence, rather than by name alone.

3. The Definitional Plurality of Leadership in Leadership Studies. Leadership studies repeatedly return to a small set of shared components, even while producing many competing definitions. The most stable convergence point is that leadership involves influence, enacted within a collective or relational unit (a dyad, team, organization, or network), and oriented toward goals, purposes, or outcomes This minimal consensus, however, does not resolve deeper disagreements about what leadership *is* in ontological terms, how it operates, and where its boundaries lie. As a result, definitional plurality should be treated not as a terminological inconvenience, but as a theoretically meaningful signal that "leadership" names several partially overlapping phenomena rather than a single, universally fixed construct. A classic diagnosis of this problem in the leadership canon is that the concept accumulates definitions faster than it settles them, largely because each definition embeds an implicit theory of

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people, power, and coordinated action (Stogdill, 1974, as cited in OpenLearn; see also Dinh et al., 2014). In this sense, definitional plurality is a methodologically consequential feature of the field: it structures what scholars decide to measure, which variables are treated as causal, and which outcomes are interpreted as evidence of effectiveness (Avolio et al., 2009). The same plurality also has applied consequences because organizations select definitions that align with their governance ideals, accountability systems, and cultural norms.

The first fault line concerns whether leadership is primarily an individual capacity or a social process. Individual capacity definitions foreground attributes of a person (traits, competencies, behaviors) and typically treat followers and context as conditions that enable or constrain individual enactment. Process definitions, by contrast, treat leadership as an emergent property of interaction, meaning-making, coordination, and relationship patterns across actors (Uhl-Bien, 2006). This distinction matters because capacity accounts naturally produce leader-centric measurement and development programs, while process accounts justify interventions that redesign interaction routines, decision architectures, and distributed responsibility. A second fault line concerns position versus practice. In classical managerial traditions, leadership is implicitly tethered to formal authority, but contemporary research increasingly conceptualizes leadership as a practice that can occur with, without, or alongside hierarchy, including plural, shared, and distributed configurations (Denis et al., 2012; Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006). A third fault line concerns how strongly context should constrain what counts as leadership and what counts as good leadership. Comparative reviews of modern theory show that context has moved from being a background moderator to being treated as constitutive of leadership processes, especially in distributed and complexity-informed approaches (Avolio et al., 2009; Dinh et al., 2014; Harris et al., 2021). The implication is that "effective leadership" cannot be defined solely by generic behaviors; it must be interpreted through context-sensitive mechanisms and outcomes.

A practical way to see definitional plurality is to treat each definition as a design choice that carries three consequences: a unit of analysis (individual, dyad, collective, system), a mechanism (influence tactics, relationships, sensemaking, coordination), and a criterion of success (performance, change, learning, legitimacy, well-being).

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Table 1.3. Selected leadership definitions and their analytic implications

Author(s)	Definitional emphasis (paraphrased)	Unit of analysis	Primary mechanism	Practical implication for measurement
Yukl (2013)	Influence that builds shared understanding of what to do and facilitates collective effort	Individual-in-context and group	Influence and coordination	Measures behaviors and effects on coordination and goal achievement
Northouse (2022)	Leadership as a process of influencing a group to achieve a common goal	Individual and group	Influence process	Measures influence processes and goal attainment (often survey-based)
Rost (1991)	Influence relationship oriented to real change reflecting mutual purposes	Dyad or collective	Mutual influence and change intent	Measures reciprocity, shared purpose, and change outcomes, not only performance
Uhl-Bien (2006)	Leadership as social and relational processes that constitute organizing	Network and collective	Relational dynamics and meaning-making	Measures interaction patterns and relational quality, not only leader traits
Denis et al. (2012)	Leadership as plural, produced through combined influence of multiple actors	Collective and system	Shared or distributed influence	Measures configurations of influence and coordination across actors
Drath et al. (2008)	Leadership as producing direction, alignment, and commitment (DAC)	Collective and system	Social production of DAC	Measures DAC outcomes as the core indicator of leadership

Source: developed by the author

For example, Rost's relational definition centers leadership on an influence relationship among leaders and followers directed toward real change reflecting mutual purposes, which prioritizes reciprocity and change intent over formal authority (Rost, 1991). Burns' work on transforming leadership emphasizes elevating motives and values and frames leadership as ethically and developmentally consequential, not merely instrumental for performance (Burns, 1978). In adaptive leadership, leadership is defined by mobilizing people to address adaptive challenges, which shifts attention from direction-giving to enabling collective learning under conflict and uncertainty (Heifetz, 1994). In mainstream organizational behavior framing, leadership is often defined as influencing others to understand and agree on what needs to be done and facilitating collective effort to accomplish shared objectives, which explicitly binds leadership to coordination and execution (Yukl, 2013). Each definition is reasonable, but each "selects" a different phenomenon, and therefore generates different operationalizations, training curricula, and evaluation criteria.

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Even where definitions overlap on influence and collectivity, they diverge on (a) where leadership is "located" (person, relation, system) and (b) which outcomes validate leadership (execution, change, learning, DAC). Consequently, comparing studies without aligning definitions risks mixing different phenomena under one label.

Table 1.4. Core dimensions that explain why definitions multiply

Dimension	Pole A	Pole B	Why it creates definitional plurality
Ontology	Leadership as individual capacity	Leadership as social process	Shifts the "object" being defined and measured
Authority	Leadership linked to formal role	Leadership as practice beyond hierarchy	Reclassifies informal, shared, and collective influence
Temporality	Leadership as execution and stability	Leadership as adaptation and change	Changes which outcomes count as effectiveness
Mechanism	Behavior and influence tactics	Relationships and sensemaking	Alters causal explanations and intervention targets
Context	Universal definition emphasizes generality	Context-constitutive definition	Makes "effective leadership" conditional on setting and culture

Source: developed by the author

Definitions multiply because leadership research spans incompatible assumptions about what leadership *is*, where it *happens*, and what it *does*. The plurality is therefore structurally produced by the field's interdisciplinary foundations, not merely by inconsistent terminology.

In applied domains such as education, definitional plurality becomes governance-relevant because definitions determine what schools reward, how they develop leaders, and what they count as success. Meta-analytic evidence suggests that different leadership types relate differently to student outcomes, which means that choosing between instructional, transformational, distributed, or other lenses is a substantive decision with implications for policy and professional development (Robinson et al., 2008; Hardy & Cherrey, 2023). Transformational leadership research in schools, for example, often treats leadership effects as mediated through organizational conditions such as culture, teacher commitment, and capacity for change, which motivates system-level measurement and development initiatives (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Leadership-for-learning traditions emphasize the instructional core and argue that leadership's contribution is strongest when goals and practices maintain an explicit academic focus, thereby tightening the linkage between leadership definition and learning outcomes (Hallinger, 2011; Robinson et al., 2008). In these settings, definitional plurality is best handled through explicit "definition-to-design"

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alignment: the selected definition should be transparently linked to the intended intervention logic, measurement model, and accountability framework.

4. Major Theory Families: From Traits to Relational and Digital Leadership. Leadership theory has developed less as a single linear model and more as a set of theory families, each built around a preferred explanation of how influence works, where leadership is located (person, dyad, collective, system), and what counts as effectiveness. Integrative reviews show that this diversification accelerated in the twenty-first century because scholars increasingly treated context, levels of analysis, and interaction processes as central rather than peripheral to leadership explanations (Avolio et al., 2009; Dinh et al., 2014; Harris et al., 2021). For educational organizations, this taxonomy is not merely classificatory: it shapes how leadership is diagnosed, how leadership development is designed, and which outcomes are considered legitimate evidence of leadership quality.

Trait and individual-differences approaches reat leadership as partly grounded in relatively stable individual characteristics that predict leader emergence and, under some conditions, effectiveness. In contemporary usage, "traits" often include cognitive capacities, personality factors, and self-regulatory resources, and the research value of this tradition lies in explaining why some individuals disproportionately become focal points of influence. Still, trait explanations are routinely criticized when they implicitly assume cross-context invariance, because educational organizations constrain discretion through professional norms, collegial governance, and multiple accountability regimes.

Behavioral approaches hift attention from who leaders are to what leaders do. Their practical strength is that behaviors can be observed, taught, coached, and assessed in competence frameworks. In education, behavioral lenses also support instructional leadership work because they translate leadership into routines such as goal setting, feedback practices, classroom-focused conversations, and the organization of professional learning. However, behavioral approaches can become descriptively thin if they ignore why particular behaviors work in one context but fail in another.

Contingency and situational approaches respond to that limitation by arguing that effectiveness depends on fit. The same leader behavior can produce different outcomes depending on task structure, uncertainty, team maturity, and institutional constraints. Contemporary textbooks continue to present contingency logic as a core bridge between classic and modern

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theories because it legitimizes context as a causal condition rather than a nuisance variable (Northouse, 2025; Yukl & Gardner, 2020).

A major consolidation in the modern canon is the neo-charismatic cluster, especially transformational leadership and full-range leadership models. These approaches explain influence through vision, meaning-making, motivational framing, and the activation of commitment, often via role modeling and value-laden narratives. Their empirical appeal is that they provide a plausible account of change leadership and of the emotional and symbolic dimensions that purely behavioral inventories often under-specify. At the same time, they are frequently challenged for conceptual overlap with adjacent constructs, for measurement inflation, and for insufficient differentiation between inspirational rhetoric and operational improvement. In education specifically, evidence syntheses indicate that leadership types differ in their associations with student outcomes, supporting an argument for carefully differentiating inspirational or transformational effects from leadership that directly organizes teaching and learning conditions (Robinson et al., 2008).

Relational perspectives treat leadership as socially constructed in interaction, meaning that leadership is produced through patterns of influence, identity negotiation, and coordination, not merely exercised by a role-holder. Relational leadership theory explicitly examines leadership as a set of social processes that constitute organizing, and it distinguishes between leader-centered "entities" and leadership-as-relations perspectives (Uhl-Bien, 2006). This matters in educational settings because professional authority is often anchored in expertise and peer recognition, so leadership can emerge through credibility, interpretive work, and facilitation of agreement even when formal authority is limited. Relational lenses also sharpen ethics and inclusion debates by focusing on how influence is legitimized, whose voice counts, and which relationships become structurally privileged.

Distributed leadership frameworks extend the relational move by analyzing how leadership work is allocated across multiple actors and situations. In this view, leadership is "stretched" over people, routines, tools, and context, which allows researchers to study leadership as everyday practice rather than episodic acts of a principal or rector (Spillane, 2006). The approach is particularly relevant in schools and universities because academic work is specialized and interdependent, and improvement depends on coordinated expertise rather than on centralized command. The main methodological risk is romanticization: distributed leadership can become a celebratory slogan unless it includes clear accountability design and

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empirical mapping of who leads which tasks, with what authority, and with what measurable consequences for learning and organizational performance.

Table 1.5. Theory families, core assumptions, mechanisms, and predictable failure modes in educational organizations

Theory family	Core assumption	Primary influence mechanism	Typical strength in education	Predictable failure mode
Trait and individual differences	Stable attributes help explain leader emergence and some effectiveness	Selection, credibility, self-regulation	Useful for recruitment and leadership potential assessment	Decontextualized "hero leader" expectations
Behavioral	Leadership is learnable through observable actions	Communication, goal-setting, feedback, routines	Supports professional development and instructional routines	"Checklist leadership" without meaning or legitimacy
Contingency and situational	No universal style, fit determines effectiveness	Matching behavior to task and context	Helps tailor leadership to school maturity and constraints	Over-typologizing, weak guidance in ambiguous contexts
Transformational / full-range	Motivation and meaning drive change	Vision, values, role modeling, commitment	Useful in reforms and rebuilding trust	Symbolic change without instructional improvement
Relational	Leadership is produced in interaction	Sensemaking, relationships, mutual influence	Fits collegial governance and professional norms	Hard to measure, can underplay structural power
Distributed / shared	Leadership work is spread across actors and situations	Practice allocation, routines, tools	Builds capacity, resilience, implementation quality	Diffused responsibility without accountability
E-leadership	Technology co-shapes leadership processes	Digital coordination, visibility, platform mediation	Essential for hybrid governance and digital learning	Surveillance risks, exclusion via digital inequality

Source: developed by the author

Digital transformation has created a distinct research stream that examines how advanced information technologies reshape communication, coordination, and control, thereby changing the mechanisms through which leadership is enacted.

E-leadership research frames leadership in virtual and hybrid environments as a product of interaction between leadership processes and technology-enabled structures, emphasizing that the effects of technology

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emerge through use patterns rather than through technical features alone (Avolio et al., 2000).

In education, this perspective is now essential because core leadership tasks increasingly occur through digital infrastructures, including learning management systems, analytics dashboards, remote teamwork platforms, and online stakeholder communication. The key theoretical contribution is that digital contexts change both the speed and the visibility of influence, while also introducing novel risks such as surveillance dynamics, data asymmetries, and inequities in participation arising from differential access and digital competence.

The table 1.5 indicates that theory families differ mainly by where they locate leadership and how they explain influence. For educational organizations, the most robust designs typically combine behavioral clarity with contingency fit, embed practice in relational legitimacy, and use distributed structures to scale leadership capacity, while treating e-leadership as a cross-cutting condition rather than a separate "optional" domain.

Table 1.6. Evidence-oriented mapping: which leadership families most directly connect to learning outcomes pathways

Outcome pathway (education)	Most directly relevant families	Why the link is theoretically plausible
Teaching and learning improvement	Behavioral, instructional, distributed	They specify routines and task structures close to the instructional core
Organizational capacity and implementation	Distributed, contingency, transformational	They explain scaling, role allocation, and change mobilization
Legitimacy, trust, and climate	Relational, ethical-oriented variants, transformational	They explain acceptance of influence, voice, and moral framing
Performance under hybrid conditions	E-leadership, distributed, relational	They explain coordination and sensemaking through digital infrastructures

Source: developed by the author

This mapping supports a mechanism-based approach to leadership choice: leadership families should be selected based on the pathway an educational organization must strengthen. It also aligns with findings that leadership types have differential associations with student outcomes, reinforcing the need to prioritize theories that connect leadership practice to the instructional core rather than relying only on generalized claims about leadership effectiveness

5. Typologies: Type, Form, and Style in Educational Organizations. Leadership typologies are not decorative classifications; they function as analytic instruments that translate complex social processes into comparable

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categories. When typologies are conceptually precise, they sharpen theory testing because they clarify what exactly is being compared across studies, institutions, and cultures. When they are imprecise, they produce "category drift," where researchers conflate philosophical orientations of leadership with situational enactments or personal behavioral patterns, and then attribute causal power to the wrong level of analysis. This slippage is frequent in applied fields such as educational management where leadership is simultaneously a governance function, a professional practice, and a normative project tied to public trust. The classic experimental tradition already demonstrated that leader behavior patterns can create distinct group climates, but it did not imply that a climate-producing behavior pattern is identical to a leadership philosophy or to a context-specific arrangement of responsibilities (Lewin et al., 1939). Later applied work similarly emphasized that effective executives shift among behavioral patterns depending on situational demands, which reinforces the need to distinguish stable personal style from situational form and from broader leadership type (Goleman, 2000). For educational organizations, the need for typological discipline is even stronger because instructional improvement is the core organizational purpose, and leadership categories that ignore this core tend to mis-specify what "effectiveness" means (Hallinger, 2005; Robinson et al., 2008).

In analytically strict usage, *type* refers to the broad philosophy and logic of influence and governance, including assumptions about authority, participation, human motivation, and the relationship between means and ends. A leadership type therefore operates at a high level of abstraction and is typically linked to values and governance commitments, for example whether leadership is primarily instructional and learning-centered, transformational and change-oriented, distributed and capacity-building, or bureaucratic and compliance-focused. By contrast, *form* refers to the contextual manifestation of a type, meaning the concrete organizational arrangement through which leadership is enacted in a specific setting. Forms are shaped by institutional constraints such as accountability regimes, national policy, professional norms, and resource conditions, and they include the architecture of roles, routines, committees, task forces, and decision paths. Finally, *style* refers to an individual's characteristic pattern of behavior across situations, especially how a person communicates, motivates, uses authority, and regulates emotion under pressure. Styles can be understood as behavioral repertoires, and the empirical literature shows that leaders often use multiple styles, with effectiveness depending on situational alignment rather than on a single preferred pattern (Goleman,

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2000). The practical implication is straightforward: a leader may hold an instructional leadership type, enact it through a distributed form in a specific school, and still differ from another leader by using a more affiliative or more pacesetting style within the same form. If these levels are collapsed into one category, it becomes impossible to identify whether outcomes are driven by governance philosophy, institutional design, or interpersonal behavioral patterns.

Table 1.7. Analytical separation of leadership type, form, and style with educational examples

Construct	Level of abstraction	Core question	What it primarily describes	Example in an educational organization
Type	High	"What is the governing logic of leadership?"	Philosophy of influence and governance, value commitments, and success criteria	Learning-centered or instructional leadership as a durable orientation toward improving teaching and learning (Hallinger, 2005; Robinson et al., 2008)
Form	Medium	"How is leadership organized here and now?"	Institutional design, role distribution, routines, tools, and accountability architecture	Leadership enacted through distributed arrangements across roles and routines, with leadership stretched over people and situations (Gronn, 2002)
Style	Lower	"How does the person typically behave while leading?"	Behavioral pattern, emotional tone, influence tactics, interpersonal approach	Leader uses democratic or authoritarian behavioral tendencies shaping climate in groups (Lewin et al., 1939), or shifts among multiple styles depending on needs (Goleman, 2000)

Source: developed by the author

The table 1.7 clarifies that typological accuracy requires a hierarchy of constructs, not a single list of "leadership types." Style research demonstrates behavioral effects on climate, but it cannot substitute for form analysis that maps how leadership work is distributed, nor for type analysis that specifies the normative and strategic purpose of leadership in education (Lewin et al., 1939; Goleman, 2000; Gronn, 2002). In educational settings, the most defensible meaning of type is the articulation of how leadership connects to instructional improvement and learning outcomes, which is why instructional leadership remains theoretically persistent and empirically consequential (Hallinger, 2005; Robinson et al., 2008).

Style typologies are widely used because they are actionable: they translate abstract leadership discourse into observable interaction patterns and training targets. The classic social-climate experiments associated with

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Lewin and colleagues are particularly influential because they demonstrate that different patterns of leader behavior can generate different group climates, participation patterns, and tensions (Lewin et al., 1939). Yet style frameworks are often overextended by being treated as complete leadership theories rather than as behavior-level descriptors. A style typology typically explains "how influence is delivered" but not necessarily "why the organization is led in a particular direction" or "how leadership capacity is institutionally produced and sustained." Goleman's applied typology makes this limitation visible in a constructive way: it frames leadership as a portfolio of styles linked to emotional intelligence, and emphasizes situational switching rather than stable adherence to one pattern (Goleman, 2000). In education, style switching can be beneficial, but it must remain anchored to the organization's educational purpose; otherwise, leadership becomes a technique of influence detached from learning outcomes. This is precisely why educational leadership literature continues to foreground instructional or learning-centered categories, which specify the substantive focus of leadership, not merely the delivery mode (Hallinger, 2005; Schein & Schein, 2023).

Style frameworks are strongest when used as diagnostic and developmental tools, not as complete ontologies of educational leadership. The literature supports a dual claim: leadership behavior patterns matter for climate and effectiveness (Lewin et al., 1939; Goleman, 2000), but the educational domain requires typologies that specify instructional purpose and learning-centered criteria of effectiveness (Hallinger, 2005; Robinson et al., 2008). Therefore, style typologies should be embedded within type and form analysis rather than replacing them.

Form typologies become pivotal when leadership is understood as a configuration of roles, routines, and influence channels rather than as a single person's performance. Distributed leadership scholarship illustrates this point by arguing that conventional constructs struggle to capture modern divisions of labor and the reality that leadership work is often shared, rotated, or embedded in routines. In practical terms, the same leadership type can be enacted through different forms. For example, a learning-centered type can be enacted through a centralized form in a small school with high coherence, or through a distributed form in a large university faculty where expertise is specialized and coordination must scale across departments. Form analysis also forces attention to accountability, because distributing leadership without clarifying authority, decision rights, and responsibility can produce diffusion, conflict, or "leadership everywhere and nowhere." This is why

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form typologies should be constructed alongside governance mechanisms, not in opposition to them.

Table 1.8. Major style typologies and their relevance to educational leadership

Style framework	Main idea	What it predicts well	Typical educational use case	Key limitation if used alone
Lewin et al. (1939)	Leadership styles create distinct "social climates"	Participation patterns, tension, group climate outcomes	Diagnosing climate problems in teams, committees, departments	Style does not specify instructional focus, governance logic, or accountability design
Goleman (2000)	Effective leaders deploy multiple styles in the right measure at the right time	Short-term effectiveness under varying situational demands	Leadership development for principals and deans, especially during change	Risk of treating style switching as sufficient without defining educational ends
Instructional leadership tradition	Leadership should remain oriented to teaching and learning improvement	Pathways linked to instructional conditions and learning quality	Prioritizing curriculum, pedagogy, professional learning	Requires integration with form and style to explain how work is distributed and enacted

Source: developed by the author

Importantly, the empirical relevance of form analysis is reinforced by educational meta-analytic evidence showing differential effects of leadership types on student outcomes, which implies that organizational arrangements that connect leadership work to teaching and learning pathways are more likely to matter than arrangements that mainly produce symbolic alignment.

The integrative typology shows that educational leadership categories become analytically useful when they specify (a) purpose, (b) organizational design, and (c) behavioral enactment. This three-layer approach reduces the common error of treating style as the whole of leadership and supports mechanism-based evaluation, aligning with evidence that leadership effects differ by type and by proximity to the instructional core (Hallinger, 2005; Robinson et al., 2008; Goethals et al., 2023). It also operationalizes distributed leadership claims by embedding them in form analysis rather than using "distribution" as a purely normative slogan.

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Table 1.9. Integrative typology for educational organizations: linking type, form, and style to improvement pathways

Leadership type (purpose logic)	Typical organizational forms	Styles that often support the type	Expected improvement pathway in education
Learning-centered, instructional	Structured routines for curriculum and pedagogy, professional learning systems	Coaching, authoritative with clarity, democratic participation	Stronger teaching and learning conditions, clearer instructional focus
Capacity-building, distributed	Shared leadership roles, routine-based coordination, distributed decision paths	Affiliative and democratic styles that protect collaboration	Sustained improvement capacity and implementation resilience
Change-oriented, transformational	Change programs with aligned structures and communication channels	Vision-oriented and mobilizing styles, selective pace-setting	Organizational commitment and cultural alignment, with risk of symbolic change if disconnected from instruction
Compliance and stability oriented	Formal procedures, hierarchical decision rights, audit and reporting routines	Coercive or directive tendencies under constraint	Predictable execution and risk control, with risk of reduced innovation and professional agency

Source: developed by the author

6. Leadership and Management: Complementarity Without Equivalence. In contemporary leadership studies and management theory, leadership and management are best treated as partially overlapping but conceptually non-identical constructs. This distinction is not merely semantic: it shapes how educational organizations diagnose governance failures, design professional development, and evaluate organizational effectiveness. Classical management theory frames management as a set of universal functions required to maintain organizational coherence through planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating, and controlling (Fayol, 1949). In contrast, leadership scholarship emphasizes influence processes that create direction, mobilize commitment, and enable coordinated action under conditions of uncertainty and change (Kotter, 1990). From this perspective, the frequent practical co-occurrence of leadership and management does not justify their theoretical equivalence; rather, it requires an explicit framework of complementarity that clarifies what each contributes and why educational governance needs both.

A useful way to sharpen this boundary is to compare the primary "problems" each domain is designed to solve. Kotter's influential formulation distinguishes management as coping with complexity, while leadership is coping with change by setting direction, aligning people, and motivating and inspiring them (Kotter, 1990). At the same time, empirical work on managerial activity shows that management is not simply a rational

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sequence of functions; it is fragmented, interaction-heavy work, structured through interpersonal, informational, and decisional roles (Mintzberg, 1973). This matters for educational organizations because the "managerial" layer often includes resource allocation, compliance, scheduling, and quality assurance, while the "leadership" layer includes meaning-making around mission, academic identity, innovation, and professional trust. When these layers collapse into one another without conceptual clarity, organizations tend to oscillate between administrative rigidity and charismatic voluntarism, each producing predictable risks.

Educational organizations intensify this challenge because they are professional systems with strong norms of autonomy and expertise, where influence is frequently exercised without formal authority. Distributed leadership research treats this as a normal organizational condition: leadership practice is "stretched" over multiple actors and their situation, rather than located exclusively in a formal role (Spillane, 2006; Cantor, 2023). Complementarily, relational leadership theory conceptualizes leadership as socially constructed in ongoing interaction, which implies that leadership can be enacted across roles, networks, and routines, including those that formal management cannot fully script (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Therefore, a higher education institution may have competent management processes and still fail to generate direction, alignment, and commitment around pedagogical improvement, research integrity, or strategic transformation (Drath et al., 2008;; Schein & Schein, 2023; Peng et al., 2024).

To operationalize complementarity without equivalence, it is analytically productive to model leadership in educational organizations through several interaction modes, rather than a single binary. A balanced governance view typically includes at least four modes: leadership as a management function (embedded in formal roles), leadership as a parallel process (informal influence alongside formal structures), leadership as managerial competence (leadership capacities held by managers), and leadership as distributed influence dynamics (leadership emerging from networks, expertise, and routines). This multidimensional framing helps explain why the same organization can exhibit strong administrative capacity while struggling with morale, innovation, or instructional coherence.

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Table 1.10. Leadership versus Management: Core Distinctions for Educational Organizations

Dimension	Management (dominant emphasis)	Leadership (dominant emphasis)	Typical implication for educational governance
Primary task	Stabilize operations and coordinate complexity	Enable purposeful change and collective direction	Compliance can improve while strategic renewal stagnates
Core mechanisms	Planning, organizing, controlling functions (Fayol)	Direction-setting, alignment, motivation (Kotter)	Formal plans without shared meaning underperform
Work pattern	Role-based coordination and decision routines (Mintzberg)	Influence through relationships and sensemaking (Uhl-Bien)	Technical compliance may not translate into commitment
Source of authority	Formal mandate, rules, resource control	Legitimacy through trust, expertise, values	Informal academic leaders can redirect practice
Success criteria	Reliability, efficiency, predictability	Adaptability, learning, engagement, coherence	Overemphasis on controls can reduce innovation capacity

Source: developed by the author

The table 1.10 indicates that management and leadership address different organizational problems and therefore require different mechanisms of action. Management secures reliability and operational continuity, whereas leadership organizes collective meaning and coordinated movement under uncertainty. In educational settings, a purely managerial optimization approach is insufficient because professional work depends on legitimacy, trust, and shared pedagogical commitments. Conceptual separation is thus a precondition for integrated design: the goal is not to choose between leadership and management but to assign each to the tasks it is structurally suited to perform.

The table 1.11 supports the claim that educational leadership is not exhausted by formal hierarchy. Leadership circulates through parallel and distributed processes, especially where expertise and professional identity are salient. A governance architecture that recognizes only formal leadership as "real" leadership risks both underutilizing expertise and misdiagnosing resistance as purely behavioral rather than structural. Distributed Shared leadership research suggests that effectiveness depends on how leadership is distributed, not on whether it is distributed (Spillane, 2006).

In practical terms, the complementarity thesis implies that educational organizations should diagnose dysfunctions as imbalances between managerial and leadership capacities. Over-management without leadership tends to produce procedural conformity, slow adaptation, and weak psychological ownership of change. Over-leadership without management tends to produce vision inflation, initiative overload, and inconsistent implementation.

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Table 11. Four Interaction Modes of Leadership in Educational Organizations

Interaction mode	Definition	Where it typically appears	Governance risk if ignored
Leadership as a management function	Leadership treated as one function within formal management roles	Rector, dean, principal, department head role expectations	Leadership reduced to administration, resulting in low engagement
Leadership as a parallel process	Informal influence and meaning-making alongside formal management	Academic communities, committees, research groups	Unmanaged informal power can undermine formal decisions
Leadership as managerial competence	Leadership capacities as part of managerial professionalization	Middle managers, program directors, unit heads	Administrators may execute procedures without building commitment
Leadership as distributed influence dynamics	Leadership practice stretched across people and situation	Professional networks, instructional improvement routines	Over-centralization produces bottlenecks and weak ownership

Source: developed by the author

A rigorous approach therefore treats leadership development not only as individual training but also as governance design: clarifying decision rights, routinizing collective sensemaking, and creating mechanisms that convert purpose into coordinated action (Drath et al., 2008).

7. Integrative Definition: Leadership as a Configuration of Socio-Organizational Relations. Contemporary leadership theory increasingly challenges leader-centric ontologies that assume leadership is primarily the property of an individual occupying a position. Instead, multiple traditions converge on the idea that leadership is produced in patterns of interaction. Relational leadership theory frames leadership as a social influence process that emerges through ongoing organizing, meaning that leadership is not simply "exercised" but socially constructed, stabilized, and revised through relationships and practice (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Distributed leadership theory extends this move by proposing that leadership practice should be studied as a distributed practice stretched over leaders, followers, and the situation, including routines, tools, and institutional arrangements (Spillane et al., 2001; Spillane, 2006). Gronn's proposal to treat distributed leadership as a unit of analysis further supports an integrative approach by shifting attention from isolated actors to conjoint agency and interdependent work systems (Gronn, 2002).

On this basis, leadership can be defined as a configuration of socio-organizational relations that structures how influence is generated, legitimized, and enacted toward shared purposes. The emphasis on "configuration" is deliberate: it highlights that leadership outcomes depend

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on patterned relations among actors, roles, expectations, routines, and artifacts, rather than on isolated traits or episodic behaviors. Such a definition is also compatible with the DAC ontology, which argues that leadership theory should explain how collectives produce direction, alignment, and commitment, even when the leader-follower boundary is blurred or unstable (Drath et al., 2008). For educational organizations, the configuration lens is particularly productive because governance is hybrid by design: formal authority, professional autonomy, collegial deliberation, and external accountability operate simultaneously, often through different channels.

An additional contemporary layer is the technological mediation of leadership. In digitally augmented or hybrid educational environments, leadership is shaped by advanced information technologies that alter communication, coordination, and accountability structures, a phenomenon conceptualized as e-leadership (Avolio, Kahai, & Dodge, 2000). This reinforces the configuration logic: leadership practice is embedded in socio-technical arrangements, where platforms, analytics, and communication architectures can strengthen or weaken direction, alignment, and commitment. Consequently, leadership diagnostics should include not only people and structures but also routines, tools, and information flows.

The table 1.12 demonstrates that leadership is not located in a single element of organizational life. Leadership becomes visible as an emergent pattern across actors, relations, routines, and socio-technical artifacts.

Table 1.12. Elements of a Leadership Configuration in Educational Organizations

Configuration element	What it includes	Diagnostic indicators	Typical intervention logic
Actors and roles	Formal leaders, professional leaders, informal influencers	Role clarity, role conflict, legitimacy patterns	Clarify mandates, support boundary-spanning roles
Relationships	Trust ties, advice networks, conflict lines	Network density, brokerage, fragmentation	Strengthen collaboration routines, reduce siloing
Routines and practices	Meeting cycles, evaluation processes, improvement routines	Stability of routines, quality of deliberation	Redesign routines around learning and evidence
Artifacts and tools	Policies, dashboards, platforms, documents	Transparency, usability, accessibility	Align tools with governance goals and capacities
Narratives and values	Mission, identity, ethical standards	Consistency between stated and enacted values	Build sensemaking, model integrity, reinforce norms
Situational constraints	Regulation, funding, crisis, cultural context	Constraint mapping, adaptive capacity	Scenario planning, adaptive leadership mechanisms

Source: developed by the author

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This supports the analytical shift from "who is the leader" to "how influence is structured and legitimized," which is consistent with relational and distributed perspectives (Uhl-Bien, 2006; Spillane et al., 2001; Gronn, 2002). In practical governance terms, the configuration approach expands intervention space: organizations can redesign routines, decision infrastructures, and information systems instead of relying exclusively on individual heroism.

Table 1.13. DAC-Based Diagnostics for Educational Leadership (Direction, Alignment, Commitment)

DAC outcome	Educational meaning	Evidence sources	Typical failure mode	Targeted structural remedy
Direction	Shared priorities in teaching, research, and service	Strategy documents, curriculum plans, agreed KPIs	Competing agendas, initiative overload	Priority architecture, strategy cascade with deliberation
Alignment	Coherence of roles, processes, and resources	Role descriptions, process maps, budget decisions	Silos, unclear authority, procedural contradictions	Decision-rights matrix, cross-unit routines, coordination roles
Commitment	Psychological ownership and sustained engagement	Surveys, retention, participation patterns	Compliance without buy-in, cynicism	Trust-building practices, participation design, feedback loops

Source: developed by the author

Applying the DAC ontology suggests that leadership effectiveness in education can be evaluated through collective outcomes rather than individual charisma. Direction without alignment produces symbolic plans; alignment without commitment produces mechanical compliance; commitment without direction produces diffuse activism. The DAC lens aligns with integrative leadership theory that treats leadership as the production of collective capacity, making it especially relevant for educational systems where professional autonomy requires legitimacy-based influence (Drath et al., 2008).

The configuration definition also connects leadership theory to educational effectiveness research. Evidence syntheses indicate that leadership impacts student outcomes and organizational performance through identifiable pathways, and that different leadership emphases (for example instructional and transformational) can have differential effects depending on how they are enacted in practice (Hallinger, 2005; Robinson et al., 2008). From a configuration viewpoint, these "types" of leadership are not simply individual styles but patterned arrangements of routines,

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relationships, and decision rules that shape instructional improvement. Accordingly, the configuration lens provides a methodological advantage for future research: it enables mapping how leadership is enacted through everyday practices and artifacts, rather than inferring leadership only from positions or self-reported traits (Spillane et al., 2001).

Conclusion. The synthesized analysis confirms that contemporary leadership studies are best interpreted as an interdisciplinary field in which no single discipline can provide a sufficient explanatory model for leadership phenomena. Across managerial, psychological, sociological, philosophical, and educational perspectives, the definitional plurality of "leader" and "leadership" persists, yet a stable conceptual core can be traced: leadership is a goal oriented influence process enacted through relationships, mediated by context, and expressed in patterns of coordination that enable collective results. Within educational organizations, this plurality is not a weakness but an analytical resource, because it makes visible how leadership simultaneously functions as a formal managerial function (within classic functional models) and as a distributed, emergent, and relational practice that may exceed formal authority. Therefore, the chapter's movement from trait and behavioral explanations toward situational, relational, distributed, and complexity oriented accounts is logically consistent with the empirical reality of schools and universities, where goals, constraints, professional autonomy, and stakeholder plurality continuously reshape influence processes.

A second integrative result concerns the boundary between leadership and management. The argument that "leadership is always management, but management is not always leadership" can be defended if management is treated as the broader system of goal setting, organizing, coordinating, and controlling, while leadership is treated as the human centered influence mechanism that mobilizes meaning, commitment, and adaptive action.

In educational governance, this distinction is practically consequential: technically correct administration without leadership capacity often fails to generate engagement, learning culture, and innovation, whereas leadership without managerial discipline risks strategic drift, coordination failures, and accountability gaps. Hence, the chapter's multi dimensional framing of educational leadership (as function, parallel process, competence advantage, and informal influence) provides a coherent basis for diagnosing why reforms succeed or stall at different organizational levels.

Finally, the proposed interpretive lens of leadership as a "configuration of socio organizational relations" offers a productive bridge between theory diversity and managerial applicability. It allows leadership to be analyzed

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not only as an individual attribute or dyadic exchange, but as a structured pattern of relations that can be identified, monitored, and intentionally developed through governance mechanisms, competency development, and cultural interventions. For further research, the most promising direction is multi level, mixed method work that links leadership configurations to measurable outcomes in teaching quality, staff well being, student results, and institutional resilience under turbulence, including crises, inequality, and digital transformation pressures. In sum, the section provides a solid conceptual platform for justifying modern leadership models in educational management, while also establishing clear criteria for distinguishing constructive leadership from merely formal authority or administratively effective, but leadership poor, control.

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